



281.890.1900  
TheMETonline.org

*Jones Road Campus*  
13000 Jones Road | Houston, TX 77070

*Fry Road Campus* | Hopper Middle School  
7811 Fry Road | Houston, TX 77433

[*Introductory video*: Puffy clouds in the sky are the backdrop for the written message ushered in by a streaking star with a shimmery comet-like tail accompanied by gently paced music with a boom-chicka-boom beat:]

**WE ALL WANT *to make changes***  
**SO WE MAKE NEW *year resolutions***  
**BECAUSE WE THINK WE *will find happiness***  
**IN ACCOMPLISHING *them***  
**BUT WHAT IF WE *got this all wrong***  
**AND YOUR SUCCESS DIDN'T *bring you happiness***  
**BUT INSTEAD YOUR HAPPINESS *brought you great success?***  
**HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE *the way you approach life?***  
**HAPPINESS MATTERS**  
***Find joy even when life hides it***

[*When the lights come back up at the video's end, Lead Pastor Sal Sberna begins.*]

Good morning, everybody here at *Jones Road*. How are you? How about *Cypress*? You all doing good out there, as well? Those of you who are joining via the Internet: *We welcome you.*

This is going to be a good Sunday this morning. Let me give you some great news. You know we're trying to raise about a half a million dollars for all of our mission projects around the world during December during the *Big Give*. All the money has been in and counted and the grand total is only \$516,360! How about that? Way to go, God! Way to go, church! Thank you for your generosity; it means so much to people whose faces you will not see until we get to heaven. So on our *Cypress Campus* as well as here at *Jones*, thank you for opening up your heart to the Lord. Isn't it great when you meet a goal? (I mean) doesn't it feel just—and then you do better than the goal you set for yourself?

Sometimes we have rules and regulations in our lives that (kind of) give us the guidance that:

- *I'm doing pretty good with God.* (Or...)
- *I'm not doing good with God.*

Based upon those rules and regulations, sometimes we can walk away feeling like a failure: *Where's the joy of my salvation?* A lot of us sometimes have just substituted those rules for a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

In fact, some of you are probably in the building this morning and you're not a believer. The reason why you came is:

- You're trying to date somebody and you'll go to church for that.
  - But (you know) every time you're in church you're just reminded that you're not doing it the right way.
  - You're just really, really far from getting this thing down to perfection.
- Maybe you were brought up in church.
- Maybe you were part of a minister's home.
  - You got burned somewhere.
  - You just aren't going to go back to church anymore, because you don't like the rules and you don't like the regulations.
- Maybe some of you think you're doing it right.

- You're not that bad compared to—well—the person you're sitting next to (maybe) this morning.
- You always know somebody that: *As long as I'm not doing that, I'm okay.*
- Maybe you know another believer:
  - *Oh, man, I know I'm at least that good; I know that guy.*
  - *I know what they're doing; I know I'm a lot better than that.*

[Do] you know what? All those rules and regulations set us up for one thing: *A colossal failure when it comes to a relationship with God.* Because if we're not careful (in our own mind) we will have enough righteousness—just enough—to keep us away from God and what we really need in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul is going to tell us this morning: he was a colossal failure, when it came to rules and regulations, trying to have a relationship with God. He's also going to tell us: He is so happy that his rules and his regulations failed, because it led him to a real relationship with God.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I FAIL SPIRITUALLY?

So, the apostle Paul is writing to the Philippians. He's going to tell them now not to substitute the real thing for rules and regulations. The first thing he says, he reminds the Philippians in *Chapter 3, verse 2: Do not rely on rules when it comes to your barometer of whether or not you're right with God.*

## DO NOT RELY ON RULES

He talks about a group of people called *Judaizers* and he says to [the Philippians church]:

Watch out for those dogs, {and he doesn't mean: *Hey, whaddup, dawg;* he means dogs—bad term here—} those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

*Philippians 3:2 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

Now when the apostle Paul would go and preach and establish churches, there was a group of people that followed after he left. They were known as *Judaizers*. They would come in and say: *You know, the apostle Paul; man, he was right on, but he just falls a little bit short of what it really means to be right with God. If you would just be circumcised, then God would be happy. If you just kept these rules and regulations, He'd be even more happy.* (Now, if you don't know what circumcision is, ask your mom and dad. All right?)

They would say to these Gentiles: *You are not really close to God and have a relationship with God because:*

- *You're not circumcised.*
- *You're eating certain foods.*
- *You're not observing certain feasts.*
- *You're not doing certain things at the beginning or the end of the month.*

Now these people are confused: *Well if I do those things, then that makes me right with God?* Paul says: *No. Huh-uh. These are dogs.* You see to a morally right/religiously right Jewish person, a Gentile was a dog. Now Paul is saying: *No-no-no! It's backwards. They're dogs and they're evil. You're not. You're right. But if you keep these rules and regulations as your barometer, you're going to be wrong. You're going to be dead wrong.*

Let me tell you what legalism does—or take using rules and regulations to have [as] your barometer of a relationship with God: It simply muddies up what a relationship with God ought to be like by focusing on deeds and standards rather than the Person of Christ and grace and mercy.

Now where do we get the rules from and whose rules are right?

- Is it the Baptist rules?
- [Is it] Catholic rules?
- [Is it] Methodist rules?
- Is it Jewish rules?
- Is it Jehovah's Witness rules?
- Is it Mormon rules?
- Is it Buddhist rules?
- Is it Mohammad rules?

What rules do you make up? Well, chances are we make up our own rules, because the rules we make (well those) are the ones that are the easiest to follow. Aren't they?

(I mean) I can make up rules. My rules are based upon what's best for *me*, not anybody else. If you're not careful, you start getting rules and regulations *you* can keep and it always seems to benefit *you*. Like here's a good example.

- Here's what's good for Sal: It's good for Sal not to divorce his wife. (All right?) That's good for me. Because she told me if I ever did, she'd shoot me. So it's really, really good for me. (Right?) But...
  - I can act like she's not in the room
  - I can diss her; dismiss her
  - I can *not* meet her needs...but I'm still keeping the rules, so I'm a good guy because I haven't divorced my wife.
- Maybe it's like I want the rules where it's not right for people to cheat me. But it's okay for me to cheat others, especially once a year when it comes to the government because (God knows) the government's cheating already. So my rule is to bend that. (Right?) That's good for me. But if *you* cheat, that's not good for you.

If we're not careful, it's a double standard of rules and you become better externally than everybody else.

Judaizers said: *To be circumcised in the flesh and to keep rules and regulations, that's what matters.* Paul says: *No! That's external. What matters is internal.* There's a circumcision that God wants to do, but it's on the inside. He wants to take away an old nature and put a new nature inside there. Look at what he says in *Philippians 3, verses 3 and 4*:

<sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, {not the Judaizers} we who worship by the Spirit of God, {we} who glory in Christ Jesus, and {we} who put no confidence in the flesh— {not what we can do externally to please God and be right with God; then he says this:} <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence....

*Philippians 3:3-4a (NIV, 1984 edition)*

The apostle Paul said: *Nobody had any more reason to think that they were right with God before they came to Jesus Christ than I did* (the apostle Paul said). But now he's going to tell us something: Religion doesn't work.

## RELIGION DOES NOT WORK

Now before I became a believer...

- I was religious.
- I went to a church.
- I went to confession.
- I was confirmed in my church.
- I said prayers.
- I was an altar boy.

Now, I'm not saying anything bad about the religion I was in. But the religion I was in—that's all it was to me: it was *my* religion. It has nothing to do with a relationship to Jesus Christ.

So if you were to ask me: *Are you right with God?* I'd say: *Yeah, I just went to confession.* As long as it wasn't five seconds after confession, I may have been right with God.

- *Oh yeah, I just had my communion.*
- *Oh yeah, I just did the stations of the cross.*
- *Oh yeah, I'm an altar boy.*
- *Oh yeah, I've been confirmed.*
- *Oh yeah, I've gone to mass.*
- *I've gotten my ashes.*

I could have told you a lot of things. Do you know how that made me feel? [In a sing-song manner:] *I'm better than you. I'm better than you.* Do you think that's from God?—No. Who's to say that my religion was any better than anybody else's religion?

Now here's what the apostle Paul says—you ready?—he said: *If anybody had religion, I did.* Look at what he says in *Philippians, chapter 3, verse 4*. He says: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confident in the flesh..." Well, let me go down [the list in the next scripture]. Okay:

<sup>5</sup> If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:...

*Philippians 3:5 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

In other words:, you think you're religious? Not as much as I am.

- “circumcised on the eighth day” —That means eight days after born, when it was prescribed in the *Old Testament*, [*snaps his fingers:*] Paul was circumcised.
- “of the people of Israel” —I am of God’s chosen people, Israel. (Right?)
- Then he says not only that but I’m the chosen tribe of the 12 tribes: “Benjamin”
- I’m “a Hebrew of Hebrews” —Nobody typified more what it was like to be a devout, religious Hebrew than the apostle Paul.
- Then he says:} “in regard to the law, {I’m} a Pharisee”
  - *I was a teacher of the stuff* (he said).
  - *I went to the seminary.*
  - *I learned all of it.*
  - *I went to rabbinical school.*
  - *I taught.*
  - *I’m the one that people would come to to get advice.*
  - *I knew the Old Testament backwards and forwards.*
- Then he goes: “as for zeal” in my religion, I persecuted “the church”
  - He killed Christians.
  - He was so devout in his religious zeal that he would look at the followers of Christ—
    - Thought they were blasphemers
    - Thought that Jesus Himself was a blasphemer
 —and he would put them to death. In his mind he was really, really right with God for doing that. That’s what religion does. It doesn’t put love in your heart; it puts hate in your heart. It makes you compare yourself to other people and believe that you are better than them.
- But he goes on and says—look: “as for legalistic righteousness,” —you ready?— “faultless.”

[*Philippians 3:5-6b (NIV, 1984 edition)*]

Now does anybody here believe they are faultless or know somebody who is? [*In response to the congregational silence:*] That’s what I thought.

A preacher asked that one time. He expected the same response that I got. No one’s going to say: *Hey, I’m faultless or I know somebody.*

A guy in the back of the church raises his hand.

The preacher was shocked and said: *Do you mean to tell me that you’re faultless?*

He says: *Oh, no. No, sir, I’m not. But from what my wife tells me about her former husband, he is.*

Nobody’s faultless, “all” of us “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” [*Romans 3:23 (NIV, NASB, HCSB)*]

All religion does is try to get it in your mind:

- You can climb your way to God.
- You can do some things that’ll make you feel like you’re better than everybody else.

But at the end of the day the ladder's against the wrong wall, guys. You're not climbing *out* of the fire; you're climbing *into* the fire.

He dotted every "I" and crossed every "T." He was a Pharisee—619 Levitical laws, he followed every one of them and then they made some up. Do you know what some of the silly things that they did as Pharisees? They were always arguing about: *What does it mean not to work on the Sabbath to keep it holy?* They would do silly things like:

- If a hen laid an egg, you could not eat it on the Sabbath. Do you know why? If the hen laid an egg on the Sabbath, it worked. So they couldn't eat it. (Seriously.)
- If you (for example) were bitten by a mosquito on the Sabbath and it began to itch, you couldn't scratch it. Do you know why?—that would be considered work.
- If you passed by a reflective surface, you were forbidden to look at yourself in that reflective surface. Because if you saw a grey hair (or like I'm always doing, finding weird eyebrow hair going in all directions), you'd be tempted to yank it. That would be what?—work.

Do you see how illogical that becomes? He was saying—look: *I was like that*. He's saying now: *That type of religion and a true love relationship do not mix together*. Because if we're not careful, we take relationship with God to be based on performance. If it's based on performance, it's always insecure; because you are out if you don't perform.

At your job if you don't perform—guess what?—you're fired. (You're fired.) We take that world's mindset and we bring it to a relationship with God. We say: *Oh, I failed, God. I failed spiritually, because I didn't keep my rules and my regulations*.

- Maybe you were brought up in a home where you're constantly being compared to somebody else. Your parents would tell you: *Why can't you be more like...* (then they would name a brother or a sister or a cousin or, you know, somebody). In your mind you go: *Okay, I don't measure up. You don't love me like you love them because I'm not as good as they are. For me to get your love, I'm going to have to do what they do*. So we take that and then we put that in front of our relationship with God, and we can never please God.
- Maybe you had a father you could never please, no matter what you did. It was always that one imperfection they would find. And they'd go straight to it—no matter what you do—you just put your hands up in exasperation and say: *Okay, I quit*. We take that and we bring that into our relationship with God.
- Maybe even in your marriage:
  - *Why can't you be more of a husband like so-and-so?*
  - *Why can't you be more of a wife like so-and-so?*

All of a sudden in our mind we just don't measure up, and we've got to get on a treadmill of performance. In every other relationship we are judged on performance. We transfer that to God and base our relationship with Him on rules and performance. Do you know why? Because performance is in our hearts.

What did Adam and Eve do when they sinned? They performed. They (went and) made for themselves fig leaves and covered themselves up. [*Genesis 3:7* (paraphrased.)] What did God do when He found them? He said: *Come here*. What did God do? God did something for them. He killed an animal and put the skins of the animal on them.

Just a reminder from [21] *Jump Street* [an action comedy TV series from 1987-1991]: ***You can't cover up what's wrong internally by doing external stuff.*** Rules and regulations don't work.

So what do you do? You have to revise the scoreboard.

## REVISE THE SCOREBOARD

If you can't win at the game, change the scoreboard. We will never win at the game of trying to be good enough to please God. We cannot be...

- Good enough to get into heaven.
- Good enough to please God on our own.

So here's what the apostle Paul said—he said: *I had to revise the scoreboard.* (You ready?)

<sup>7</sup> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing {—put that word in your mind for a second; we'll come back to it—} Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

*Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

So here's what he's saying: *All of that stuff I did for most of my adult life, I was:*

- *A Pharisee of the Pharisees*
- *A Hebrew of the Hebrews*
- *Absolutely perfect in the minds and the eyes of people based upon my external reality*
- *Killing Christians, thinking I'm doing God a favor*

He said: *All of that now, that's a tremendous loss for me. There's only one thing I'm concerned about and that's **knowing**...* *Gnosko* [ghin-oc'-ko] is the Greek word there and it literally means to have intimate knowledge. When used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, it's the word that is used for Adam *knew* Eve. It didn't just mean: *Hey, Eve, how ya doing? My name's Adam.* [It means] **intimate sexually, deeply**. Paul said: *All that I did did not give me intimacy with God; it drove me further away from Him. Now, I want to know Him.*

Now...

- Some of you know *about* Him.
- Some of you have *heard* about Him.
- Some of you have been *raised* in homes where what you knew about Him wasn't good; it was held over your head:
  - He was a threat to you.
  - It made you feel guilty.

- It always made you not be able to live up to a certain standard. That's *not* the Christ of the Bible. That is a perverted understanding of who God is and what it takes to please Him.

So [Paul] said: *Everything that I've gained—that I thought that I gained, now it's rubbish.* We've looked at that word before. Remember the word *skubala*? Remember what that means? *Dung of the worst kind.* (Right?) If it was modern-day vernacular, there'd be a bumper sticker that says: *Skubala happens!* (Right?) This is what the word is. This is exactly what Paul is talking about: *When I look at my life before Christ, and though religiously (on the outside) I appear perfect to people, it was a pile—a pile—compared to what I have in Jesus Christ.*

Now let me ask you: *What do you want in life? Do you want a pile or do you want the presence of God inside of your life?*

Look what he says. He goes—look: *I want to "be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own" [Philippians 3:9a (NIV, 1984 edition)]* How do we get righteousness on our own? *I'm better than you. Why?*

- *I do these things.*
- *I don't do these things.*

Maybe you're here today and you say:

- *We don't cook when we go home, because (you know) it's the Lord's day.* So you go to a restaurant and let someone else cook for you? What's the difference? (I mean, come on, honestly.)
- *We'll pay them (you know), because we're better than they are. They don't know any different. They're just lost and blind in sin.*

Some people won't even go to movies on Sunday. They'll go every other day, but not on Sunday. Why?

- *Well, that would be having fun and after all it's the Lord's day.* Think about that—what you've just said—think about that.

The apostle Paul says—look: That's not "righteousness of my own...from the law." Now look, here's how you get real righteousness. This is how you have a relationship with God [that's] not based on performance:

...but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

*Philippians 3:9 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

Now I've told you this before but it's an easy way to remember this:

- Do you know what **religion and legalism** is? D-O or D-O-N-'T. I'm doing or I don't do. Based upon what I'm doing or I don't do, I'm right with God.
- **Christianity**—a relationship with God—is spelled D-O-N-E. It's based on what Christ has *done* for us on the cross. He has given us something. My right standing with God is

not something that I externally achieve, but it comes from inwardly believing in what Jesus Christ has done.

Do you see the difference?

Here's the truth (really) about whatever you believe: Whatever is on the inside ultimately makes it to the outside. [Repeated for emphasis.] If on the inside—just like Jesus talked to the Pharisees: *You on the outside appear righteous to men. You're like a whitewashed tomb. On the outside you appear beautiful, but on the inside you are full of (what?) dead men's bones. You are always washing and polishing the outside of the cup. Why don't you wipe the inside of the cup?*—Jesus said. *Why is it that you would "strain at a gnat" but then you would} "swallow a camel"?*—He said to the Pharisees. [*Matthew 23:24 (KJV)*]

The apostle Paul was saying *external* doesn't matter, *internal* matters. You are unrighteous and I am unrighteous—not because of what we have done—but [because of] what's inside of us causing us to do what we've done.

Now look, from time to time I get a cold. (How many of y'all ever have a cold? Let me see your hands. Everybody. Right? Everybody gets infected with a cold—everybody does.) Now when I get a cold...

- My eyes water.
- My nose runs (and believe me that's a lot of running).
- My ears get stopped up.
- I cough.
- My chest gets filled with fluid.
- I am miserable.

What caused it? Are the symptoms causing it? No, a virus is causing it. I could take cold medicine, and it will dry up my sinuses and my eyes, and keep me from coughing. All it does is mask the real problem.

Let me tell you what religion does: *It masks the real problem.* You're covering over a virus that is killing you, and Jesus is the only way to cure the virus.

[Here's a] great *Old Testament* example of this. In the *Old Testament* God's people had a proclivity to be negative and whine about a lot of stuff. It's like:

Someone said: *Hey, man! Are you having a great day?*

I say: *Can't complain, but it won't stop me from complaining.*

These are God's people: *Man, we have nothing to complain about, but it won't stop us.*

God had enough of it one day so He sends these snakes into the camp. (You think snakes on a plane are scary—how about snakes in the camp?) Everywhere you step there's a snake. [Pantomimes a snake rising up and biting his leg.] Whap! Whap! (I mean) just striking every time. It doesn't matter what age you were—if you were an infant, an old man or an old woman—you were getting bit. God's people start calling out to God: *Oh, we're sorry. Help us!*

So Moses begins to intercede for God's people. When he does, God says: *Okay Moses, do this: My people have done wicked things. I want you to take some bronze and melt it down. I want you to make a replica of this snake. Then I want you to put it on a pole. Then raise it up in the middle of the camp. It will come about that if anybody is bitten by [a] snake, they can go to the replica of the snake, that doesn't have the poison in it, and when they look at it and believe that this poison-less snake will cure them, then they'll be healed.* [Numbers 21:8-9 (paraphrased)] Sure enough, if they got bit, they ran into the camp, they looked up and they lived.

So Jesus picks up on this in *John's gospel* and He says this:

So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to the top of a pole. Whenever those who were bitten looked at the bronze snake, they recovered!

*Numbers 21:9 (NLT, 1996 edition)*

Whoever had the venom on the inside showing—how did they know they have venom?  
[Pantomimes being affected by venom:]

- I'm choking up.
- I'm dying.
- I'm getting ready to pass out.
- My blood pressure is falling.

If you got the venom on the inside, you went to the snake, who had no venom on the inside. You looked and you lived. Whoever was bitten looked at the bronze snake; they recovered.

Now listen to what Jesus said.

<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so I, the Son of man, must be lifted up on a pole, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in me will have eternal life.

*John 3:14-15 (NLT, 1996 edition)*

Now what do you think Jesus was talking about? He was talking about the cross. He said: *I look just like you, don't I? I've lived among you—just like you, didn't I?* Except for one big difference: He was so much like us and so not like us. He had no virus of sin inside of Him.

- His eyes didn't water.
- He didn't cough.
- He didn't wheeze.
- He didn't have to mask the problem

—because He didn't have the problem of sin. He was totally, 100 percent righteous.

So we, who have this venom of sin inside of us that calls us to do wicked, that we could cover up for a while; but ultimately it's going to kill us—when we come to our senses and...

- We go to the cross of Christ
- We look up and see Him, Who is our representative, but yet without sin
- We live as well and the poison is taken away from us.

That's the righteousness that's given by faith.

That's what he goes on to say. (That) we have this righteousness given to us by faith. [*Philippians 3:9* (paraphrased)] It's called imputed righteousness.

So when I came to Christ [and] when you come to Christ, say:

- *Lord, I'm a liar on the inside.*
- *I've got a virus of sin.*
- *I need my heart circumcised.*
- *I need the venom taken out.*
- *I believe in Jesus.*

When that happens, the venom leaves and the righteousness comes in. Sin leaves; Christ comes in. Your heart is changed. That's called *imputed* (given to your account).

Now let me give you a good illustration about imputation. Because my wife and I impute something into my daughter's account every month. (Hopefully in August when she's graduated, the imputation shall stop.) Now if we didn't impute into her bank account money, she wouldn't be able to get out of college.

- She couldn't pay for it.
- She couldn't afford to live
  - Eat
  - Have gas for the vehicle (and)
  - All those things that mom and dad provide

Now—

- Does my daughter deserve it?—No.
- Does she need it?—Yes.
- Why do I give to her?—Because I love her.
- Does she make all As?—Unfortunately, no.
- Because she doesn't make all As, do I take the money back?—No.
- Could she ever pay me back?—No.
- Why do I do it?—Because I love my daughter and I want the best for her.
  - I know if I don't help her she is never going to be able to make it, in the plans that I have for her anyway, and that her mother has, and that she has for herself.

What is God saying to us?

- Do we deserve to live?—No.
- Do we need to live?—Yes.
- Why do we get to live in Christ?—Because our Heavenly Father loves us.
  - [He] knows we can't perform.
  - He knows that we can't keep the standard.
  - He knows we'll never be good enough.
  - He knows the external never matches the internal until we come to Christ.

That's why He gives us the righteousness of Christ. So when you sin and God looks down on you, He doesn't say: *Oh, naughty, naughty Sal.* He goes: *Oh, I see the righteousness of my Son, Jesus. Live, son, live. Don't do it again, but live now.*

Now don't you think that's a better way of living than trying to be good all the time? When you start living like that, you are good.

- Do you know why I'm good?—Because I'm good.
- I'm good on the inside, therefore I can be good on the outside.
- Does that mean I'm good all the time?—No.
  - Ask my wife.
  - Ask the people I work with.

But what is my proclivity? It is to be good because Christ is inside of me.

## RESIST COMPLACENCY

He said—now:

- *Oh, that means I can just do anything I want to do.*
- *I can go out and divorce my wife and I still have the grace of God inside of me.*
- *I can go rob a bank and claim that it wasn't bad [because] Jesus still loves me.*

Look what He says:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

*Philippians 3:12 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

- Why did God save you?
- Why did He take hold?
- Why did He come and snatch us out of that virus of sin?
- Why, when we were in the snakes, did He take us to the Savior?

Why?—Because He said: *I've got to do something with you. I've got something beautiful I want to do out of your life. I've got something to do not only in you, but through you.*

If we are not careful, then we will get to the place where: *Man, we have arrived!* Here's when we can say we have arrived: When we open up our eyes one day and we are in heaven—guess what?—you've arrived. Until that time:

- The devil would love to ruin your life.
- He'd love to ruin your marriage.
- He'd love to snatch your kids away.
- He'd love to make you immoral.
- He would love to steal your joy.
- He would love for you to turn greedy and self-centered and forget about the things of God.

We can't do that! We cannot afford—you cannot afford—to be complacent.

- There are people in your family that are looking to you to say: *I want to look and live just like you.*
- You have kids that need to become believers.

- You have friends that you work with that need to become believers.
- You've got people down your lineage somewhere that are going to be a believer because of the way that you lived.

You can't afford to take a day off. Don't be complacent in your walk with God.

Some of us have grown complacent because of past successes (which we're going to talk about in a minute). Secondly, church, let me say something. *Cypress*, you listening to me? *Jones*, you listening to me?

We can't afford to be complacent—ever. Literally...

- People around the world
- People in Cypress
- People that drive by that 100 acres [our property on Fry Road in Cypress]
- People that go up and down the roads to this church

We exist to show them: *All you have to do is look and live. It is not about rules and regulations. It is about a relationship with a God Who loved you so much He became like you and died for you so that you might be like Him.* We can never get complacent—ever get complacent! People need Christ.

So what would I tell you if you're here this morning and

- You're a Mormon (or)
- You're a Catholic (or, worse)
- You're a Baptist:
  - Not smoking and drinking doesn't make you good.
  - (Not) going to church four times a week doesn't make you good.
  - Not drinking iced tea and Coca-Cola® doesn't make you good.

The only thing that makes you good is a God who is good, and when He gets inside of your life, you can't help but be good because He loves you. (He loves you.)

One more thing (and we're done):

## REMEMBER TO FORGET

Remember to forget.

<sup>13</sup> ...But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

*Philippians 3:13b-14 (NIV, 1984 edition)*

If you're going to become everything that God wants you to be, you've got to learn to develop a bad memory. Isn't that good news for all of us over fifty? *I forgot; I'm getting closer to God. I forgot.* Here are a couple of things to forget:

## 1. YOUR PAST FAILURES

Now here's the deal:

- Some of you are excited right now.
- You want to get right with God.
- You believe everything I'm telling you.

As soon as it comes time for you to really step out, the devil's going to say: [Pantomimes a conversation with the devil whispering through cupped hands as if in your ear.]

[Devil:] *Ahem! Have you forgotten something?*

[You:] *I think I was supposed to...*

[Devil:] *No, no you weren't. Remember? You're divorced.*

[You:] *Oh, yeah.*

[Devil:] *Remember? You sin sexually.*

[You:] *Oh, oh yeah.*

[Devil:] *Remember you cheated on your taxes.*

[You:] *Yeah.*

[Devil:] *Remember you didn't vote last year.*

So here he comes [the devil]: *You're not as good as you think you are.*

Here's what you say: *I'm not good; He is. And He's a whole lot better than you are, you filthy liar!*

[There are] some things you have to forget. You've got this big sin in the past. You have gotten forgiveness for about everything, but this one, big, colossal, red eye always on you like this.

[*Demonstrates a condemning stare.*] The minute you think about doing something for God: *I can't. Oh God, how can You ever love me?*

- He loved you before you did it.
- He loved you when you did it.
- He loved you right after you did it.
- He loves you every time you bring it up.
- He doesn't remember that you did it.
- He has chosen to forgive you.

Here's the greatest thing that you could do: Embrace forgiveness and forget about your past failures. They will only keep you from future successes. Forget about your past failures.

Second thing, forget about:

## 2. YOUR PAST SUCCESSES

That's harder, isn't it? It's like: We can give the failures to God; uhhh, the successes we like to keep. Because successes make us feel better than everybody else. We don't need what everybody else needs:

- *Oh, I need to be your teacher because, you know, I've been to the Bible college.*
- *I am on the internet, by the way. (Yeah, well, so is Scooby-Doo.)*
- *I used to do this.*
- *I used to be this.*

- *I've won all these people to Christ.*
- *I've given all of this money.*

You know what? [*Blowing a derisive raspberry.*] Ready? *Skubala!* Whatever you did yesterday, it's a pile. It's kind of like manna. It's good for today and [if] you try to hold onto it, it rots in your hands.

Forget about your past successes.

- Today needs a fresh touch from God.
- Today needs a fresh anointing from God.
- Today needs a fresh word from God.

You need God today, because I'm telling you: Satan wakes up every morning and knocks on your door. (You ready?)

- *I want your children.*
- *I want your marriage.*
- *I want your finances.*
- *I want your life.*
- *I want your mind.*
- *I want to ruin you.*
- *I want to trick you.*
- *I want to deceive you today.*
- *I want you to slip and fall down and never get up.*
- *I want you to have perverted thoughts about God.*
- *I want you to think you don't matter to God.*

And he'll go on and on and on.

What we need today is the mercy and the grace of God. If we draw near to God, He'll draw near to us; and Satan will flee from us. [*James 4:7-8, (paraphrased)*] Forget about your past successes; they don't work today.

(Okay, we've got to go. I got on a roll there for a second. I made up for last week [when] I only kept you here for 20 minutes.)

Do you know Christ? (Bottom line.)

- Don't tell me if you've been baptized.
- Don't tell me if you've been catechismed (like me).
- Don't tell me that you've been to Sunday school.
- Don't tell me about all of your church training.
- Don't tell me about your confirmation.

Tell me the day you looked [up to Jesus hanging on the cross] and lived. When was that? Maybe it needs to be today. (Maybe it just needs to be today.)

So, I want you to pray with me, at our *Cypress Campus* and here at *Jones*. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. If you've never met Christ, if you don't want to be on a roller coaster of rules, but you want to be in a love relationship where you have the righteousness of Christ

because you—by faith—want to believe in Him today, then you pray this prayer with me. It goes like this:

Dear God, I am a colossal failure at trying to have a relationship with You. Forgive me. I trust Christ to give me a relationship with You. Give me Your righteousness, Christ. I give you my unrighteousness.

Before we go on any further—so many of you have prayed that prayer in the past (and some of you are praying it right now)—do you know what you need to do? When we walk out of this room, I want you to go directly to the *Next Steps* desk that Pastor Scott [Rodgers, *Jones Road Campus Pastor*] will be talking to you about. And you need to be baptized. You need to know that really there's something on the inside now that's driving all of the external things. You need to obey Christ and be baptized. Period. (If not, guess what you're doing? You're relying on past successes.) *Oh I prayed*. Did you, really? Well then, be baptized and start following.

For the rest of us:

Lord, we don't want to give up. We don't want to grow complacent. We want to be the church that You've called us to be. Help us, Lord, to stay committed to You no matter what the cost—not thinking about yesterday, not worried about tomorrow, but enjoying today in Your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lead Pastor: Dr. Sal Sberna

**The MET**  
Metropolitan Baptist Church  
13000 Jones Rd  
Houston, TX 77070

*Sermon Transcript Ministry*  
resource@TheMETonline.org

**The hopes of the godly result in happiness, but the expectations of the wicked come to nothing.**

*Proverbs 10:28 (New Living Translation)*

**Legend:**

**(words in parentheses)** = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

**[words in square brackets]** = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

**{words in curly brackets within indented quote}** = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*