

REMOVE, RETURN AND REST

“So Samuel said to all the Israelites, ‘If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only...” —1 SAMUEL 7:3

After two successive losses against the Philistines, the response of the Israelites can be summed up in three words: remove, return and rest. Firstly, they ‘removed’ all the foreign gods that had been imported into Israel. Secondly, they ‘returned’ with all their hearts to the Lord, and thirdly, they began to ‘rest’ in God’s strength and sufficiency.

C.K. Chesterton famously said, “When people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing, they believe in anything.” I would like to come alongside that and say, “When people stop depending on God, they don’t become independent; they don’t depend on nothing; they depend on something else.” If we are serious about God, we have to rid ourselves of every object of dependence other than God Himself.

We may have dealt with the same sin many times, but like the Baals in Israel, they rear their heads again and again. If our guard is not up, just as the gods from Canaanite pagan religions had repeatedly infiltrated God’s own people, they will creep back into our lives and drive us increasingly further from God. We need to confess them, and bring them in humble repentance to God. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” This is not passive, but active. We are not simply confessing our sin, but are returning to God to serve Him only.

One of the biggest needs in our Christian lives is not actually to go on, but to go back. Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4). Growth in the Christian life is not a growth from one point to another, but a growth in our relationship with Christ; in our knowledge of Him, dependence on Him and experience of Him. We do not grow out of anything as we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, but we can slide away, and Christ says we need to return and remember the love we first had for Him.

Having removed the barriers, and with all our hearts returned to God, we are to rest in His sufficiency. Resting in God is living every day dependent on Him, not only for material needs, but in every circumstance we face. Victory in the Christian life is never won, but received, yet many are still living in a frantic self effort to accomplish what only God can accomplish. Returning to God with all our hearts is what allows us to rest in His total sufficiency.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, I ask for your help to remove any form of dependency there is in my life other than on You. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Do I feel a need to return to God with all my heart?