

Are You Striving?

by Rene P. Brown

Gal 2:20 (RSV) "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

John 15:4-5 (RSV) "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Mat 6:25 (RSV) ""Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Mat 6:33-34 (RSV) "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. ³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

Striving is a product of various mistakes, some of which are listed below:

- 1) Trying to live out your life on your own rather than Jesus living His life **in** you, **through** you and **as** you.
- 2) Lack of faith in God that:
 - He loves you with an eternal love.
 - He has a plan for you that will both utilize and bless your life in Him.
 - He will make all things work together for good for you.
- 3) Not taking everything to God in prayer and then leaving it there!
- 4) Not offering your life as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1)
- 5) Trying to get God to do **your** will instead of having only a desire to do **His** will - whatever that might be!
- 6) Putting your dreams and hopes and desires and ministry and decisions ahead of God's desires for your life.
- 7) Trying to do ministry in which God is not involved or to which He has not called you.
- 8) Trying to do ministry not in God's timing.
- 9) Trying to do ministry that is not in your gift areas.
- 10) Not understanding that we will surely suffer in this life (Philippians 3:10, Romans 5:3, Romans 8:18, 2 Cor. 1:5 - 7, 2 Thess. 1:5, 2 Timothy 1:8, 2 Timothy 2:3, 2 Timothy 4:5, Hebrews 10:32, 1 Peter 4:13, John 16:33)

Striving causes us ongoing problems: spiritual, emotional, and physical. Our entire body can be wracked with sickness and disease simply because of stress from striving over things that are not ours to be concerned over.

1Pet 5:7 (RSV) "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you."

Mat 11:28-30 (RSV) "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Mat 10:29-31 (RSV) "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Let us refer to the previous list of problems:

1) What really "saves" you in this life we live in is the **Life** of Jesus. Rom 5:10 (RSV) "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." If we are not willing to allow Jesus to live out His life through us, we cannot be "saved" in this life. We can never enjoy the abundant life which Jesus promised us. How do we do this? Simply give up your rights to run your own life! Tell the Lord you are ready to completely turn your life over to Him. Tell Him you do not want to live an independent life anymore but desire to be dependent on Him. He will begin to live His Life through you. After all, it is His Life that gives you life. You really have no life apart from Him.

2) We must believe that God's love is unconditional and eternal. All our lives we have been taught "rules of life" in sermons that try to tell us that if we keep such rules, we will be successful in living the Christian life. When we cannot live up to those rules, we begin to assume that God is angry with us or does not love us as much. We anguish over this and begin to try to perform rather than just trusting in His eternal and unconditional love. Believe!! Believe!! That is the key to a life of peace and joy. Rest in Him! Rest in His love! Trust God in all things! Your life is in God's hands and nothing can take you out of His hands. John 10:28 (RSV) "and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand."

God is deeply involved in your life because He loves you with an everlasting love that does not change when you sin or make mistakes! Yes, bad things happen to good people but God has promised to make everything work together for good. Rom 8:28-29 (RSV) "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

Nothing in scripture promises us an easy life without problems and pressures. But the scriptures do promise that God is always there and will ultimately make everything work together for good. Some people may think that means a sweet and easy life but remember that God is looking from an eternal perspective and not just at this life. If something happens to you, and you are taken from this life, you are still in God's loving hands eternally - because He has given you His Eternal Life!

3) When you tend towards stress and striving, **pray!** Give the problem to the Lord and leave it with Him. It is now His problem to deal with as He sees fit. Trust Him. 1Pet 5:7 (RSV) "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you."

4) Read about your life sacrifice in Rom 12:1-2 (RSV) "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Give up your everything to God and become that living sacrifice to Him. Make up your mind to give Him full control of your life to do with as He pleases.

5) Become dependent on God! Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, man has been living the independent life and even if they knew God they have been trying to get God to do their will, fulfill their desires, give them their wants. Some groups in the body of Christ make this their central theme: Making God do what they want by quoting Him and His word and forcing Him to give them the blessings He promises. Compare that with a life lived in total submission to God wherein you desire to bless God and honor Him and not be concerned about your own life. He has promised that if we would make His kingdom first in our hearts, He would take care of us. Mat 6:25 (RSV) ""Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"... 6:33-34 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. ³⁴"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

6) Determine in your own heart that God comes first. Determine, decide, that God's will is your complete desire and any desire you have is less important than His will being fulfilled. Afterwards we will find that our will begins to be His will because our heart is turned towards Him, and as He acts in our life, we see that our heart changes and we begin to desire the things of God and what we were wanting is not very important anymore. Only God's will is now important!

7) So much ministry in the body of Christ all over the world is done in man's own strength! 1Cor 3:14-15 (RSV) "If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." Any work that God did not institute or authorize or initiate is a dead work and will be burned up. Work that God calls us to do is made of gold, silver and precious stones and will go through the fire in the eternal realm, and we shall receive our reward in the life to come in heaven. Be sure that when you do something for God, it was His idea in the first place and not your own. You cannot judge by the benefit the world may get from your work since men completely out of the will of God may preach and see people genuinely saved or healed or delivered. For these people it is a blessing but for the minister it is a dead work that will burn up! God uses even the works of evil men who are completely out of His will to accomplish His purposes.

8) Be sure that you are doing things when God desires they be done. Do not run ahead of God. Sometimes we may wait years and years to begin after God has told us what we will do. After the Lord showed me that I would minister in Africa, it was five years before He sent me.

9) God gives men the gifts they need to accomplish the task He appoints for them. If you are sweating and straining in doing something that does not seem to fit, you are probably working outside your gift area. You need to seek the Lord again as He will not ask you to do something for which He has not gifted you. For example, though you may not be a prophet, God may have you to prophesy.

But if He does, He will give you the needed gift even if only for that one time of ministry. Some of the gifts God gives us may operate in our lives only occasionally.

10) Suffering and pressures are just part of the life on this earth. Since the sin of Adam, we have lived in a fallen world filled with sin. John 16:33 (RSV) "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

There is no reason to be striving over the tribulations of this world. They will surely come no matter what we do. Jesus promised us this. God uses those tribulations to press us towards Himself. Few people really grow during the good times. It is when adversity strikes that people turn to God. It is then they really grow in Him as they find it necessary to trust Him.

So give up striving. Begin to **turn your life over to God - completely**. Determine in your heart not to live independent of God any longer. Determine you will depend on Him and His love to guide you. Determine that His desires will be what occupies your thoughts, your time, your everything. Give yourself over to Him completely and begin to enter in to the abundant life that Jesus promised. Enjoy God's unconditional love! Rest in Him!

*******End of Lesson*******