

February 10, 2019

The Deeper Things

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Hebrews 2:18

"But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast." Hebrews 3:6

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." Hebrews 3:12-14

Last week my son and I were visiting about a close friend and fellow minister who he knows who has decided to leave the ministry. Like so many who minister this young man had run into some severe problems with his some in his congregation who were second and third generation believers, although their behaviors didn't reflect this. Sadly, this is a pretty common pattern witnessed many times over the years.

The truth is, it is hard to remember day by day who we are called to be as disciples. As those who have chosen to follow Jesus and to surrender our lives absolutely to his direction, it is easy to forget that initial commitment. Over the years we begin to make concessions to the pressures of this world instead of holding fast to the most basic tenets of our faith.

Jesus understands what it is like to be tempted to go along with the pressures of the world. He has experienced the same pressures to conform. Even those closest to him sometimes pressured him to soften his stand. Faithfulness is a life time commitment and holding on to the fundamentals of our faith is essential.

So, when the world pressures us to embrace hatred, or selfishness, or whatever; we, as true disciples have to remember who we are. Our consistency over time is essential to our salvation. This means the our lives must conform, and continue to conform, to the basic rules of our faith. If Jesus commands us to ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*** (Ephesians 4:3), then we must make every effort, every day, day in and day out, to do just that. Living these fundamentals of our faith is proof of who we are.

And who are we? The Hebrew author would tell us that we are members of God's family; his children. He writes, ***"And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."*** We belong to the family, to the household of God, but we must hold on to that reality. The powers at work in this world pressure us to give up who and what we are; to join in the things they are doing. Believers cannot do that.

As children of God, as members of his household how can we keep from abandoning our hold on the most basic teachings of our faith? There are, I think, some simple things that we can remember that will help us to be, and continue to be God's children.

First, do not judge and condemn another person. Not ever! Boy is that hard to do, right? It is even harder when we are encouraged by the world to join them in doing just that. How does the world get us to make condemning judgments? One of their favorite mechanisms is their use of labels.

Our world is constantly labeling individuals.. The world takes a totally unique person created by God, gives them a label, and then condemns them as if it understands the first thing about them. We talk about "the homeless" as if all of those who are homeless at any given time are just like all other homeless people. We label entire nationalities or races or those we think hold certain political beliefs and then we condemn them. If Jesus commands us not to make condemning judgments but the world tells us to join them in doing just that, who do we listen to; who do we follow? Ignore labels and deal with that one individual you actually know.

Second, apply "*...do to others what you would have them do to you.*" (Matthew 7:12) That one person you actually know needs something or wants something. The rule we live by as disciples, is "*... do to others what you would have them do to you.*" So, how should I deal with the one person I actually know?

The fundamentals I live by moment by moment, day by day, for the rest of my life define me. If I bend these fundamentals, or even give them up before the end I am lost. The pressures that the world exerts on me cannot be allowed to change who I am or to alter who I follow.

