

See That You Do Not Fall Out Along The Way.

Text: Gen 45:24

1) How this may be avoided

Suggested Hymns:

2) Why it should be avoided

452, 369, 170, 544, 538

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Genesis 45:24, ²⁴ *So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, "See that you do not fall out along the way."*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The words just read were the words of Joseph. He had just made himself known to his brothers and was sending them back home to tell to his aged father the wonderful news that he was still alive and was Governor over the land of Egypt.

In dismissing them with every proof of his affection, he addressed them before starting out with a few last words of caution. "*See,*" he said, "*that you do not fall out along the way,*" a most pertinent advice under the circumstances.

A quarter of a century before, in the miserable transaction that had sold him to the Ishmaelites and into slavery, some of his brothers had been more to blame than others. Reuben and Benjamin had had no hand in it at all. So there was great danger that on their homeward journey they might take to squabbling and disputing, each endeavouring to excuse himself and lay the blame on the other.

Now, Joseph who had been the victim of that infamous deal, told them that there should be no unkind remarks, no upbraidings, and no reflections among you. You are reconciled and at peace with me, therefore be also at peace among yourselves.

This caution of Joseph, uttered to his brothers Thirty-seven hundred years ago, certainly needs to be applied in our day, amid our circumstances, in our homes, and in our churches.

Like those brothers we, too, spiritually speaking, are travellers. We have set out for the journey to the heavenly Canaan. Is there no danger of wrangling and disputing among ourselves?

No lovelier sight is there on earth than that of a family, a household, in which the members dwell together in harmony and love. It is a blessing and edifying to see Christian brothers and sisters taking counsel together in a congregation, promoting unity and good will.

Even so there is no more dismal, heart-sickening scene than of members of the same household and members of the same Church holding one another at arm's length, imputing sinister motives, casting reflections, magnifying faults, breeding discord, causing confusion, and instigating every evil work.

Let us then consider the admonition suggested by the instructive piece of Bible history spoken by Joseph, "*See that you do not fall out along the way.*" May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. See That You Do Not Fall Out Along The Way How This May Be Avoided

In the first place, *How may strife be avoided?* One way in which these brothers of Joseph were likely to keep from falling out, was in abstaining from talking about one another's misdeeds. That is still an excellent method.

It is the stinging words that stir up anger and strife, and the way to avoid falling out is to learn, to use the expression of the holy apostle, "*to bridle our tongue,*"¹ which does not mean merely to keep it from speaking evil, but far more than that, namely, to guide it in the right direction.

Certainly, these brothers of Joseph could not have refrained from talking about the goodness and greatness of Joseph, and by doing so, there would be neither time nor room for casting reflections on one another.

So it is with us. One of the most successful ways in which Satan destroys and breaks up harmony among Christians is by leading them into frivolous gossip, foolish jesting, and unsavoury conversation. Then what is frivolous soon becomes uncharitable, and the damage is done.

Scripture says in Colossians 4:6, *⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.* And

when is your speech with grace ? The answer is, When your heart is filled with Christ.

If there is something wrong with our clocks, then we must regulate the mechanism behind the dial, not merely the hands on it. The fault lies beyond the face of it. And so let us regulate our hearts, let our spiritual mechanism be set right, our thoughts be filled with Christ, with His holy instructions and principles, with love of His truth and cause, and there will be no time and no room to give our tongues for frivolous, unsavoury, uncharitable conversation.

Then our souls will be fully engrossed with the greatness and goodness of our heavenly Joseph and not to lend our tongues to profitless strife. Be careful in your homes and in your conversation with your fellow-Christians in the Church as to what you say and how you say it. Indiscretion here, as with Joseph's brothers, may involve you in endless peace-disturbing bickerings and brawlings.

Again, another source of disturbance in the home and in the Church comes from self-esteem and self-assertion. Reuben was the oldest of the twelve sons of Jacob.

Was it not he who had so strongly advised against killing the dreamer, as they deridingly termed him, and had suggested putting him in the pit, with the thought of taking him out and bringing him back to his father?

And although his scheme failed, did he not at least deserve some credit? Then there was Benjamin. Had he not been the centre of Joseph's affection? Ought he not, then, have the pre-eminence? Simeon had been kept behind on the first visit of the brothers and was put in prison until their return. Surely that was to be considered.

And so one after the other might have urged some ground for superiority in that party returning home from Egypt. What would it have led to, but to *"falling out by the way?"*

The Lord Jesus tells us of the Pharisees. They loved the chief seats in the synagogue and the uppermost rooms at feasts, and desired to be saluted by high titles in a public gathering.

The Bible tells us of a certain Diotrephes² in the apostolic church who in his self-conceit went so far as to snub the Apostle John. This greed for distinction,

praises and compliments of men, with the arrogance that it breeds, is one of the most common strife-breeding passions to which people of talent, and those gifted with abilities and eloquence, are especially prone too.

Luther wrote, *“There is no village where there is not some one or other that desires to be counted wiser and be more esteemed than all the rest”*; and *“when this passion creeps into the Church, it cannot be told how hurtful it is; straightway there arises dissension.”*

Who has not heard and seen these things? Let a congregation of any sort be at odds by reason of some conceited self-asserting person or persons, and how the news spreads to the joy of the unchurched and the triumph of Satan!

Let us, then, be on our guard against the root of all this mischief, and that root is pride. There is no sin that is condemned more in the Bible. It is this sin because of which the fallen angels were east out of heaven. It was through pride our first parents forfeited Paradise. They wanted to be as gods, knowing good and evil. Nor let anyone think he or she is exempt. The workings of this sin touch every one of us.

There is not a single person who does not have a rather extravagant estimate of his own excellencies and desires to be praised by others. And who is there, who is not inclined to grow sullen and discontented, if he does not obtain the applause for which he longs? In some people this is stronger than in others, but who can claim exemption? We are just as human as Joseph’s brothers.

Now, the Bible says in Galatians 5:26, ²⁶ *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.* And how can we keep this injunction? The answer is, that we are to possess and cultivate the opposite, that is, humility.

Joseph’s brothers knew that all they had, the possessions they were carrying up to the land of Canaan, including their life, — for that, too, had been in the hands of their mighty brother, — was from him.

And so all that we have, our life and talents and gifts, we owe to our heavenly Joseph and ought to use them in His service and not for our own aggrandisement, the gratification of our personal vanity and self-importance, but to His glory. And where there is such a sense and conviction, it will keep us from lifting up our heads above our fellows in overrated importance of self, so

that we rather give place to one another and in honour giving preference to one another.

Thus we read of Abraham, the elder and the uncle, that, when he heard of the contention between his herdsmen and those of Lot, his nephew, he said, ***“Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.”***³ In the family let the husband and wife and the children, and in the church let the members, the officers, the minister, each keep his and her place, and there will be no ***“falling out along the way.”***

2. See That You Do Not Fall Out Along The Way Why It Should Be Avoided.

If there is to be no ***“falling out along the way,”*** there must be the exercise of a forgiving spirit. We can imagine a conversation’s having taken place on that journey homeward.

“It was your fault, Judah; you made the proposal to lift him out of the pit; and you, Simeon, lifted him out to sell him. And you, Levi, took the twenty pieces of silver.” Thus the one person might have faulted the other. And what would it have led to? As a matter of fact they were all guilty, even Reuben; despite his seeming affection and desire to save Joseph’s life he had acted as the indecisive coward.

And so there was only one thing for them to do, to confess that they had all done wrong and charitably to forgive one another. It is this very thing Joseph had done toward them. It was only proper that they should do likewise among themselves. That is the particular lesson of this Sunday.

The Christian religion maybe stated in two sentences. Sentence one - God freely forgives us our sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ; that forgiveness we are to believe. Sentence two - Because God so graciously forgives us our sins, we should also forgive the sins of other people toward us; and that forgiveness we are to practise.

When the Apostle Peter put a question to our Lord on this subject, Jesus’ reply was most decisive. Peter asked, ***“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”***⁴ He added, by way of declaring, as he thought, his own readiness to go to some length, ***“Until seven times?”*** The Lord turns to

him and replies, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*

This does not mean that we are to forgive our brother just 490 times but to refuse forgiveness the 491st time, rather it means that we are to place no limit at all upon the extent of our forgiveness.

In other words, Jesus wishes forgiveness to be a matter, not of arithmetic, but of the heart and spirit. Where this is in place there is no importance whatever attached to the number of times forgiveness is to be exercised.

But since the apostle had operated with figures, the Lord continues His instruction and sets before him a parable in which He states that a certain king⁵ had cancelled a ten thousand talent debt, which is an enormous sum, to a debtor, who, in turn, clutched his debtor by the throat, who owed him only one hundred denarii, and demanded payment.

The explanation is plain. We are that enormous debtor. If we were to compute our spiritual indebtedness on record in God’s ledger, our offences against His holy Ten Commandments in thoughts and desires, in words and deeds, annually, monthly, daily, hourly committed, our brains would reel at the vast number of them.

But God mercifully forgives them. *“Your sins are forgiven you,”*⁶ God says to the penitent. And forgiven, he is to be forgiving. That is the law of Christian life.

“Pay me what you owe,” you have offended me, wronged me, and I will not and I cannot be satisfied until I have had revenge and redress, that is the way of the world. But it is not the way of a Christian, who acknowledges the authority of Jesus Christ in his life.

For a person to say that he trusts for the forgiveness of his sins to the mercy of a pardoning God and to a gracious Saviour, who atoned for them all upon the cross, and yet for such a one to continue to cherish ill will and even enmity against those who have offended him or her, is this not, to call it by no sterner terms, mockery, pretence, and a sham?

To think that we have received the sacred waters of Baptism for the cleansing of our sins, that we have drawn near to the altar in the highest and most solemn

rite of the Church, partaken of the holy elements and come regularly to the Worship Services which open with a confession of our sins and the declaration of God's forgiveness; to devoutly pray: *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,"* and then to harbour unkindly feelings, a grudge, unforgiving thoughts in our hearts, - is this true religion? Certainly not!

Does not the Christian religion teach us to love even our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us? Scripture says in Romans 12:19, ¹⁹ *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.* How, then, can we justify an unforgiving, irreconcilable spirit? It is not of God, of Christ, or of the Holy Spirit.

There are families where some of the members do not speak to one another for days. That is horrible. What slow torture, year-long agony, some children have to endure because their parents so often wrangle and abuse each other. Between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, there should be no feuds, no sullenness, and no revengefulness. Open, generous, forbearing, forgiving love should rule the home.

And may the same forgiving disposition prevail in the church! Do not pass by, refuse to speak to, someone who, you think has offended you or has actually done so. "Impossible; it cannot be done" you may think. But did not Joseph do it hard? Yes, like so many other lessons in Christian life, hard for the Old Adam.

But in a Christian the Old Adam is not the growing, controlling, dominant factor, but the enemy within that we must keep down, and that we can keep down if we are led by the Holy Spirit and are resolved to follow and do according to God's Word as taught to us in the Gospel lesson of today.

Dear friends, on our way to the heavenly Canaan, the house of our heavenly Father, the abode of perfect and uninterrupted peace and blessedness, may ours be a peaceable spirit, freely and fully applying the law of Christian forgiveness.

You will discover how many difficulties it is able to solve, what power it has to make the heart and the home and the church and your sphere in life so much more happy. Remember and meditate upon the admonition, *"See that you do not fall out along the way."* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ James 1:26

² ³ John 9

³ Genesis 13:8

⁴ Matthew 18:21

⁵ Matthew 18:23

⁶ Luke 5:20