

## A Proper Balance

Good morning everyone, do you get the sense there is a shaking going on?

I don't mean just a physical shaking i.e. the recent dreadful earth quake in Egypt and Syria but a spiritual shaking - a sifting even? I think what is happening is, through our times and circumstances, God is sifting those who are His.

Here's a Bible verse to hang onto in these times; Psalm 125:1

*“Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be shaken but endures forever”.*

What a wonderful promise in times of 'shaking' - if we trust in the Lord we cannot be shaken and will endure forever.

I think what I would like to do this morning

is to clarify something I said a couple of weeks ago, so I need to recap a little, I talked about the teaching described as 'Let go & let God' and with some of the feedback I got afterwards, there may be a need to make a little clearer some of the things I said.

It started when someone had said to me a little while ago ; **'Stop striving'** 'give it all to Jesus' – 'your working too hard at this Christian life' – what you need to do is just **'Let Go and Let God'**

Now on the surface it sounds like really good advice – I mean we all get stressed from time to time don't we? But this time, I had a bit of 'check in my spirit' when I heard those words.

The key question I asked myself was (and can I say it is always the question we should ask when people give you advice) **is it scriptural?** And In this instance is 'Let go and let God', 'stop striving' **really what the New Testament teaches?**

It was interesting to find under this heading 'Let go & let God' turned out to be fairly recent teaching in the history of the church; in fact it did not enter the Christian church until about 150 years ago, about the year 1870 or so - in general what they say is this;

Fundamentally they believed you could split the Christian experience into 2 distinct stages – firstly conversion where you are saved then a ‘second blessing’ - they say you hadn’t arrived as a Christian until you received this! They said also, there are 2 categories of Christians. They called them ‘carnal and spiritual Christians’

So in essence there is this delay - You got saved, then at a later date through this experience you got set free, they said many Christians were living a sort of ‘lower life rather than a ‘higher spiritual life’ - they were living a ‘defeated life’ rather than ‘victorious life’ and to get to this more ‘abundant life’ in all its fullness they needed a radical setting free experience.

They say when you come into this life changing experience, you come into a new place of freedom, you experience a level of holiness and liberty and victorious living you have never experienced before and what’s more it’s all instantaneous, it happens in a flash! - It’s like the struggle you had in your Christian life before with sin has been miraculously taken away.

They said the secret was; all you had to do was stop striving, no more effort on your part, just relax and give it all to Jesus.

I said; you need to be wary of this teaching and you need to be wary of any teaching that it gives you a **quick fix, an easy solution** to living the Christian life.

Now this is where perhaps the confusion came in for some, I was in no way denouncing an experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon you and releasing you in way that deepens your experience of God.

I am aware this filling of the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation at various points on your Christian journey is absolutely genuine. In fact I was reading the other day about George Verwer who is leader of OM, who is 85 and has just been diagnosed with cancer

He was saying while he was in hospital recently he felt the Holy Spirit had ministered to him and he was released from the burden and weight he was carrying of running the organisation.

The Lord had taken it all off him, and he was 85. We never come to a place where we don’t need the Holy Spirits filling, intervention, and support in our lives.

I know many of you have been released from burdens, and worries, some have been healed, when you have experienced a visitation of the Holy Spirit. And after that you have felt changed, invigorated, and set free in areas in your life previously you struggled in.

So can I put the record straight in no way am I questioning or diminishing that experience you may have had.

That's quite different however to this 'forever waiting experience' where you live your Christian life in the shadows, and experience a half hearted commitment, where you never quite measure up, you're a 2<sup>nd</sup> class Christian so to speak.

So what are some of the errors of this 'Let Go Let God' teaching and what it can lead to? I said last time

### **Firstly the danger is 'waiting' for this elusive experience.**

There are people who are always waiting, waiting to feel better, waiting to feel more on fire, to experience something out of the ordinary, a second blessing, they say 'the grass will be greener the other side of the fence' if only they could get there, if only they could know more of this 'spiritual filled life'. Their **always waiting but never arriving**.

### **Secondly - it makes promises it can't keep!**

The problem with this teaching is - it offers you through this 'utopian blessing' **a greater deliverance from sin than the scriptures or the apostles ever experienced.**

We never in this life, eradicate sin completely, you never escape the flesh.

*"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8)*

### **But thirdly and perhaps MOST importantly it results in Passivity - or 'easy believism'**

The call to passivity, to surrender, to do nothing, is not a scriptural one in fact rather than 'letting go letting God, or not striving, it is quite the opposite;

**The scriptures everywhere call us to action!**

Last time I gave you various scriptures to support this call to action for the Christian - in fact if we were just to 'give it all up' it would make most of the NT epistles and their exhortations meaningless.

Listen what the Bible says about the path **we all have** to tread to holiness. **“Strive to enter in** at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. (Luke 13:24) Strive - don't not strive!

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make **every effort** to confirm your calling and election (2 Peter 1:10)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders** and the sin that so easily entangles. **And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us**”, (Heb 12.1)

I could go on - these calls to action, to full & active engagement are everywhere in the Bible!

But here again lies the potential for misunderstanding. The error here is; we have to do it all! That it's all about our efforts, we are 'captains of our own destiny' so to speak, **but like everything in scripture there needs to be a balance.**

This is the problem Jesus found with the Pharisees;

Matthew 23:23: Jesus says this; *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.*

Here a classic example of losing balance! Here we see these Pharisees focusing on the legalities of their faith and what was written in book of the law, but they became so obsessed with that - they forgot what their faith was all about *“justice, mercy and faithfulness”*.

I remember hearing the story of a woman, some time ago who had a young family and she felt she had been called to the mission field.

This young mother felt 'the call' so strongly that in the course of time she left her 2 young children and her husband for a permanent missionary job in Africa

or China. The story mentioned, tragically the ‘heart wrenching cries’ of her children the day she left.

Commendable some may say! Yet she was a mother, whose first commitment was to her children, to bring them up in the Lord, but she chose to leave them in favour of the mission field - in my view she had lost the balance.

It is a danger for us all when the balance is lost.

So what part do we play and what part does God play in keeping a balance of ‘not striving’ or of ‘trusting in Him’ but at the same time ‘*making every effort to make our calling and election sure*’

I just want to pick up on a few scriptures both in the Old and New Testament to clarify this; firstly Philippians 4:23 *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”*

Let’s break this verse down into sections. I think by doing so it will make clear what we are trying to say of keeping the balance, let’s just take the first part of the verse.

“I can do all things” Don’t know whether you remember the book ‘Power of positive thinking’ by Norman Vincent Peale it was a big seller in the 70’s and 80’s and it was all about thinking positive thoughts and making positive affirmations about yourself.

The trouble was it was all about you and your efforts, a sort of self help therapy. It wasn’t the Christianity of the Bible.

If you take that statement by itself “I can do all things” it sums up this ‘power of positive thinking’ teaching. I heard somebody once pretend to argue this part of the scripture back to the apostle Paul.

**So you can do all things** can you Paul? – stand on your own against the devil?

All the difficult circumstances, the stoning, the whippings, the years in jail? it’s ridiculous we cannot overcome the world the flesh and the devil on our own, it’s impossible, but wait the verse goes **onto say** “I can do all things **through Christ**” it only through Christ he says he can do it - **he is not alone.**

But the verse goes on further; I can do all things through Christ **who strengthens me.**

Who does Christ strengthen 'to do all things' **you & me** - **you have to do these things - it is you who have been given the strength to do it!** - Now walk forward in faith knowing that Christ is with you.

Or how about this other verse; *“submit to God resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7)*

**Firstly we have to submit to God** - you have got to be a Christian before you can resist the devil! But having submitted to God, that is making Jesus Lord of your life, you are now empowered to be able to resist the devil - the empowering comes from God - but notice who has to resist - **YOU have to, nobody will do it for you.**

If we have a look at a verse from the Old Testament - I was reading this the other day, the Israelites were going out to fight their enemies and in Exodus 17: 9 it says

*<sup>9</sup> Moses said to Joshua “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”*

*<sup>10</sup> So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup> As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.*

*<sup>12</sup> When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. <sup>13</sup> So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

Again here we see where God does His part and we do ours.

Joshua would not have won the battle except with God's help and when Moses hands were held up the victory was assured, however when they were lowered he was losing the battle - it's exactly the same for us; When God is with us, Helping, enabling us – 'we can do all things'.

But note here; Joshua still had to fight the battle, he had to practically put into action Gods anointing and calling.

And finally we all know those famous verses from Ephesians 6;

*“Put on the whole armour of God stand against the devils schemes for our battle is not against flesh and blood but the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms”*

The battle is the Lord's and it is fought in the 'spiritual realms' - It's His campaign, His battle, but we have to stand, put on the full armour of God. But when the devil attacks you he is really attacking Jesus!

When Paul was persecuting the church and putting Christians to death and then was dramatically converted on the Damascus road Jesus appears to Him and says: “Saul, Saul why do you persecute **Me. He wasn't so much persecuting the Church but the Lord Jesus personally.**

So in conclusion let's recognise we can do nothing without Christ who strengthens us, let us never stop praying for the Holy Spirit to fall in revival on our nation, on all people - but especially on us.

But let us not be paralysed into waiting for the 'grass to be greener the other side of the fence' before we do anything, or indeed spend our days in waiting for some elusive experience that will enable us get going.

Rather let us step forward in faith knowing God is with us by his Holy Spirit - The Holy Spirit who lives inside **of us now** and has given us everything we need to live our Christian lives in faith and victory.

Amen.

*Tony Troy*

19.02.2023