

How to Improve Your Spiritual Grade
Hebrews 13: 8 – 16
March 21, 2010

Last Sunday I asked you to engage in an exercise; grade your spiritual life by answering four questions. It can be a difficult thing to honestly grade yourself in any area of life. It can be an important step in personal and spiritual growth. But I don't want to leave you with a possibly hurtful self-evaluation, without giving a follow up sermon: you can improve your spiritual grade! That in fact is always God's intention all along; He doesn't have a fantasy-based idea that any of us has a perfect score on our "spiritual IQ." He desires to help us grow to maturity – the proper model of perfection is Jesus Christ.

So, I propose to give you the check list on how to improve on the little exam we took last Sunday. Let's remind ourselves what the Scripture is in Hebrews 13: 8 – 16 (read).

Some of us are always looking for new and novel things to make our Christian life more exciting, so...

1. In order to combat the new and novel, master Scriptural truths and store them in your heart (Hebrews 13: 9a).

A. If there were a Bill of Rights for Christians, the First Amendment would might be found in Ephesians Chapter four, Verses Eleven through Verse Fourteen (read).

B. Christians who have not mastered Scriptural truths in their lives are subject to becoming victims of every new and novel idea, philosophy, or doctrine that comes along.

C. "Okay, Pastor, how do I master the truths of the Scripture?"

1. 2 Timothy 2: 15 – *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."*

D. Too many Christians treat their spiritual life as if it were a casual, optional affair.

2. The challenge is to see every experience as an opportunity to develop my heart, my mind, my soul, in concert with the Holy Spirit's leading.

Second, some of us give too much power to religious rituals rather than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, so...

2. In order to avoid giving power to rituals, always engage your mind in your Christian life (v. 9b).

A. The second amendment to the Christian's Bill of Rights would likely be **Hebrews 12: 1 – 2**; let's read Verse Two: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."*

1. What is the pattern of the world? Well, it largely is, "If it feels good (especially at the moment), then do it." It is all about disengaging your brain and focusing on your emotions (feelings).

B. Allow me to use a common example: For many Christians, prayer is a ritual engaged in at certain times or in certain situations; that type of prayer is like

disengaging your brain and mouthing a rote, serialized script. Such prayer has no power, and certainly does not match the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon Him.

1. God is not interested in the form of our prayer but the heart which is engaged in prayer.

C. For the Christian, it is all about engaging the brain and not focusing on my emotions.

Some of us struggle with "fitting in" no matter the cost, so...

3. In order to combat "fitting in" at any cost, focus on the fact that God will vindicate you when your faithfulness causes you to be different (v. 12 – 13).

A. The example of Jesus is powerful for us. He saw no problem in standing in a different place from the centers of power and popularity in order to remain obedient to His Father, even to the extent of suffering and dying on a cross at a place of ultimate suffering – Calvary.

1. He did so, trusting His Father would one day vindicate Him. And of course the Father did just that!

B. Do you believe that one day God the Father will make right every wrong you have suffered?

1. So if you don't "fit" in now, is it a big deal? No!

Finally, some of us avoid the hard spiritual work of speaking up for Jesus or stepping up to do good, so...

4. In order to avoid not speaking out about Jesus or not stepping up to do good when you have the power to do so, just start doing it (vs. 15 – 16).

A. I am reminded of the classic marketing slogan by Nike: "Just do it."

1. Sometimes the most daunting dilemmas can be solved by just taking a deep breath, straightening one's shoulders, and... just doing the right thing.

2. So often, the problem isn't in not knowing what is the right thing to do, but in possessing the strength of will to follow through to do the right thing.

B. I remind you of the argument James makes for the spiritual implications of doing good when the opportunity presents itself: "*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead (James 2: 26).*"

1. In essence, the end result of knowing the right thing to do – and failing to do it – is to commit spiritual murder of our faith; we effectively choke off the small voice of our conscience telling us the right things.

2. That is why, if we persist in habitually disobeying God's voice, we can become hardened to His voice.

C. When we persistently do what we know to be God's will in our life, the likelihood we will speak out publicly in praise for our Lord, or that we will step up to do the right thing, will become more likely day by day.

The question is always there: Will you make the commitment to bring up your spiritual report?

Let's pray!