

1Corinthians 3:1-3

"Use it or Lose It"

Let's have a show of hands. How many of y'all have heard the phrase, "If you don't use it, you lose it"? (pause) One of the things I have learned from visiting nursing homes is this statement applies to the mind and the body. I have encountered heartache while visiting men and women whose minds are bright and active, and yet their bodies have started shutting down. Maybe they have a heart attack, or fall and break a bone and are then put on bed rest to recover. But bed rest meant they couldn't get out of bed to walk. Their legs need exercise so they don't forget their strength. Then, when, they are finally released from bed rest they have to learn to walk again. I have seen people in the nursing home deliberately try to escape from this world by zoning out to the TV or trying to take just one more pain pill than they are supposed to. Their bodies are strong, but their minds are disappearing, as they slip away all together. (pause) "If you don't use it, you lose it."

My sisters and brothers, do you know; are you aware, the same can be said of our spiritual muscles as well? Church, hear this warning. We have often heard it said we are bound with chains of sin. The truth, I'm afraid, is the devil is much more subtle. We would be much more likely to recognize and deny chains of temptation, sin and doubt, and rebuke them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am afraid the chords which the devil uses to trick us; ensnare us; and then bind us much more closely resemble the sickly, sticky webs of a spider – a spider who has caught her prey. Quickly she falls upon her next meal and wraps them in layer upon layer of restraint until they are helpless to fight back, to move; to barely breathe. Hear the warning church. Our fall to sin does not come all at once. Our doom comes as a slow fade as we are bound in layer after layer of sin. Be warned, every choice we make is an opportunity to choose God or to be wrapped in another layer of sickly, sticky doom.

Now hear the Good News! Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God's love toward us. Christ died for us so we could be freed from the icky, stickiness of sin. God provided faith through grace, and in the moment we chose to accept God's grace we are justified. Justification brings freedom from sin and death. In that moment we are like spiritual babies. We have been bound by sin for so long we do not have the muscle mass to walk by faith. This is the way it was when Paul organized the church in Corinth. The Apostle Paul writes, "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of flesh, as babies in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it;" (1Cor 3:1-2). My brothers and sisters, justification is the beginning of the journey – not the finish line. As Rocky Balboa put it, "Aint nuth'n over till it's over."

In the moment we are justified God grants a portion of the righteousness Adam and Eve knew in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Righteousness is a right relationship with God. Through Jesus Christ God gives a portion of that relationship back. We call it regeneration which looks like a new birth in Christ. When we are born again we receive a partial regeneration of the grace Adam and Eve once knew. This grace is like the muscles of a newborn baby. The baby moves its arms and legs, and lifts its head until it can see around the room and roll over. The grace in regeneration works the same way in that our relationship with God must be strengthened.

The spiritual muscle must be used in order to be strengthened. If we don't use them, we lose them. The spiritual muscles require work to become strong if we are to withstand the spiritual forces of wickedness and strain toward the upward call of God in Jesus Christ (Eph 6:12; Phil 3:14). Thankfully this work is not

dependent upon our intelligence, physical ability, character or determination. God provides sanctifying grace that our fallen nature might be renewed further by the Holy Spirit until we reach entire sanctification.

The Apostle Paul explains the Corinthians were spiritual babies who needed to grow up so they might receive and understand the weightier matters of our faith. They were like my baby girl. Gabrielle is 10 months old, and she is getting really good at this motion. (**demonstrate a baby squatting to standing motion**) More than likely she will start taking her first steps in the next couple of months. That's where the Corinthians were. The Corinthians were getting close to being able to walk with God, but they were still too hung up on their old sins, gripes and complaints. With Gabrielle, it is her teething, and a basic lack of confidence. She wants to walk, run and play with her brothers and sisters. She just doesn't have the strength, the balance or the confidence – not yet. (**pause**) Stay tuned for your pastor's happy dance when she does walk. (**pause**) Then wait a second or two more when your pastor remembers all she will be able to get into once she starts walking. (**pause**) The difference between the church at Corinth and my baby girl Gabrielle is Gabrielle is trying to stand and trying to walk every day. The church at Corinth had fallen back in quarrelling with one another. Gabrielle keeps trying.

The same should be said of the church when it comes to growing in our relationship with God. God acts first by providing prevenient grace that we might come to the cross and accept Jesus Christ as our God and savior. Through justifying grace God provides freedom from the webs of sin. God grants a partial regeneration that we might take our first steps in faith. God grants the faith that we might run and play in the freedom of God's sanctifying grace do our part to rebuild our broken relationship with God. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. In Christ we gain the ability to grow closer to God. Brothers and sisters are we taking advantage of the opportunity God has granted us? How many people have chosen NOT to read God's Word? How many people have chosen to watch TV instead of spending time with God in prayer? How many people have chosen to sleep in instead of coming to worship on Sunday morning? (**pause**) My sisters and brothers there are too many spoon-fed baby Christians. Amen? **Amen.** Huh. It sounds like we're not so sure. Let me ask the question this way. Yes or no, is this a church filled with spoon fed baby Christians? (**pause & repeat**) God has given us so much. God has given us the church. What kind of church do we want to be? If we want to be the kind of church that is mature enough in our faith to put God first then we need to think about what we **think** is most important. We need to **think** about how much effort we put into putting God first in all of those things. Let us agree on this point. We need to **think** about what it means to put God first, and we need to **think** about what it means to put God first without a half-hearted effort. We had better **think**.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen