

AFTER YOU'VE DECIDED

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life...." Luke 21:34

The door is wide open. You don't have to be respectable, or sinless, or middle class, before you are welcome. Many a person has sat in these pews drunk. Many a man who has shed blood, many a woman with a bad conscience, many a young person troubled and angry, comes here looking for something that might help.

The wider we can open the door to people who are stumbling, falling and failing, the warmer the welcome we can give to those whose minds are seared and whose consciences are sick, who are looking for healing, the better it's going to be. The Son of Man did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. The whole purpose of this church's existence in this town is to bring healing to broken lives. Our Christ is not suspended out of reach between heaven and earth, Our Christ is here, and with the power of his own shed blood, he heals the sick conscience and the sick mind and the sick life and even the sick body.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon him because he has anointed him to preach good news to the poor, sent him to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Luke 4:18

Many of us are living evidence of how this Christ can take something which is twisted, marred and soiled, and cleanse it. There is not one life too vile or too sick for him to heal it, if it wants to be healed. Open the door wide and tell them to come in:

"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink!"

Nor do we crowd anybody or force anybody or twist anyone's arm. A troubled soul may wish to sit and listen for a long time, to stand on the edge of the crowd and wrestle with themselves for months or even years. We're prepared to wait for a person to make up their own mind to surrender themselves into the hands of the Son of God rather than to tamper with their choice which has to be theirs alone.

Come and listen. Come and think it over. Don't rush. Take your time. Make sure you know what you're doing.

But once you come to the place where you commit yourself, of your own free will, to Jesus Christ---and he reaches out and receives you, forgives your sins, heals your life---then those wide-open doors, through which you came out of that world of filth, click shut. And he says to you,

"Now, my child, that's over. It's forgiven, but it's over. You don't go back that way again. Now you walk in a new way. "

Once you've committed yourself to Jesus Christ, and you go back to the life you lived before, you're in for trouble. If you're too foolish to listen to what your conscience is telling you, you'll be told in other ways. And if you're too vain to listen to these warnings, the life of God in you will quickly begin to dry up, until there's nothing left. You'll find yourself wandering around in a

wilderness of divine judgment unlike anything you ever knew in those days before you came to faith.

When the man who was cleansed of a demon failed to go on with the God who cleansed him, to fill his life with the Spirit of God and walk in the way of God, that demon came back. And it didn't come alone. It brought seven companions, and the last state of that man was worse than the first.

Too many of us have failed to understand that the God who is so merciful with the sinner who comes to him, becomes exacting when that person commits themselves to Christ. Now the sins, which he so freely covered with the blood of his Son, become forbidden territory.

"Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life."

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.

We're not going to become perfect overnight. We're going to stumble and make mistakes. But there are three things the Spirit of God won't put up with in a believer:

Dissipation.

Drunkenness.

Abandonment to the cares of this life,

...or as Paul puts it: immorality, impurity, covetousness.

There are few of us who are not touched by one or two or all three of these things. This is why we have such a low output, so little fruit, why we live such shaky, unsteady lives. We let ourselves get weighed down with these things which we should long-since have let go of.

DISSIPATION is when you compromise your body, however you do it---whether you do it sexually or whether you do it by carousing and running it down with all kinds of abuse. Maybe you lived like that before, and if you did, it's forgiven. But now that you've committed yourself to Jesus Christ, your body doesn't belong to you anymore. It belongs to God. It is a holy vessel, and if you desecrate that holy vessel, you will answer to God.

If you're married, under God, your body belongs to your husband, or to your wife, as the case may be, and to no one else! Don't get sucked into this "new morality " garbage. The "new morality folks" are the blind men trying to lead the blind. Once you're a disciple, if you link your body with any other human being under the sun except your spouse, you are driving God out of your life;

There may be people reading this who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ---and now you're compromising your body. You're desecrating that temple of God. And you're telling yourself it really doesn't matter that much. "God understands my physical needs. I'm not hurting anybody,..." etc. I'm telling you in the name of the living Christ that you're destroying yourself. Once you give your body to God and then turn around and compromise it, you're destroying yourself.

DRUNKENNESS is when you compromise your mind. The trouble with tossing down one highball after another is not what it does to your stomach, but what it does to your mind. Your

mind lifts off the ground. It loses touch with reality. It gets beyond your control and becomes the target for every devilish influence that comes down the pike. And, by the way, it's not just alcohol that makes people drunk. There a thousand ways to compromise your mind. Not just by hopping yourself up on pills, or floating into happy land with grass---you can quite easily make yourself drunk with your own favorite self-enchanted thoughts about your power, your intelligence, your athletic skill, your sexual prowess, your beauty, your importance.

However you do it, when you turn your back on reality and start compromising your mind, you drive the Spirit of God out of it and all balance and reason goes. You may have the I.Q. of a genius, but you're thinking like an idiot.

When you committed yourself to Christ, you gave him your mind. You turned it away from all the earth-bound vanities with which it had once been drunk and fixed it on him, until the cool, refreshing water of his Spirit bathed it clean and free, and you could think clearly. You could see for the first time what life is all about. Now you turn around and compromise it. Your mind has become impure, and in that impure mind the bacteria of your old life return and grow with a vengeance, until the very thought of God seems the most impossible thing in the world.

THE CARES OF THIS LIFE: When the cares of this life start weighing you down, it's a sign that you've compromised your heart. When you became a disciple, Jesus became your Lord, you put your trust in nothing in this world but him. His light came on and it guided you. He said, "Walk with me and everything you need will be provided"---everything you need. You believed him and it was so. But then, ever so subtly, you began to compromise your heart. You began worrying about money---not under Christ, not bringing your need to your Master and asking and trusting. You worried because you set your heart on money like no disciple of Christ has any business setting his or her heart on money. You began scheming to acquire this and get that and get this and have that, until your heart was so tangled up in the fever of getting and holding and getting some more, that Christ and his Kingdom were dwarfed beside your booming schemes and all the cares that came with them.

So the Spirit of Christ withdrew. No man can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon. If you want idols, have your idols, but you can't have God too.

Before you take another trip to the altar to commune with Jesus Christ, make up your mind what you're going to do about this half-baked, compromised, immoral or impure or covetous life you've been living. If you intend to go on living that life, don't make a mockery of the sacrament.

Don't eat and drink judgment upon yourself.

Commune at his table only if you seriously intend to walk with Jesus Christ.

For the God who is infinitely gracious to every sinner that comes to him, expects that person, after they turned, to walk a new way. The same God who, in his church shows his love to the penitent sinner, is quite capable of showing his wrath to the phony saint.

There's work to be done. And it's going to be done. But it will be done only by those whose bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, whose minds are clear, and whose hearts are single---fixed upon God alone.