

James T. Jeremiah  
The Importance of Balance in the Christian Life  
October 29, 1969

Transcript

James T. Jeremiah:

Thank you ladies for that message in song. Shall we have prayer together? Our Father, we thank you this morning for this opportunity to meet around the word of God. We pray that thou will bless us as we read the scriptures, as we think about our responsibilities and our privileges as Christians. We pray to bless each student, each faculty member, and every member on our staff today, as they labor for thee, and as they serve thee in this college. We pray that our lives may count for Christ that men and women may know that we've been redeemed, because Christ lives in us, and not only that, he lives through us. We thank thee for thy presence. We depend upon thee to speak to our hearts, in Jesus name, amen.

James T. Jeremiah:

This morning, I would like to talk to you a little bit about the importance of balance in the Christian life. I don't know how original this may be, it'll be scripture. I heard about a student in a homiletics class one time... And for you non-Bible majors, homiletics is the science of the preparation of the sermons, and most of my sermons need a little science. But anyhow, this science teacher said that he wanted the class to prepare some outlines. And one student in the class worked diligently and prepared a good outline, and turned it in to the professor.

James T. Jeremiah:

And when the paper was turned back, he had an F on it. And the student was indignant that he got an F on that outline, and he went to the professor and he said, "I do not understand how you could give me an F on that outline. I got that outline from God." Well, the professor said, "That's easy. I wanted something original." Now, one thing about it, when you use the word of God, it is original whether there's an outline about it or not. I believe that there is such a thing as being out of balance in our Christian living, but the word of God does not give us any basis for this.

James T. Jeremiah:

And there are many scriptures that indicate truths that need to be emphasized together. Sometimes, I think we're like the poor inebriated fellow who was walking down the boardwalk, he had a pegleg and he got the leg caught in a knothole in the boardwalk. And he kept on walking, just going around in circles, and he met a policeman, and every time he'd go round, he'd meet a policeman. Go around again, he'd meet the policeman, the same one of course. And he finally got frightened because he thought the whole force was after him.

James T. Jeremiah:

Well, there are a lot of folks in the Christian life like that, they have their spiritual leg caught in a boardwalk, and all they ever do is go around in circles, and they really never go very far, they just circle. They are where they are today, because they haven't made any progress, and there'll be the same place tomorrow and the next day and the next week and the next year, because they haven't realized that there's more to the Christian life than getting saved.

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Now, there is no Christian life without becoming a Christian, but there is more to the Christian life, when once you have become a Christian. Someone told me about a VW... Any of you have VWs in this place? Well, I have one in partnership with another fellow in the school. And I heard about one of these VWs, that a fellow was driving it down the road at 120 miles an hour, not my partner. And when the fellow finally stopped he said, "How in the world could you ever drive that thing 120 miles an hour?" Well, he says, "It's the tires on the car that makes it go like that." Well he said, "What do you mean the tires? What do the tires have to do with it?"

James T. Jeremiah:

Well, he said, "It's very simple." He said, "I have front tires that were made by the Arabs in Jordan, and I have back tires made by the Israelis in Jerusalem." Now, that was an unbalanced VW. I suppose there are a lot of folks that live the Christian life like that. They just keep on running, and great speed, and great activity, but well, they're going to find themselves in some difficulties sometime. We need to read the word of God and see what it says all the way, not just part of the way. Because you can get yourself in trouble like the English people did when they sent the message back from Waterloo, and they semaphored the message back, Wellington defeated, and everybody in England was defeated too, because they felt that the cause was lost.

James T. Jeremiah:

But when the fog had cleared, the London fog had raised, and the semaphore could get through, it says, "Wellington defeated the enemy." And that's another story. When it comes to the word of God, if we do not read all what God says on the subject, we can find ourselves unbalanced. Now that I've told my stories, I want to talk to you about the texts. One of the great texts of the Bible that we Baptist and Christian people of all denominations who believe the gospel of grace talk about a great deal is Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

James T. Jeremiah:

And no one ought ever to come any place in his life, for he does not emphasize this. But I have met people and so have you, who will take this verse in the scripture and say, "Yes I'm living under grace and that gives me the liberty to do about as I please because, I am saved by grace, I live by grace and therefore I have no further responsibility, God has saved me, I'm going to heaven. I don't have to work to get there. Hallelujah." Well, the only thing wrong with that is that the Bible also says in the same context, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works which God has ordained that we should walk in them."

James T. Jeremiah:

Now my friend if you are a Christian saved by grace and that's the only way you'll ever become one, and you think that because you're saved by grace this is all there is to the Christian life, you have not heard all the story. This is the reason why James was disturbed in his book when he wrote that faith without works is dead. Make it clear, no one gets saved because they deserve to be, nor work to be, nor try to be, but when one is saved by the grace of God, he will because of this grace in his life go to work for the God who saved him. It is as much a reality in our experience as anything can be.

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I think we ought to think a little bit about this battle[?] prayer imbalance. I have met students over the years who have the idea that what God wants them to do is come to school, he asked them to pray, and you're going to pray that he'll meet every need. And so they say, "Lord supply my needs." And this is wonderful, in fact, it's essential. If God doesn't meet your need, there's nobody that can. I remember one young fellow one time came to the end of the school year... You wouldn't know him because he was here a long time ago. This is nice about having some illustrations you can use that don't have any meaning to anybody around today.

James T. Jeremiah:

He came to the end of his semester and he couldn't pay his bill, and he came to see me. I was then trying to be the business manager too and then the school was in a terrible condition. And he came to see me and he said, "I haven't any money to pay my bill." I said, "What have you been doing about it?" He said, "I've been praying about it." I said, "That's great." I said, "You don't have any money. Do you have a job?" He said, "No, I don't have a job." I said, "Have you looked for one? And he said, "No, I haven't looked for one." I said, "That's one good reason why you don't have one. Probably if you didn't look for one, you've been praying."

James T. Jeremiah:

Now, this is not to deny the power of prayer, we ought to pray, but God never expects us just to pray and then sit by idly and not do what he commands us to do with regard to responsibility. I think it's important that we wait upon God, we cannot receive what we ought to receive unless God sends it. But by the same token, God teaches us in his word that we ought to be doing something for him, over here in the 12th chapter of the book of Romans verses 11 and 12. Paul said, "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer."

James T. Jeremiah:

Now there is prayer, but there is also a requirement that we should be earnest in our business, we should be boiling hot in our spirit, doing God service with a joy and with a fervency. We ought to be serving the Lord and we ought to be rejoicing in hope while we're praying. Now, young people if you just pray for God to answer your prayers, and then, he leads you to do something to put some feet to them, and you just sit by idly with your hands wide open, waiting for pennies to come from heaven and hoping they will multiply into dollars, you may be terribly frustrated and join the ranks of the poverty stricken.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now don't misunderstand me, I don't want you to go out of here without saying God doesn't answer prayer, and he may not have an envelope over there with some money in it for you to meet your need, that he will do in his way. But when he puts responsibility in our lives as well as expectancy in prayer, he expects us to carry out the responsibility, he expects that of all of us. I want to talk about another word that's a very unhappy word in a college, I want to talk about discipline.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now, I'm not talking about discipline as you think of it. I'm sure that to some people that's a bad word. But discipline is a part of life, and you cannot say the word disciplined without saying discipline. If you're a disciple of Christ, there must be discipline. And one of the problems today is that in our generation... your generation and mine, because I'm part of your generation, whether you think there's a gap or not.

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In our generation, there are a lot of people that want to live without it, and they think that they can go through life without having any discipline in their lives, and they're a mess to put it mildly, they are that.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now, the word of God has a balance in this. For example, Paul said to the Galatians, as he gave his own testimony, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." And so we as Christians say, great, isn't that wonderful? I am crucified with Christ, I have been identified with the lord. I have met a lot of tobacco chewing crucified people. I met a lot of theater going, dancing, card playing crucified people, who seem to think that the only thing in the Christian life is to be identified by trusting Christ in a open profession. But there is more to that Christian life than that.

James T. Jeremiah:

For this same Paul who wrote that we are crucified, and that's a blessed reality. This is an experience for the believer in a wonderful long to recognize this, also said in Romans 8:13, "For, if you live after the flesh, you shall die." This is not written to the sinners, but to the saints. "If you through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. It's not only true that we have been crucified, but there is an expectation that by the power of the spirit, we mortify the deeds of the body."

James T. Jeremiah:

And what's that mean? Well, you know what the word mortuary means. Mortuary and mortify, some sound somewhat alike and they speak of death. Now, death is defined as the separation of the soul from the body. The eternal death is separation of the soul from God forever. Spiritual death is separation from God. Now, God says that as believers who are crucified with Christ, we are then to mortify or separate ourselves from the deeds of the flesh.

James T. Jeremiah:

This is not something that comes simply because I am identified with Christ, without responsibility to see where I'm going in obedience to him. This is not something that comes automatically, it is a responsibility to do this, through the spirit. Not by the flesh, not by your determination and you're hanging on, and you're cutting off and all of this, but it is nonetheless a responsibility. Now, Paul gets a little more pointed on this back in the book of Colossians, if we want to look at it for a minute, where he uses the same term in the book of Colossians in chapter three, and he uses the word mortify once more, verse five, let's see this, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth."

James T. Jeremiah:

Now, the next things that he deals with have do with sensual things, with sex, perversions, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, which is idolatry. Now, you wouldn't think it'd be possible for people who don't have idols to be idolaters, but it's true because he says a covetousness is idolatry. Now, he tells us in verse eight, "Put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another." It'd be great if people just stop lying. I have a friend who says that he wished that some people would stop their lying and take up the chewing of tobacco. Well, I don't advocate either one, and neither one of them is very nice.

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Lying, this is wrong. And you see God says, "Those who have been crucified with Christ, are responsible to mortify these things that are part of the flesh." Now, I don't know how you feel about that young people, but somehow or other it seems to me that's a lifetime proposition. It isn't going to be done in five minutes, but it's a responsibility in balance with a crucified life. The Lord Jesus said, "Take my cross upon you." "Die daily," we're told. These are expectations. And all I think about us sometimes in our Bible believing churches, we are so well indoctrinated, that we know all the answers of the doctrine, but we need the help of God to put into practice what these doctrines produce.

James T. Jeremiah:

I go into churches every Sunday, pastors tell me their heartaches. In Bible believing churches without number, there are former deacons, and former Sunday school teachers and former leaders breaking up their home, turning their backs upon God, wallowing in the depths of sin, and that which happened to them, can happen to me, it can happen to you. Therefore God says, "It's not only true that we ought to recognize our identification, we ought to practice it." There is a need for balance in this, you see.

James T. Jeremiah:

Let's talk a little bit about prophecy. In Luke 19:13, Jesus said, "Occupy till I come." You have both things here, occupy till I come. In the Thessalonian epistle, Paul wrote to these believers, they turned to God from idols to serve the true and the living God and to wait for his son from heaven. My father was born in a town in New Jersey, in Dover, New Jersey. He came as a young man into town in New York State to Corning, New York. Never had very much opportunity so far as I could ever know of a very strong church background, but he'd had some experiences with people in his days as a young man, that sort of turned him off when it came to the things of prophetic future.

James T. Jeremiah:

I remember him telling me one time that there were a group of people in the town, who had the idea Jesus was coming. And so they went through a ceremony, they got rid of some of their possessions, and they donned the white robes and they sat waiting for Christ to come. I don't know where they got the idea, but they didn't get that out of the Bible. I'm sure there are going to be some people who say, "Why in the world do you pre-millennial baptists try to raise \$800,000 to build a science building because you believe Jesus is coming?"

James T. Jeremiah:

I believe he's coming, he may come before we have very much of the money. I hope he does. I'd rather see the Lord come than the science building any day. But he may not come until that's built and used. There're be a lot of you young people who are going to need what that building will provide, if he doesn't come. Don't you sit around as a Christian believing in the coming of the Lord with the idea in mind that now that you're saved and you're going to heaven and Christ will come any time. Well, let's just not get excited.

James T. Jeremiah:

Brother that's something that ought to make us excited, people going out into eternity every day. And if we don't reach them with the gospel, they're going to hell. And then in the context of that verse where Jesus says, "Occupy until I come." He also says, "For the son of man has come to seek and to save, that which was lost." And the word occupy means do business, what business? Seeking and saving, that is

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seeking those who he saved. You see there's a balance in this and the Bible, far as I'm concerned, if we work everything, and we have all of this done, and it's all finished, when the Lord comes and he comes before, and we have too long, anybody who's left here can have it.

James T. Jeremiah:

I won't need it, you won't need if you're saved. And I don't think they're going to get much out of it either, but they can take over the debt. Let's have a balance in our thinking about the coming of the Lord. Let's talk about one more thing this morning, and that has to do with temptation. You know, whenever you think if you ever do, that you've lived so close to God, and you've walked so long with him, that you're never tested or tempted, that's when you are. I have met a few people who, well, they were just a real honor to the Lord, they'd tell you so. And they arrived, they really made it. I remember one time a man used to tell me every time I'd meet him, he prayed an hour a day. And I don't know if Shakespeare said this, but me thinks he protested too loudly.

James T. Jeremiah:

Temptation is a part of life and we're going to face it. Both from the standpoint of trial, and from the standpoint of enticement. The word of God says in the 10th chapter of First Corinthians, "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, he will not suffer you to be tempted above that you're able. But will with the temptation, make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it.

James T. Jeremiah:

And somebody said, "That's fine. Wonderful." I'm going through temptation. Now I can just sit down beside it. I can just sit there and let the devil tempt me, and all the things come against me, the Lord is faithful. Mm-hmm (affirmative), the Lord is faithful, I'll just sit there." But the very next verse in the scripture has something to say that's very interesting. The 14th verse of the chapter says, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." Paul wrote to young Timothy and he said, "Flee, youthful lust." It's not cowardly to run from somethings, it's conceited, it's conceit not to.

James T. Jeremiah:

And if you think that, because God has saved you and given you the Holy Spirit to dwell in your body and the promises of scripture, that God is faithful, you can just put yourself in the environment of temptation and not succumb, you're wrong, there are some things we ought to run from. In the new Testament in the book of Acts, when these people were saved, those who practiced curious arts, they brought their books and they burned them. Some people ought to do some burning of some books.

James T. Jeremiah:

I recognize in obtaining a liberal arts education, there are a lot of books you have to read to get through it. There's some of them you ought to read and get rid of them after you have to read them. And there are some of them that you read that you don't need to read, you ought not to read in the first place. Don't expect that you can use your eyes and your mind in the participation of some of the slop of this world without succumbing to some of the things that the slop offers.

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Don't think you can fool around in the matter of sex, even though you're a Christian, and not pay the same price that a non-Christian pays, who fools around with it when it's wrongly used. Flee idolatry, flee youthful lust, but when you do, recognize that God is faithful. He'll take care of you when you take your stand for him, and do the thing he commands. Listen young people, the word of God is a balanced book, and it presents balanced truth. That it might in turn produce a balanced life in every one of us. God is able and we are responsible. How we need it in these days, we have no business presuming upon the grace of God, when we have responsibilities toward the God who saved us by his grace.

James T. Jeremiah:

Bless thy word to our hearts today our God. Help us in our Christian service, in our Christian living, that we might endeavor in every way possible to have a balanced life to the glory of Christ in whose name we pray, amen.