

The Fatal Race



David Wilkerson January 15, 1982

"...Let us run with patience the race that is set before us..." (Hebrews 12:1)

The very word race suggests competition. God's people are likened to runners in a long distance race, competing for a prize. The prize being a glorious revelation of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But we are corrupting that race toward eternity, and we have substituted a debased and carnal prize. The competition is getting very intense, but now it is God's people competing with one another. And the prize now is success, prosperity, applause, and acclaim. Christ has become nothing more than the sponsor, since all the runners claim to be competing in His name. Great numbers of the competitors wear Tee-shirts marked, "I'm #1." Others are bolder, sporting the words, "I Refuse to Lose." It has become a fatal race.

There once was a time the race was not to the swift, or to the prosperous, or to the covetous - but rather to the humble and weak. The race at one time led through persecution, privation, spoiling of goods, hardness and martyrdom. Some of the runners wore only goatskins, some were tortured, some were torn asunder, others were beaten and scarred. They were stopped in the middle of their race and were burned at the stake, others were thrown into prisons and filthy dungeons. Some had their eyes plucked out, and others were forced to watch their children being tortured before their eyes. And why, pray tell, did all these exhausted runners go through such turmoil and suffering? Why didn't they drop out? Simply because the prize to them was worth it all. They wanted nothing but Christ! They considered, along with Paul, the things of this world as mere dung. They loved not their lives, but only Christ. They were strangers here on earth - running with all their might and strength toward that city whose builder and maker is God. They would have mocked you if you tried to substitute carnal prizes. they would have cried out, "Take the whole world, but give me Jesus."

Contrast that kind of race with what we see developing in God's house today. Yesterday, I was informed that one well known evangelist had upset other TV evangelists because he offered TV stations more money to take over their prime time spots. He "upped the prize". Another boasted that he was going to take on enough additional stations to assure he was on more stations than any other evangelist in modern times.

Pastors and evangelists are competing to build the biggest, most unique churches and headquarters. One minister friend confided in me, in all seriousness, "Pastor J___ is building a church of 119,000 square feet - so I had my architect redo our plans and expand our new church to 121,000 square feet. I want the most square feet of any church in my state.

And what about the multitudes of Christians now caught up in the race for material things. They now want two of everything. A backup system for everything they own. It is almost as if we are trying to turn this race into a jackpot marathon.

My dear children of God, this race is not some kind of eternal raffle. It is not a competition for prosperity, health, and success. If our faith is rewarded with anything short of the prize of a high calling in Christ Jesus - it is not worth competing for. The only one who wins this prize is the child of God who wants to obtain nothing but more of Jesus. He is the one who casts the things of this world at the feet of the cross as worthless junk - that he may win the

glorious joy and peace of the Savior.

The Way to Perfect Happiness Here on Earth Is to Give Up the Fatal Race of Human Competition.

If a Christian can give up all competition for worldly objects, if he can stand aside from the mad race which so many are now running - he could discover what it means to be totally contented.

The Christian who drops out of the carnality race can say to all competitors, "Divide your prizes; keep it all; I quit the race." He could say to one, "You keep the ambition." To another he could say, "You take the applause." To another, you take all the money and materialism." He could leave them all to compete with one another for their worldly prizes and he could run his own lonely race, a different race, a race for but one prize. The glory of God in Christ Jesus.

But it is almost impossible today to get Christians to renounce the fatal race, without cutting off their feet. So many are in the fatal race of carnality, so few in the race for eternal values.

In all history, only those who have learned to renounce the world and all that is in it, have discovered true happiness. One great divine said, "I never knew what it meant to be happy until I quit striving to be great."

If we could but cease struggling with worldly ambitions, and be willing to become nothing, we would break through into a new world of peace and joy.

Praying Payson

Dr. Edward Payson, known by most as "praying Payson," pastored in Portland nearly 175 years ago. In 1806, just a few years after the Declaration of Independence, America was devastated by a severe depression. It was the darkest period since Independence and Dr. Payson vividly recorded the tragedy in his area. He wrote:

"Business has stagnated, many are failing. Hundreds of seamen and other citizens have been thrown out of employment, and they are destitute. "I tremble for my poor country. I fear our sins have helped call down judgment upon us. If we escape a civil war, it will be well. "Some of our wonderful young converts have lost their all, and had their homes stripped away; but it does my heart good to see them cheerful and quiet under it all. Others, who have no God, have lost their reason, they worry incessantly, and are apparently dying of a broken heart..."

Dr. Payson and his dedicated congregation suffered the spoiling of all their goods. Dr. Payson himself lived on pennies during those hard times. On December 28, 1807, in a letter to his mother, Dr. Payson wrote:

"Conditions worsen. A large number of the wealthy merchants live in poverty now. Businesses are failing daily, so that we are threatened with universal bankruptcy. The poorhouse is already full, and hundreds are yet to be provided for. Many who have been brought up in affluence are now dependent on others for daily food. If the hard times continue, nine-tenths of the people here will be scattered to the four winds. I have scarcely enough myself to pay for food and board.

"Perhaps, Mother, you will grieve for me and say, Poor Edward!' But you never had more reason to rejoice on my behalf, and cry, Rich Edward!', than now. Blessed be God, my faith does not stand on such tottering foundations as to be shaken by these commotions. God keeps me quiet, resigned, and even happy in all these troubles. I do not mean I don't feel pain - I do. All my worldly hopes are destroyed. My friends are about to be turned out into the streets, and many may starve. In these circumstances it is impossible not to feel pain. "I thought I knew before, that this world is treacherous, and its enjoyments but for a moment; but these hard times have taught me to wean myself from creature things and pursue the things of God. "It is my prayer, that if God has any worldly blessings in store for me, He would be pleased to give me His grace instead, or change them all into spiritual prosperity."

Edward Payson and his band of believers had quit the fatal race. They could take joyfully the stripping away of all they possessed, because they were in this world - but not of it. The world was unworthy of them.

If We Could Spend Just Five Minutes Either in Heaven or Hell, We Would Run a Different Race.

If We could spend just a few minutes in heaven, we would never again compete in a carnal race. If we could experience a short walk within the gates of that city of God; drink in the peace, the beauty, the heavenly splendors; listen to the grand choirs of angels and seraphims singing the glories of the Lord; mingle with the patriarchs, the martyrs, the apostles, those dressed in white robes who came out of great tribulations; to once again visit with departed loved ones and hear their enraptured stories of what eternal bliss is like; sit beside the crystal waters, feel

the glow of God's holy light; marvel at the splendid colors, the perfect trees, flowers and plants unknown to human eyes; and best of all, to catch a glimpse, just one, of the face of the resurrected Lamb of God; to feel the glory and warmth and sense of security shining forth from His presence; and finally, to behold Him who was from the beginning, our holy, holy, Almighty God!

Would you ever come back to this earth and take up the fatal race again? Never. You and I would live only for the Lord, rejecting the world and all its pleasures and carnal things. We would run His race! We would never again backslide, grow cold, or serve the Lord halfheartedly.

If we could spend even a few minutes in hell, we would never be the same. To be drawn into that black furnace of fire and everlasting darkness; to suddenly be cast into a demonic world of godlessness, cursing, hatred, lust, and corruption; to hear the groans of the eternally damned, to witness their terror, their grinding and gnashing teeth; to rub shoulders with the workers of iniquity, the rapists, the murderers, the world's dictators and tyrants, the crucifiers of the Lord Jesus; to listen to the endless sounds of hopeless, useless prayers of the damned; shaking their fists at the God of justice, cursing the day they were born; to feel what lostness means, cut off from God and truth and love and peace and all comfort; to witness such unbelievable sights and scenes beyond all the world's atrocities combined; and worst of all, to stand face to face with that bloody butcher from hell, Satan himself; to feel a wicked, enslaving fear as the father of all lies tries to take you by the throat and choke out of you a confession that he is lord of all; to walk out of the gates of hell with the cries of the eternally damned ringing in your ears, voices of the ungodly from all ages, bellowing out their pitiful cries - "We are lost! Lost! Forever Lost! Chained to darkness and eternal tortures!"

How could you return to earth from your short visit to hell and ever be the same again? Would you go back to neglecting God's Word, His house, His love? Would you go about your selfish pursuits of accumulating, hoarding gold and silver, and praying for even more? I hardly think so. No - you and I would live every hour as if it were our last. Oh, how we would pray, and work, and study, and sell rather than buy, and fast, and witness, and help the poor, and be constantly looking for the Lord's return.

I used to say to congregations, "Don't come forward to be saved just because you are afraid of hell. Just come in simple faith." But I was wrong - deadly wrong. The apostle said, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." There is a godly fear that leads to repentance.

It's true hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. It's also true that Christians are saved by unmerited grace, and that faith in Christ is the believer's security. Also, Christians are not supposed to doubt the saving and keeping power of Christ.

But - there is one huge problem. Passive faith, the fleeting kind that comes and goes, in flashes and during emotional highs and lows - that kind of faith will not save the soul. Only saving faith - the kind born out of deep contrition for sin; out of a heart that has repudiated all iniquity and besetting sins; out of a heart totally and daily surrendered to the Lordship of Christ - only that kind of faith guarantees grace.

God helping me - I have once and for all dropped out of the fatal race of carnality and worldly mindedness! I have quit the competition race! I will no longer run in flesh-motivated, ego-tripping, man-pleasing races.

I want to do more than simply give up mental attachment to things, houses, cars, lands, possessions. I want the power and grace to curb my appetites, to lay aside all the junk, to sell what I don't need, to quit buying and building and acquiring unneeded things, and to get my eyes so focused on Christ and eternity, the things of this world will lose their hold on me, and materialism will no longer be my master.

Beloved - if this message doesn't sit well with you, if it angers or upsets you even in the slightest - perhaps you should do what I've been doing lately. Get shut in with God, day after day, and ask the Holy Spirit to turn God's holy searchlight on your soul. Get deadly honest with God. Ask Him to expose the sin in you. Become God hungry and Holy Ghost convicted. Like me, you will soon discover how much time you have wasted, how many foolish lusts and wants have crippled you - and you will fall on your face before this Holy God and confess the coldness and emptiness in your heart.

And if you do it with an honest heart, you will begin to thank God for pricking your conscience and stirring you to run a different race. You will thank God for messages like this.

Saints of God - the trumpet of the Lord is about to sound. Our Lord is coming in clouds of glory to catch up His bride. A bride without spot or wrinkle. A bride purged of covetousness, pride and worldly ambition. Shall we spend our final hours on earth putting money in bags with holes in them?

No thanks! I'm just passing through. I want no more roots to hold me down. Thank God for the good things He has given me, my family, a nice house, modern transportation - but daily I now prepare my heart to walk away from it all to be embraced in the Savior's arms! I don't want to be a fanatic or take some kind of poverty vow, or neglect my family and their future. I simply want to be released from all covetousness.

Do you want to quit running and beating the air in vain? Then quit the fatal race. Set your face and heart to seek the Lord as never before.

Changes are coming! For you - for me! Are you ready?

"It is my prayer, that if God has any worldly blessings in store for me, He would be pleased to give me His grace instead, or change them all into spiritual blessings." Edward Payson
PART TWO — How to Discern False Teaching and Error

Ulrich Zwingli, the great Swiss reformer, left us some very good advice on how to judge doctrine and teaching. Although written over 450 years ago, his counsel is desperately needed today. I am including this message because I feel every believer must now fully test the teaching and preaching of all evangelists and teachers. There is a sure Word of God to keep us from all error and false teaching.

"...we shall not go astray if we seek only the mind of the Spirit. If we do not, if we apply our energies to find scriptural support for our own opinions, though they be nothing but leaves and grass, we shall constantly be in error. The will of God is that He alone should be the teacher. We should be taught by Him, and not by man. It is not for us to sit in judgment on Scripture and divine Truth, but let God do His work in and through it, for it is something we can learn only by God...."

"The Scripture came from God, and not men. How then can man be judge? See II Peter 1.

"You might ask, who is to tell me whether he is divinely enlightened or not? The God who enlightens the teacher will enable you to perceive that what he says is of God, or not. You may say: That is not my experience, but if so, take heed lest you be of those who have ears to hear and hear not, as Christ shows from Isaiah:

"The word of God teaches its own truth...We dare not shape the divine ' Who has told you the mind of God, that you declare things which God Himself has not said, and that you say you received from God, but you lie. You would attempt to even teach God and force Him to accept your own views....'

"If you are to judge on any matter, you must think like this: Before I say anything or listen to the teaching of man, I must first consult the mind of the Spirit of God. (Psalm 85: 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak.')

"Then you should reverently ask God for His grace, that He may give you His mind and spirit, so that you will not be of your own opinion, but of His. Have a firm trust that He will teach you a right understanding, for all wisdom is of God, who freely gives to all who believe.

"Then go to the written Word of the Gospel, not believing anything contrary to the revealed Word. The doctrines of God are never more clearly formed than when done by God Himself and in the words of God. Men seek to twist and force the Scriptures according to their own folly.

"Put away that view of your own which you want to read into the Scripture. I know some say they have searched the Scripture and discovered texts which support their own opinions. Alas! Here we come upon the cancer at the heart of all human methods. And it is this: Men want only to find support in Scripture for their own views, and so they take a particular view and relate all texts to that view, no matter how artificial - and in that way men twist the Scripture in order to make it say what they want it to say...."

"False Teachers tell us: Not everything is told us in the Gospels. There are many good things which are never even thought of in the Gospel.' So they pick out verses without regard to context, and twist them according to their own designs... they are set so much on their own human understanding that they are sure there cannot possibly be any

other....

"When I was younger, I gave myself overmuch to human teaching. About seven or eight years ago I decided to devote myself entirely to the Scriptures. I came to the point where led by the Word and Spirit of God, I saw the need to set aside all these things and to learn the doctrine of God directly from His own Word. Then I began to ask God for light and the Scriptures became far clearer to me - even though I read nothing else - than if I had studied many commentaries and expositions. My own feeble understanding could have never brought me to this point."

Conclusion

Zwingli was not against Bible teaching. He believed as I do that God set teachers in the church. But he insisted that nothing should be believed until the Spirit of God revealed it to the individual, after much prayer and searching of the Scripture. Also, he believed that the very lowliest of Christians, even the unlearned, had the right to question all teaching until proven by the Word and Spirit of God. He pointed to 1 Corinthians 14 as proof that unlearned believers can pray and receive insights of truth that could expose even the most learned of false teachers.

Therefore, pray for an understanding. Test all you hear by prayer and the written Word. Accept no man's boast that he has a special revelation, beyond what the apostles received. Most of all, pray for and never argue with those you believe are in error. False teachers have a purpose, and that is to make us want to know the truth so badly, we will search the Scriptures diligently until we hear from God for ourselves.

"But the anointing which you have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and ever as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him..." (1 John 2:27)

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