

Depending on God

M. W. Bassford

5-4-08

Introduction.

- A. In America, we strongly value self-reliance and individualism, and that means that relying on something or someone else is something we look down on. We don't celebrate Dependence Day; we celebrate Independence Day. Most men in this country would rather drive around lost than ask for directions.
- B. In a lot of ways, there's nothing wrong with this love of self-reliance, but it poses a big problem for us spiritually. When we get to thinking that we can take care of ourselves, we forget that in reality, we are dependent on God to take care of us. Consider what Solomon tells us in Psalm 127:1. We can live in the illusion that we are self-sufficient, but unless the unseen hand of God is laboring with us, all of our efforts are doomed to failure. We are not in fact independent, but totally reliant on Him.
- C. This is an unpleasant truth that most people will reject for as long as God allows them to. In fact, friends, this is honestly something that I myself struggle with. I should know better, but time and time again, I find myself trusting in my own abilities rather than in the power of God. I doubt I'm alone in this, either. Folks, that's not an amusing personality quirk; that's a serious spiritual flaw that we need to correct before it causes us serious physical and spiritual harm. Let's spend some time this morning, then, looking at depending on God.

I. Learning How.

- A. As we consider this topic, we first need to learn how God teaches us to depend. The easiest way that God does this is by speaking to us through His word. Let's look at the advice that Solomon gives us in Proverbs 3:5-6. There are many problems with trusting in ourselves and not in God, but this passage highlights the problem of intellectual arrogance. Too often, we fall into the trap of thinking that we are capable of figuring out and governing our own lives, and that we don't have to pay attention to God.
- B. This reminds me, actually, of a study I read about some time ago. In the study, the researchers examined people's decision-making skills by putting them through a series of tests. Then, they asked the test subjects to rate the decisions that they made. What the researchers learned is that the people who did badly in the tests, the poor decision-makers, rated their decision-making skills just as highly as did the good decision-makers. They thought their understanding was capable, when in fact it wasn't. Folks, any time we start listening to ourselves and not God, we run into the same problem, because next to Him, none of us are capable decision-makers. That's why we need to listen to the message of His word, which urges us to depend on Him.
- C. Of course, a lot of the time, we don't listen to the word, even when we know what it says about us. A lot of the time, that's when we run into the second way God teaches us to trust: adverse circumstances. When God allows us the illusion of competence, when we find ourselves in situations where our intelligence and abilities appear equal to the task before us, that's when we're most likely to trust in ourselves. By contrast, when things aren't going well in our lives, when we know that we're in a situation that we can't resolve ourselves, that's when we turn to God. At times, God puts us in those situations precisely so that we will turn to Him.
- D. Look at what Moses says in Deuteronomy 8:3. God knew that when the children of Israel entered the promised land and began to enjoy all of its riches, that they would become proud. God knew that they would start boasting in all the wealth they accumulated and forget about the One who gave it to them. That's why God gave them a powerful object lesson. He led them through the desert for 40 years and fed them with bread that literally fell out of the sky. There was no way that the children of Israel could have supplied themselves for even a day in the wilderness. Every meal they ate, every bite of manna that passed through their mouths, forced them to admit what was always true: that they were completely dependent on God. Even though we are not fed by the fall of manna, we still encounter times that teach us the same thing.
- E. Sometimes, though, God will afflict us even more personally than that so that we will learn to lean on Him. Consider the story that Paul tells in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. During his early time as a Christian, God gave Paul the opportunity to look into heaven itself, to see and hear things that mortal tongue cannot express. However, God knew that Paul would be tempted by that vision to assume that he himself was something special, so God allowed Satan to afflict Paul with what he calls "a thorn in the flesh," a physical weakness. Paul prayed three times to God that this weakness be removed. He surely expected that God would take it away. Three times, God said no, because Paul with that weakness was more useful to him than Paul without it. Paul needed an object lesson in his own body to remind him to trust God, and he likely carried it for the rest of his life.
- F. It's impossible for us to know the mind of God, but it may well be that many of the afflictions and infirmities that we have to deal with, we have for the same reason. We haven't seen into heaven, but that doesn't keep us from believing like Paul that we are complete without God. As we deal with our infirmities, then, let's remember that the power of God is not perfected in our strength. It is perfected in our weakness.

II. God Will. . .

- A. Once we've got it through our heads one way or another that we are dependent on God, we can turn our attention to the things that God promises He will do for us. First among these, we can depend on God to **FORGIVE US**. This is something that a lot of Christians struggle with. We start focusing on our lives and all the things we've done wrong, and even though we've asked forgiveness for those sins, we still carry the guilt around with us and worry that we're going to be lost. It sounds strange, brethren, but there's actually a kind of pride involved in thinking that way. It's the pride that says we are capable of living a righteous life, that we should try to earn our way to heaven by works of merit, and that we should be fearful when we don't.
- B. Folks, that's not the way that God has ordered our salvation at all. Look at what Paul tells us in Romans 8:1-2. We should try to be righteous, yes, but it is not our perfect lawkeeping that makes us righteous. This passage doesn't say that there is no condemnation to those who are sinless. It says that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. There is a price to pay for our sins, but Jesus has already paid it. By His death, He set us free from the law of death. We don't have to carry the burden of sin ourselves; we can depend on God to carry it for us. As far as the east is from the west, so far will He remove our transgressions from us.
- C. Likewise, we can depend on God to **PROTECT US** and those we love. This is one of my personal battles. Generally, but especially since Lauren and I learned that she was pregnant, I've been in low-level freak-out mode. I have a very active imagination, and it seems to spend a lot of time thinking up all the horrible things that could happen to my family and me, many of which I can do absolutely nothing about.
- D. If this is something we struggle with, we need to pay attention to the sentiments expressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. All of us have some reason to fear, because the world is an uncertain place, but Paul especially had reason to fear. We don't know precisely what incident Paul was describing, but when he says that he was under sentence of death, he was almost certainly speaking literally. When he was under that sentence, when nothing stood between him and the grave but the protection of God, that's when he learned to trust in that protection. Even if our situation isn't as dire, we still need to do the same. It's interesting. When people in the world say, "All we can do now is pray," to them, that's an expression of hopelessness. For the child of God, it should be an expression of hope. The power of God is not frail and tenuous. It is real and active. Rather than worrying about the problems we can't solve, we should trust in God who can solve them.
- E. In similar fashion, we should trust in God to **PROVIDE FOR US**. As I think most of us are aware, this country right now is headed for a recession, if it's not there already. Some of us have already been affected by this economic downturn, and, although I pray that it will not be so, it may be that more of us lose our jobs. I know what it's like to be unemployed, friends. I know what it's like to look for work and need work and pray for work, and still not find any. That's a hard situation to be in, but if we're there, we still need to trust in God.
- F. Look at the promise that Jesus makes in Matthew 6:31-33. Those were much harsher times than these are, friends. Back then, a man who couldn't find work might literally have to watch his family starve before his eyes. Because we're children of God, though, we don't have to worry about that, because somehow, some way, God is going to provide for us. He might not give us a seven-bedroom mansion with a Dodge Viper parked out front, but He will always give us what we need to get by, as long as we seek His kingdom first.
- G. Next, we can depend on God to **BLESS OUR CHURCH**. There are certainly times when it can be discouraging to be a Christian. There are times when it feels like we're working for the Lord, and working, and working, but no one cares, either in the church or outside of it. There are times when it feels like the whole world around is so bent on sin and pleasure that no one has five minutes for Jesus. There are times when it's easy to quit.
- H. Friends, that's the wrong answer too. Let's think about what Paul tells us in Galatians 6:9-10. If we are diligent about planting and watering in any portion of the Lord's vineyard, God is going to give the increase. Right now, that may actually be especially true about evangelism. Recessions are hard times, it's true, but they are also times when God hands out a lot of object lessons. When people go through struggles, they start realizing that no, they don't have all the answers right now. They start realizing that they don't have it in them to direct their own steps. They start getting humbled a little bit, and that makes them more receptive to appeals from the One who does have the power and wisdom to direct their steps for them. In the months to come, friends, let's be on the lookout for people like that. Let's see if we can bring them to the Lord.
- I. Finally, though, we need to depend on God to **BRING US TO HEAVEN**. This is certainly something that's beyond our own powers. We can't see heaven, we can't locate it on a map, and it's impossible for us to earn our way there. However, friends, nothing is impossible with God. Consider Paul's thoughts on the matter in 2 Timothy 4:18. This is not just idle banter from Paul, friends. Paul knows that he's about to die; in fact, he knows that he's about to be martyred. Nonetheless, his words here make clear his confidence in God. God isn't going to rescue his body this time, but God can certainly rescue his soul and deliver him safely to heaven.
- J. Sooner or later, folks, this is something that we're all going to have to depend on God to do. Sooner or later, our lives are going to come to an end too, and we're going to need to rely on God to do something that we couldn't even dream of doing. When that time comes, that's when we are in the greatest need of faith and trust. Let's have confidence in the promise of God that we will share in eternal life with Him.

Conclusion. If you're not a faithful Christian now, you can become one and claim that promise for yourself too.