



Now we have received, not
the spirit of the world, but the
Spirit who is from God, so that
we may know the things freely
given to us by God.

1 Corinthians 2:12

AS I GAZE OUT THE LIBRARY WINDOW, over the back slope that leads down to the frozen pond, I look out over ground that, just a few days ago, was made higher by several inches of snow and accumulated ice. Everything was a soft, pillowy white, broken only by the dried leftovers of last year’s weeds.

The sight was not only pleasing to the eye, but one that augured well for the filling of the pond for spring. Now, though the ground remains frozen, recent warm temperatures have melted away most of the snow covering, exposing the faded and brittle blades of last year’s grass. Much of that melting snow and ice behind the house flowed down the hill to the pond—a pond that has steadily diminished in depth over the long winter.

For, you see, our pond has a slow leak. Its level—even when locked up as ice, as it is now—continues to drop. The more snow we receive over the winter months, the more snow there will be to eventually melt away, and subsequently run off to fill the pond come spring.

But, as Linda’s Grandma Beurer once pithily reminded us, it takes a lot of snow to make a bucket of water. In point of fact, it takes approximately ten times as much; 25-30 cm (10-12 in) of snow melts to 2.5 cm (1 in) of water. And when your bucket has a hole in the bottom, it takes even more.

A LOT OF GOD

I often wonder why it takes so much effort to be a Christian today. I am not referring to what it takes to *become* a Christian, nor am I referring to what it takes to *remain* a Christian—if some still hold to that errant theology. But I refer to what it takes today to live a righteous life, to walk in a Christ-like manner—what the apostle Paul referred to as “work[ing] out your salvation.”

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

During the seasons of our life we require a lot of God in our lives—God in the form of His word, His Spirit, His counsel. We faithfully attend “church” and Sunday School. We may even attend a small-group Bible study. We frequent our favorite Christian book store, and very often leave with a fresh purchase under our arm. We listen to radio messages from well-known preachers, and download their resources from their web sites.

We pray daily, not just itemizing our woes, but earnestly listening for His voice. We pore over His word—if not daily, at least regularly—searching out God’s written wisdom. We study the gospels, and try to apply the life of Christ to our own.

All of this piles up around us, over us, beneath us, and we think that we’ve laid in an abundant, even sufficient supply.

But then we turn around and wonder what good it has done us. We still behave stupidly. We still disobey the Lord. We still, on occasion, give into our “bent toward sinning.”

ATTRITION

Snow is only about ten percent water, and that seems to be about how much of God most of us retain these days. We sit in our pews listening to the preacher, leaning over our Bible to absorb the words, but by the benediction the wisdom has vaporized into the ether. We talk the words of God, then forget what we’ve said. We pray to Him, but do more talking than listening. Through all of our various connections to Him, the glory and wisdom God has to offer still gets watered down to about ten percent of the original.

As if that were not bad enough, our “bucket” has a hole in the bottom. As the world’s ways do battle with God’s ways, much of what He has placed into our lives seeps away through attrition. The society in which we live constantly tries to suck away everything good—everything of God—that we’ve placed into our lives, until very little remains.

WORKING IT OUT

Is there a solution? Is there a one-time fix that will halt the incessant drainage of God from our lives?

Not really. There is no miracle cure for our inconvenient humanity. Until the day of our transition from flesh to resurrected form, we remain flesh. The apostle Paul did not tell us to “discover the secret to living a pure and unsullied life.” No, he told us to “work [it] out...with fear and trembling.”

Our daily sanctification will pass both through times of labor, and times of ease. But more often than not it will be a hard slog. Count on it. The good news, however, is that we have not been left to do it on our own.

Will You not Yourself revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?
Show us Your lovingkindness, O Lord,
And grant us Your salvation.
I will hear what God the Lord will say;
For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones;
But let them not turn back to folly.
Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.

Psalms 85:6-9

Work, as well as believe,
and in the daily practice of
faithful obedience, in the
daily subjugation of your own
spirits to His divine power, in
the daily crucifixion of your
flesh with its affections and
lusts, in the daily straining
after loftier heights of godli-
ness and purer atmospheres
of devotion and love—make
more thoroughly your own
that which you possess. Work
into the substance of your
souls that which you *have*.
Apprehend that for which you
are apprehended of Christ.

Alexander Maclaren