

How would You Grade Your Christian Life?  
Hebrews 13: 8 – 16  
March 14, 2010

I want you to join me in an intriguing exercise today: How would you grade your Christian life?. The grading scale for this exercise is a simple formula: I will share four questions based on our Scripture for today; I want you to take one letter grade off for each question for which you missed the mark. If you miss none of the four, you get an A; one missed earns a B, and so forth. So, let's look at our Scripture and figure out our grade.

**1. If you are always looking for new and novel things to make your Christian life more exciting, take one letter away from your grade (Hebrews 13: 8 – 9a).**

A. There is a troubling prophecy recorded in 1 Timothy 4: 1, "*but the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrine of demons...*"

B. I think we are here – in those later times. Christianity at large is busily diluting its core message of the Gospel.

1. Go into many churches today, and you will likely hear a passage of Scripture followed by a preacher giving his opinion about it, never referencing back the Scripture he read from, all the while dishing out encouragement intending to help you feel good about yourself.

2. People are looking for a new way to "do church" that will dove tail with the ever-changing culture. They are looking for a new way to relate to Christ, a new way to feel good about being a Christian without causing undue angst over their out of style religious choices.

C. The Bible tells us in the last days God has chosen to speak though His Son. His Word is His final word; there are no new revelations.

1. Therefore, you and I ought to want to know what God thinks.

And even a cursory examination tells us we have a long way to go to become the persons God intends us to be.

D. I need to know what the Bible is saying; yes, it is not always going to tell me I am doing well, but it is always going to tell me the truth.

1. I need to listen to the Holy Spirit living within me; I don't care to hear what I have to say, because I can – and do – deceive myself often.

E. Take a letter grade off your report if you are always searching for new revelations, new ways to make your Christian life more exciting.

**2. If you focus on and give power to rituals over relationship with Jesus, take one letter away from your grade (vs. 9b – 12).**

A. We focus on rituals because we can see them, and they symbolize a truth associated with our faith. But here is the problem: as we focus on the ritual, and the memory of the truth behind it, eventually we will assign the ritual with some sort of special power.

1. That is wrong, because all power comes through Christ Jesus.

B. Eventually I will believe the ritual is the thing that does me good.

1. Here, the people thought the eating of ceremonial food possessed some special power.

2. The writer of Hebrews said eating the food accomplished nothing of spiritual significance.

C. The church has **three common rituals today:**

1. **Baby dedications:** we are acknowledging that God has that baby in its state of innocence now, and the parents – and the church in support – accept the challenge to raise the child to know of God’s love, grace and forgiveness until he/she comes to the age of accountability; there is nothing supernatural about baby dedications, only in the power of God to extend grace to that child as it is innocent before Him.

2. **Baptism:** this is an outward symbol of something that happens to a person internally, as they receive by faith Jesus Christ as Savior; the power is the internal change created by Jesus Christ; baptism does not have the power to change a person’s heart.

3. **The Lord’s Supper:** we partake in the Lord’s Supper because Jesus asked us to do it in remembrance of His sacrificial death on the cross as atonement for our sins; there is no magical or sacred power in taking communion

D. Many churches have over time segued from the use of the rituals – especially the three of which I speak – as tools to teach the great truths of our faith relationship with God through Jesus Christ, to over time focusing upon the rituals as vessels of sacramental grace.

1. If there is some ritual you might be doing, and in your mind it has assumed some power to impart some spiritual benefit, subtract a letter grade from your grade.

**3. If you are trying to “fit in” no matter the cost, take one letter away from your grade (vs. 13 – 14).**

A. Paul relates in **Galatians 2: 11 – 12** how he had to confront Peter when they were together at Antioch. Keep in mind Peter outranked Paul in seniority in the early church; he had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry, while Paul certainly had not. So the breach in protocol is striking.

1. What’s the problem? Peter just wanted to fit in with the two camps in the early church – Christians who were non Jewish citizens of Antioch, and Jewish Christians who came in a visiting delegation. And to do that at any cost, Peter compromised his doctrinal beliefs.

B. Like Peter, many of us will succumb to the universal desire to be liked and accepted; so it is highly probable at some point in time we will be tempted to compromise our spiritual convictions and doctrines in order to fit in.

1. Ironically, the act of compromise is usually not lost on the folks you are trying to impress, and the mark of being wishy washy leaves you stained in the eyes of the very people you hoped to influence!

C. If you have tried to “fit in” and had to compromise some of your principles to do so, take off one letter from your grade.

**4. If you avoid the hard spiritual work you are called to do, take one letter away from your grade (vs. 15 – 16).**

A. Invariably, Christians are called to acts of obedience that are difficult on any number of levels.

1. Serving God in one’s life in this world is by definition a journey of

decisions made and followed, of weighing choices between two diametrically opposed masters. Remember Jesus' statement of Matthew 6: 24, "*No one can serve two masters...*" He doesn't apologize for that reality; He only points out the necessity of choosing between the gods of the world and the God of the universe.

B. Notice the **Specific hard work the Scripture calls us to do in Hebrews 13: 15 – 16):**

1. **Speak out in praise – anywhere anytime (v. 15).** It is not so much what you do and say at the church house, but what you do and say when you are out in the world every day.

2. **Step up when someone is in need (v. 16).** Simple, quiet acts of ministry, such as sharing from the abundance God pours into our lives with those who are in need. I am convinced prayer is cheap – and largely empty – *if* it is produced as an end in itself; prayer should always be toward an answer – and we should always be open to the possibility we just might the answer God has to that prayer and that need.

C. If you are not doing these two things routinely in your life, take one letter from your grade.

As I reflect upon the four questions in this spiritual examination, have a feeling our Heavenly Father is not satisfied with a middling effort from His children. This is not a pass/fail exam; it is a progress report on how we are living out our commitment of faith day-by-day.

I challenge you to examine where you may be coming up short in your Christian life; are you seeking new and novel spiritual thrills instead of working at developing a deeper relationship with God; have you settled for the comfortable familiarity of rituals rather than the challenging, rewarding relationship God desires; is compromise of your beliefs your first option; and do you tend to avoid the hard spiritual work – to speak out and step up – the Holy Spirit calls us to?

If so, the call now is to make adjustments and corrections necessary to improve our grade.

Let's pray!