

The King's Highway.

And an Highway shall be there, and a *Joseph Martineau* shall be called the Way of Holiness

The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.—Isaiah 35:8

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GRAY HAIRS

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"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Hosea 7:8, 9.

The text before us is freighted with terrific suggestions. It is disastrous for a soul to mix among the people. (We do not mean to infer by this that Christians should live like monks and refrain from being neighborly and friendly and thus curtail their influence for the winning of souls to Christ). If I take water and mix it with sand, lime and hair, the mixture will be MORTAR. The water soon loses its identity, and in a few days disappears altogether. When a Christian mixes himself with the world, he too loses his identity; he no longer looks and acts like a disciple of Jesus. He loses the strength of his character and one cannot discern the difference between him and his worldly associates. This is the picture we have of Ephraim. He is the twin brother of the minister who goes to the theatre to gain popularity and prestige, or like the leader of the Young Peoples' Society, who attends the Moving Picture shows in order to STAND IN with the youths and win them to the church, or like one who goes to the base ball and foot ball games, saying his presence there will hinder and quell the spirit of courage and rowdiness, and by so doing loses his standing with God and his influence over them.

What is more saddening than to behold an old gray-haired man who has lived a Godless life and is now stepping into the grave with no hope in Christ, wholly unprepared to meet his God! But, on the contrary, how beautiful and how refreshing to look upon the aged saint with whitened locks and beaming countenance! In Proverbs 16:31, we read, "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." But old age in the spiritual life is a calamity; it is a sign of declension. In old age the physical powers become weaker and weaker but God's idea for the CHRISTIAN life is given us in Job 17:9: "The righteous also shall HOLD on his way and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger"; the marginal reading is SHALL ADD STRENGTH. Ephraim had missed the will of God; he had compromised with the world and its idolatry. He had allowed strangers (to God) to devour his strength. This will obtain in every life that is mixed with the world. My friends, Beware!

The Bible illustration of the proper ending of a righteous life is found in Moses: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Let us contrast this with that of Isaac: "And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," etc., that Jacob DECEIVED him. Do you not see the dangers consequent upon dimness of vision, and other frailties of old age? God never intended the Christian to become gray-haired and infirm IN SPIRIT.

Ephraim was the second son of Joseph and was born during the seven years of plenty that preceded the great famine which began about 1715 B. C. Ephraim means DOUBLY FRUITFUL,

and stands for the experiences of the wholly sanctified. They are DOUBLY BLESSED and therefore "doubly fruitful"; they are justified freely and sanctified wholly—pardoned and purified. How sad that Ephraim did not remain a true type of the holy people! And how disappointing it is today to note that some bright lights in the holiness movement have become dim, and useless to God!

The most alarming word, found in our text, upon the declining Ephraim is "yet he knoweth not." He was becoming gray-haired and was unconscious of his state. Like Samson, "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." In this condition Ephraim was like an unturned cake, half baked and unpalatable. He was of no use to God and the church and had become, by his own folly, a laughing stock for the world. He still held tenaciously to the profession of religion and could stand in the public services and say, "I am still saved, sanctified and satisfied," but his testimony was old and musty, and the people with good eyesight could see gray hairs here and there upon him. The children and non-professors may have laughed in their sleeves and whispered, "Did you hear what that old hypocrite said?" The process of declension had begun to show marked signs in his life,—there were gray hairs "here and there upon him." People seldom become gray-headed in a single day for such signs appear GRADUALLY. As a rule, holy men do not back-slide from God completely in a day, or a week, or even in a month; there is a gradual letting down in the habits of life, a continuous approach towards "the evil day" when Satan brings them to the climax of the temptation and then makes the last grand assault and overpowers them, and they commit the open sin. Like Eve they notice, desire, and then yield, and become transgressors of the law.

I want to call your attention now to some of the signs of spiritual declension, some of the "gray hairs" that are noticeable early in the process of backsliding.

I. LOSS OF DESIRE FOR SECRET PRAYER

What the act of breathing is to the body, the employment of prayer is to the spiritual being. If you neglect to breathe good air properly, the lungs will be affected and gradually weakened until the whole body declines and perishes. A similar result is seen when the exercise of private prayer is neglected; presently the DESIRE to pray becomes less frequent and finally subsides altogether, and the soul is left lifeless and dry, Prayer is the breath of the soul; when it ceases death ensues. Brother, sister, what about your prayer-life! Are you as fond of it now as you were in the early days of your Christian experience?

II. LOSS OF RELISH FOR THE BIBLE.

What food is to the natural man, the words of God are to the soul and spirit. Our Lord answered the temptor: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every WORD that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Psalmist exclaims: "How sweet are Thy WORDS unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Friend, is this your experience today? Do you LOVE to search and read and study the Holy Bible, and are you devoting as much of your time to it as ever? Christian, where art thou?

III. LOSS OF SPEECH

That soul who neglects private devotions and Daily Bible reading should not be surprised to find that he has acquired an aversion to, and a timidity in, speaking for Christ in the home, at the neighbors, on the street, in the public services, and elsewhere. This is the natural result of neglect,—a warning of desire for the exercises of spiritual life. It is not uncommon to see such persons interested and engaged in worldly pursuits. Sometimes they excuse themselves by saying, "We haven't the gift of speech like Brother Speakeasy and Sister Talkative," but, if you should happen in next door some morning, after they had spent the previous day SHOPPING you could here a long and glowing description of the goods they had seen and bought. Have you little or nothing to say for Jesus? People talk about the goods they have on hand. Have you "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control," and such like? Let me listen to your ordinary conversation for thirty minutes and I can tell you what is in your heart, and how much or how little you love HIM who died for you.

IV. LOSS OF JOY

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Your spiritual strength is measured by your buoyancy of spirit. Satan will do his utmost to rob you of your joy. Thus he will weaken you if possible. He will throw his black wings of grief about your spirit and try to make you feel blue, or he will take advantage of some physical weakness and suggest that you are not so joyful as usual, and deceive you into wrong thinking, possibly, and thus conduct you into "doubting castle." Beware of his trickery! Loss of joy is brought about naturally by disobedience. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be HAPPY in Jesus."

V. LOSS OF HEARING

Defective hearing is either caused by an internal disorder or by an outward accident. The ears of the soul may become filled with the ear-wax of the world and thus be deaf to the voice of God. Listening to gossip about your neighbors and friends or about your brethren in the church, will dull the sense of hearing. Failing to obey God when he speaks injures the acuteness of the soul's ear. You may become so accustomed to the awakening sounds of an alarm-clock, and habitually fail to heed them, until they have no power to arouse you, and you can now sleep on in spite of them. This is none the less true of the soul who neglects to obey the admonitions and warnings of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit used to call you to prayer, Bible study, personal work, the visiting of the sick and infirm, and to the aid of the poor and needy, but you have failed to obey His voice so often, that now you seldom hear it and, perhaps, not at all. How sad is your condition! "Who heareth ears to hear, let him hear," and heed the voice of God when He speaks.

VI. LOSS OF SIGHT

One may gaze at the sun until he is blinded, and then, wherever he looks, he sees nothing but suns. Christians may continue to pore over fashion plates until they can see nothing but bonnets and gowns whithersoever they journey. They go to church but do not see Jesus anywhere in the service. They have been blinded by gazing too long at the new millinery and fashionable gowns. They have misused their eyes in reading fiction until they care nothing for solid, soul-strengthening truths. They have become short-sighted

too; they see only their own set or circle; they are concerned wholly in their particular church or society; they evince little or no interest in foreign missions and no care for the needy poor in the next street. They do not see that the world about them is "dying for a little bit of love." They have been blinded to all these by the glitter and glare of worldliness, and are now easily snared. Isaac, because of his blindness, was deceived by cunning Jacob. Many today are being deceived by so-called "Christian Science," "Mormonism," "The Millennial Dawn," "Seventh Dayism," "Theosophy," "New Thought," etc., because of dimness of vision. What a GRAND difference between these deluded souls and those of the righteous described by the prophet in Isaiah 33!—"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off."

VII. LOSS OF BENEVOLENCE

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty," are the words of the wisest of men sounding forth from the book of Proverbs, and how true!

The laws governing "sowing and reaping" have their rewards and punishments. If you sow your last ten bushels of wheat, you may reap 300, 600 or perhaps 1,500 bushels therefrom, but if you withhold them from the soil you will reap a bountiful supply of—NOTHING, nothing but remorse in return for your negligence and selfishness.

A Christian woman in the State of Iowa was attending a missionary convention and they were raising funds with which to equip and send laborers to the foreign fields. The Spirit of God impressed her to give twenty dollars. She hesitated, and reasoned that she needed it for a garment for winter. The Spirit still held the opportunity before her until she returned home and refused the call. Within two or three weeks she made a visit to another state but hid the \$20 beneath the carpet at home. Upon returning from her visit she looked for the money but it was gone; a thief had broken into the house and taken it. She lost both her winter coat and the blessing of Him that maketh rich. "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." "The liberal soul shall be made fat," but what will become of him who lives for himself alone! "He that watereth shall be watered also himself," but what shall the end be of them that close their eyes, their hands and their purses to the mute appeals of the languishing souls about them! "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." "God loveth a cheerful giver." "Freely ye have received, freely give."

The foregoing signs of spiritual declension may properly be summed up in one word—INDIFFERENCE. Indifference to the calls of the Holy Spirit to prayer, to Bible Study and to personal work. It is not at all strange that this neglect should produce a harvest of apathy and death in all lines of Christian work. The fountain of tears drieth up and burdens for the lost are unknown. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." Eccl. 10:18.

Brother, sister, have you noticed any "gray hairs" on the head of your Christian experience today? If so, you should thank God that you have found

them. You are better off than Ephraim. He had gray hairs but KNEW IT NOT, and we have no record that he ever awakened to his sad state. I'm glad to tell you that there is a divine restorer for gray hairs, a preventive for falling hair and a sure cure for baldness. The former life and natural color may be regained by a bath in the cleansing fountain, AFTER a full confession and true repentance have been made. It may be next to dying to confess that you have discovered gray hairs, for people do not like to admit that they are growing old; but if you will humble yourself under the Almighty's hand, He will lift you up and bless you as in other days. You shall then renew your youth like the eagles; Thou shalt be like the palm tree that still brings forth fruit in old age; thy leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever thou doest shall prosper.

—The Baptist World, Louisville, Ky, gives the following as the list of questions sent to a minister by a church which was considering the advisability of inviting him to become its pastor:

"Name? Address? Education? Name of Institution? Location? Dates? Degree? Name of any secret society to which you belong? Experience? Where last pastorate? Number of years? What is least salary you will accept? When can you begin work? Married or single? How many in family? Where were you born? When? Nationality? Height? Weight? Age? Colour of hair? Colour of eyes? Are you a successful organizer? Are you a successful preacher? Are you assertive, or timid and shrinking? Are you tactful? Are you humane or scholastic? Are you overbearing or considerate? Are you zealous and firm? Have you the spirit of self-sacrifice? Is your spirit that of leading or driving? Are you a good Sunday school worker? Do you sing by note? Do you play piano or organ for singing? Are you original or imitative? Are you willing to do and dare? If married, state health, age, training, and disposition of your wife. Is she an optimist or a pessimist?"

This sounds like a joke, but Dr. Prestridge, the World editor, is understood to vouch for its genuineness. The London Baptist Times, commenting on the list, suggests that some of the questions should be read together. For example, there might be some subtle connection between the questions, "What is least salary you will accept?" and "Have you the spirit of self-sacrifice?" Suppose the candidate replied that he had this spirit, and then intimated that he could not undertake to organize and preach the shepherd the flock successfully; be tactful and scholastic; labour in the Sunday school, play the organ; sing by note; be original and do and dare for less than £1,000 a year! Again, his readiness to do and dare would be infallibly revealed in his examination paper. For, as Dr. Prestridge remarks, he might be bold enough to confess to a wart behind his left ear, and yet shrink from describing the disposition and letting out the age of his wife.

"Enjoy the blessings of this day, if God sends them, and the evils of it bear patiently and sweetly; for only this day is ours; we are dead to yesterday, and we are not born to the morrow."—Jeremy Taylor.

"To wish to deceive heaven is folly among men."—La Fontaine.