



## Is It Slipping Away From Us?

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We may possibly respond that we would never let a diminishing of our faith happen, but could we actually be unconcerned and spiritually blind to the fact that it is definitely happening to us, or the possibility that it may have already happened? It is certainly an extremely serious matter, and the sobering fact remains that we had better "WAKE UP" and give a great deal of thought and evaluation to our true spiritual condition and to the spiritual condition of brethren around us! Please soberly consider the inspired words of Hebrews 2:1-3, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them* (let them slip - KJV). *For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard;*". If indeed you and I are simply "whistling past the graveyard", simply "playing church", or if we are trying so very hard to ignore the fact that we are unwilling to honestly evaluate our own spirituality, then "slipping away" can and will definitely take place! And, possibly, it may have already happened and we simply don't have the spiritual knowledge or basic spirituality to recognize it!

Is it possible that we sometimes give such feeble excuses for missing a Bible Study or a Worship Assembly, when we are really aware and absolutely know that what we are saying may not really be a totally “honest” or straightforward reason? Would we ever say that “we just had things to do which were more important to us?” Could we really be using this “excuse” to either “deceive others” or to soothe our own conscience so that we won’t feel any guilt? And the more that we don’t feel any guilt, then the more we may continue to be dishonest with our own selves! And the more we continue to do this, then the more able we are to avoid feeling any guilt at all. It simply becomes so very easy to justify ourselves! Does it concern us at all when we absolutely know that the Lord is well aware of what we are doing? That is what “whistling past the graveyard” really describes! When we know that we had rather sleep, play, or a vast variety of other selfish activities, rather than being with the Lord’s people and serving the Lord - shouldn’t it be obvious to us that our spiritual desires are slipping away? Now, remember, was it really you and I who said that “it would never happen.” When you or I almost never pick up our Bible to read or study, or when we talk and visit with others and the conversation is almost never about spiritual things, is it possible that our love and concern about spiritual matters is definitely “slipping away?” When we sit through almost all of the sermons and Bible classes while playing or texting with our cell phone or electronic pad, or having conversation with those around us, or letting our minds simply wander away from the lesson, are we ever concerned about just how much of what is being taught that we are actually retaining? If we were asked if we could even tell what the lesson was about, what kind of answer could we give? We “go to church” but how much spirituality have we demonstrated or absorbed while we are there? Are we ever spending time on the computer researching and developing lessons which we can use to teach others? Are we knowledgeable enough to teach a Bible class, either privately or publicly? How able are we to give answers to others about their denominational error? Do we rarely have any Bible discussions with others or ask them to

have a Bible study with us? We seem to know the name of every sport team and player, and who wins every hockey or ball game, and what all the television programs and movies are about, and the very latest gossip on Facebook, but we wouldn't have the faintest idea about how to tell anyone about the worship, work, and scriptural nature of the Lord's church, and be able to tell why it is different from various denominations. Maybe we are actually wrong by saying that it is "slipping away", when the truth may be that we "never really had it in the first place!" Is our faith, knowledge, and spiritual usefulness about as deep as the rainwater on a sidewalk? We may not like for others to ask us these questions, and if not, "we had better get busy asking ourselves!" The Lord doesn't need for us to tell Him, He already knows! And if we will be truly honest with our self evaluation, we may also clearly recognize that "slipping away" is a reality!

Brethren, I can assure you that I am genuinely concerned about my own spiritual growth and strength, and, as God knows my heart, I am trying hard to always remember that I need to become stronger and more useful to the Lord every day. And I always need your help and prayers to be able to accomplish that! And I must admit that, in the sunset years of my life, I am genuinely concerned about the spiritual strength of the Lord's church. Do we have parents who are genuinely concerned and demonstrating interest in the spiritual growth of their children? Do we have men who are fully knowledgeable of the Truth so that they can both teach the lost and defend the church against numerous errors which invade it? When we can hardly get any brethren to visit the sick or the shut in, or get brethren to teach a Bible class, or to reach out or teach those who need to be taught the gospel, why wouldn't we be concerned about the future of the church? When we have brethren who can easily miss services for totally selfish reasons, and not feel any guilt at all, then why wouldn't we have concerns about what the future holds for the church? When we don't have men who can even teach a private or public Bible class, don't you think it is time to be con-

cerned about the future? If the preacher became ill or had some emergency just before he got up to preach, how many of our men could immediately step into the pulpit and preach a sermon? That is rather frightening isn't it? Does it tell us anything about the future for the Lord's church? If it is all "slipping away", are we soberly aware of the consequences? Do I realize that it is possibly happening to me, and maybe I have just been pushing these thoughts from my mind to avoid any feeling of guilt? Without a keen and well developed conscience, every one of us had better realize that we could be in the very deepest of troubles! Self evaluation may not have been nearly as aggressive or objective as it needs to be!

Are we totally honest within ourselves when we say, with the words of Psalms 17:5, "*My steps have held fast to thy paths, My feet have not slipped.*" As the Hebrew writer reminds us, we can drift away from them - we can let them slip! Do we need to be reminded again to "*Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*" (Ephesians 6:10). Brethren we must open our eyes and recognize that Satan is winning far too many battles in our own lives and in the lives of family and brethren whom we love so dearly! We may label ourselves as "strong" or "faithful", but are we deceiving ourselves? What measuring standard are we using? "*For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves: but they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding*" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

There are so many congregations across this great country that were once thriving, working, and so very strong in their stand for the Truth, and now so many of them are small and struggling because so many of our brethren have been slipping away over the years. It can happen so easily in our own lives and in the con-

gregation where we worship. I am persuaded that so many young families are fleeing to the few very large congregations for what I believe may be mostly for “social” and not spiritual reasons. The men in these families are hardly asked to do anything in those large churches, and slipping away is definitely happening! And even when we lament the fact that doors are closing forever in so many of the smaller churches, we are also able see the lack of spiritual growth and spiritual development even in these smaller churches which still exist, and many of us are in these churches. When brethren don’t even make any effort to speak to or follow up with those visiting our services, we don’t have to wonder what the future is going to look like. How are we ever going to convert the lost of the world, when we have to spend so much time converting our own brethren? And, I am persuaded that we are not doing a very good job of accomplishing that! When the service is over and we head directly to talk and “be with” our special friends, family members, or those “who are a special interest to us”, are we aware of just how many folks we have totally ignored - especially visitors? We might need to take a long and concentrated thought about our motives and priorities!

I have often said that the greatest regret that I have, over my more than sixty-five years of endeavoring to preach the gospel, is that most all of my time and effort has involved trying to improve, change, and deal with problems relating to brethren. It is hard to convert the lost of the world when you spend most of your time trying to relate to the needs and problems of brethren. When we have brethren in the local church who “don’t have a clue” as to what has been destroying brethren and churches over the past 60 or 70 years, how can we expect them to see and recognize the dangers of error when it arises today? Each one of us need to realize the great danger we are in when we have to count on the “blind to lead the blind.” And if our own usefulness and faithfulness is becoming more and more distracted and limited, what kind of asset am I going to be when it comes to spiritual matters?

Yes, in far too many lives and in far too many churches, we must be sadly aware that it is slipping away. And how much do we really appear to care? Are there those of us who need to realize that we are indeed part of the problem? What do we think the future holds for each of us individually and for the congregation where we worship and which we profess to be "sound?" What am I personally doing to insure the faithfulness of my own family and of the congregation where I regularly worship? Am I honestly "involved" or am I a part of what is obviously SLIPPING AWAY! The Lord knows the true answer, but the question remains, am I recognizing what is happening, and do I consider what I am willing to do so that it can be changed for the better? It is my sincere hope and prayer that good will come from these few words of encouragement for each one of us! I am not "angry", I am just truly hurting in my heart with a great fear for what I see to be happening. And I am having personal sadness and great concern, brethren, when I see my beloved brethren who don't hesitate to miss many of the services, who don't appear interested at all in the class lesson or the sermon, who don't even pick up a bulletin, or who leave it on the pew or on the floor of the building. I have therefore come to realize that many members won't even take a few moments to read this article! Is there any doubt left in our minds that there is great danger in our future because of what we are able to observe that is "slipping away?" Where am I in this picture? God knows, but do we honestly know?



