HOW TO STOP SPIRITUAL DUMPSTER DIVING
(AND FIVE WAYS TO AVOID IT)

INTRODUCTION

- In Philippians 3:7-8 the Apostle Paul said "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ".

  - In these verses Paul contrasts the things he held as valuable in his previous life outside of Christ, with those things he held valuable in Christ.

  - He says all of the things that I held as valuable outside of Christ, I now count these things as lacking value, considering what I am gaining in Christ.

  - But moreover, Paul says I count these things as rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

  - The Greek word that we translate here as “rubbish” means “that which is thrown to dogs”. We’re talking about filthy scraps, things not fit for human consumption -- things today that you might find in a trash can or dumpster.

- Today, many Christians engage in what I refer to as spiritual dumpster diving. They frequently return to the sinful ways of their past life outside of Christ. Disregarding the eternal blessings they enjoy in Christ, they find enjoyment in the “rubbish” of that dumpster.
According to Proverbs 26:11 fools who repeat their follies are “Like a dog that returns to its vomit.” Merriam-Webster defines folly as a “lack of good sense or normal prudence and foresight”.

Now, if folly is a lack of good sense, then repeating our follies is sheer madness.

And every time we dive into the spiritual dumpster of our past life, we repeat our follies. In a spiritual sense it is as grotesque as a dog consuming its own vomit.

I want to speak to you today about the dangers of spiritual dumpster diving, and five ways that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving.

LESSON

Way 1 -- Standing firm in the Word

The first way that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving is by standing firm in the Word.

Galatians 5:1 says “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

- This was Paul’s warning to Christians in Galatian who were still practicing parts of the Mosaic Law -- specifically circumcision.

- They had been freed from the controlling nature of the Law, and were living under the freedom of God’s grace. However, God’s grace apparently wasn’t sufficient enough for them.
They just had to hold on to parts of the Law, including circumcision. They just had to dive back into that spiritual dumpster.

But Paul essentially told them that you can’t have it both ways -- you can’t be a Christian living under grace, while allowing yourself to be bound by the Law.

Listen carefully to what Paul had to say about that -- he said “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:2-4

There are two points that we need to take away from these verses:

- Point 1 – We can fall from grace -- the notion of “once saved-always saved” promoted by some denominations, is scripturally false, and extremely dangerous.

- Point 2 – One of the ways that we can fall from grace is by following false doctrine.

Today, many so-called Christians become dissatisfied with the sufficiency of God’s grace, and the absolute authority of His Word. They think they can do things that are contrary to God’s Word, as long as their heart is in the right place. Are they right? Of course not!

We have no authority to deviate from God’s Word, in any way, shape or form. In fact, the scriptures warn us about those who deviate from the Word and follow ungodly doctrines.
• Paul said to Timothy “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” 1 Timothy 4:1-2

- The fact that we have so many different denominations today, attests to the truth of these verses.

- Rather than adhering to God’s perfect and Holy Word, many today chose to follow unscriptural doctrines. Regardless of whether these doctrines are of men, demons or deceitful spirits is inconsequential. The point is that they are not from God.

- Now, why would any so-called Christian follow a doctrine that is contrary to God’s Holy Word? The answer is as simple as it is complicated -- it’s about doing what they want, rather than what God commands.

• For these same reasons, many today seek out preachers and teachers who tell them what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear.

  - As Christians we cannot fall into the trap of telling people what they want to hear. This is dangerous stuff brothers and sisters, to us and to those we are teaching.

  - James 3:1 warns that those who teach the Word will incur a stricter judgement. To me, this also includes preachers.

  - Yes, God holds preachers and teachers accountable for being more worried about tickling people’s ears than delivering His Word in context. And God holds all of us accountable for holding fast to His Word.
- We do not get a free pass because we follow unscriptural doctrines. If we are doing that, look out.

- Jesus said "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'” 
  **Matthew 4:4**

- Every time that we fail to stand firm in our faith, and follow God’s Holy word, we dive back into that spiritual dumpster.

- Every time that we partake of the contents of that dumpster, we leave no room for the Word of God. And if we do this often enough, we will eventually starve ourselves and die spiritually.

- Let’s be clear, we have to make a choice, to either live on the Word of God, or die on the contents of that spiritual dumpster.

- To avoid that dumpster and to gain God’s approval **2 Timothy 2:15** tells us:
  
  - We must, first and foremost, be committed to being diligent students of God’s Holy Word -- truly studying it to understand it in the context of the whole Word.

  - Second, we must be committed to unashamedly and accurately handling God’s Holy Word, in what we say and what we do.

- Our failure to keep these commitments to God, puts us back in that spiritual dumpster every single time.
Way 2 -- Not practicing sin

- The second way that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving is by not practicing sin.

- **1 John 3:9** says “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

  - Please notice that John did not say “no one born of God sins” he said “no one born of God practices sin”. There is a difference.

  - Because we all sin and fall short of God’s glory. In other words there is no one who hasn’t sinned or won’t inadvertently sin from time-to-time. It is the nature of man.

  - However, God draws the distinction between us slipping up and inadvertently sinning, and us continuing to living in a state of premeditated sin. Premeditated sin only leads us down one-way path…the path of destruction.

- Listen carefully what the writer of Hebrews says about this. He says “…if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.” **Hebrews 10:26-27**

  - Indeed, God holds us all personally accountable for working out our own salvation, with fear and trembling. And God takes a very dim view of those, who in spite of their knowledge of the truth of His Holy Word, continue to sin willfully.
- If fact, those who continue sinning willfully after knowing the truth of God's Word, should expect only one thing: the terrifying judgement of God and the fury of His fire.

- Still, many so-called Christians are living in a state of sin, while denying it. This a dangerous game. Because when we can’t admit that we are living in sin, we can’t have forgiveness of our sins.

- 1 John 1:8-10 says “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

- You see, it’s bad enough to lie to others. However, when we say that we have no sin, then we are lying to ourselves.

- On the other hand, when we admit that we have sinned, then we can confess our sins. And when we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us, and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness.

- But ultimately, if we say that we have not sinned, we do something horrible and incomprehensible: we make a liar out of God, and His Word is not in us. Let me assure you that making a liar out of God is not something that we want to be guilty of.

- Now, when we practice sin, we are not just diving into the spiritual dumpster, we are living in the filth of that spiritual dumpster.
• Brothers and sisters, many times in our lives we are faced with the choice of denying our sins and living the filth of that spiritual dumpster, or confessing our sins and being cleansed from our unrighteousness.

• I don’t know about you, but I personally believe that admitting our sins and confessing our sins, and being free from the filth of that dumpster is the much better choice.

Way 3 – Not letting pride get in the way of our relationship with God

• The third way that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving is by not letting pride get in the way of our relationship with God.

• James 4:5-8 says “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.’ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

• Listen up brothers and sisters, our God is a jealous God. He expects nothing less than all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). He also expects our humility. And He rewards us for our humility, with His magnificent grace.

• We need God’s grace for two reasons: (1) because according to Romans 3:23 we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, and (2) because according to Ephesians 2:1 without God’s grace, we are dead in our trespasses and sins -- with no ability to save our ourselves.
Here’s something else that we need to understand about pride: it will eventually lead to our spiritual destruction.

- Proverbs 16:18-19 says “*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.*”

- Indeed, pride manifests itself in arrogance -- and according to Obadiah 1:3, it is the arrogance of our heart that deceives us.

- But ultimately, our arrogance draws us away from God. Psalm 10:4 tells us that “*The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’*”

Simply stated, as long as we hold onto our pride, our hearts and minds can never be in a state that will allow us to be in a right relationship with God.

When we allow pride to get in the way of our relationship with God, we make the choice to dive back into that spiritual dumpster. And the filth of that spiritual dumpster brings us down every single time, and may ultimately cost us our soul.

But James offers us the solution. He says “*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you*”. James 4:10

If we want to stay out of the spiritual dumpster, then we must humble ourselves in the presence of God. And if we do that, God will lift us up and magnificently exalts us.
Way 4 – Not allowing our pursuit of material things to get between us and our relationship with God

- The fourth way that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving is by not allowing our pursuit of material things to get between us and our relationship with God.

- **1 Timothy 6:7-10** says “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

  - Brethren, we come into this world nothing material and we leave this world with nothing material. As the saying goes: there are no moving vans following hearses to the cemetery.

  - Because no amount of material wealth can positively affect our eternity, we need to find a sense of contentment in the basics -- things such as food, clothing and roof over our head.

  - Those who can’t find contentment in the basics will continue to focus their time and energy on material things, and will regularly fall into temptation.

  - These passages make it very clear that money is not in and of itself evil -- it is the love of money that is root of all sorts of evil. Why? Because those who long for money are drawn away from God and set themselves up for many self-inflicted griefs.
• Please understand that the love of money, and the love of God are both character traits. However they are character traits that cannot coexist. In many respects, the love of money is indicative of a lack of faith in God.

• Notice what Hebrews 13:5-6 says about this -- it says: “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,’ so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?’”

  - It is a serious thing when we lack confidence in God, because we are no longer trusting that God will take care of us and provide for us.

  - And when we are no longer trusting in God to take care of us and provide for us, we are now in a position of trusting ourselves. As if we can somehow do it on our own -- which we can’t.

• In Luke 12:16-21 we find Jesus telling the parable of the rich man.

  - The rich man was so consumed with accumulating material wealth that he neglected his obligations to God.

  - And at a time when the rich man was least expecting it, God demand his soul. According to Luke 12:20 God said to him “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?”

  - You see, when we die, the people that we leave behind may benefit from our material wealth, but it won’t do us one bit of good. However, it certainly can cost us our soul.
• This is why Jesus said "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

- The treasures of this world are temporal, they will eventually be destroyed. But heavenly treasures are eternal and will never be destroyed.

- Jesus tells us that our heart goes wherever our treasure lies. If our treasure is here in this world, then our heart will be in this world. If our treasure is in heaven, then our heart will be in heaven.

• Brothers and sisters, in that very moment when we take our focus away from storing up treasures in heaven and begin to focus on accumulating earthly treasures, we dive back in that filthy spiritual dumpster, every single time.

Way 5 – Remaining focused on what lies ahead

• The fifth way that we can avoid spiritual dumpster diving is by remaining focused on what lies ahead.

• And what lies ahead of course, is our prize of eternal life in heaven. With respect to this prize Paul said “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13-14

- Paul never took his prize for granted. But doing the one thing that he could do, Paul worked on forgetting what was behind him so that he could focus on what was ahead of him.
By looking ahead, Paul was able to press on toward his prize, which was through the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- In order for us to answer that upward call, we cannot continue to live in our previous state -- we must be spiritually changed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

- When we are in Christ, we are supposed to be new spiritual creatures.

- For us, the worldly things of our former lives outside of Christ have passed away, and they are replaced by new and magnificent spiritual things.

- For this reason, Romans 12:2 tells us that we are to no longer be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may prove what the will of God is -- that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- In order to avoid getting caught up in worldly things we must continuously look ahead.

  - In this regard, Isaiah 43:18 says “Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past.”

  - Similarly, Proverbs 4:25 says “Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.”

  - Here’s the point: in that very moment that we stop looking ahead, we run the risk of spiritually crashing.
• I personally believe that looking behind is symptomatic of a lack of trust in God and his promises toward us. **Proverb 3:5-6** says “Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.”

  - God doesn’t want us to trust Him halfheartedly -- He expects us to trust Him with all of our heart. If you want God to be in on you, you have to be all in on God.

  - He doesn’t want us to rely on our own understanding, because our understanding is lacking -- His understanding is infinitely greater than ours. Instead, He wants us to acknowledge Him in all that we do and think. And if we do this, He will make our paths straight.

  - Indeed, God has laid out straight paths that we must follow in order to realize our eternal reward in Heaven. Yet we often choose to not trust God, and instead choose to follow the crooked paths of this world.

• Brothers and sisters, every single time we fail to place our trust in God, we make a choice to place our trust in the things of this world. Once again, we dive back into the filth of that spiritual dumpster. But God wants us to place our focus on the things that are right in His eyes. So, how do get our focus right?

• Paul said to the Philippians “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” **Philippians 4:8-9**
If we dwell on the things that are excellent in the sight of God, we will not have time to be focused on things that can harm us spiritually.

If we practice the things that are right in the sight of God, we will stay out of that spiritual dumpster, and God will bring us a sense of spiritual peace and contentment.

- Keep your eye on the prize brothers and sisters! Keep your eyes on the prize and stay out the spiritual dumpster.

**CONCLUSION**

- As we wrap up this morning, I want to again underscore the five ways that we can stop spiritual dumpster diving.

  - **Way 1 – Standing firm in the word.** According to 2 Timothy 2:15, we do this by diligently studying God’s Word, and by handling it accurately. By doing these things, we gain God’s approval.

  - **Way 2 – Not Practicing sin.** According to 1 John 1:7 we do this by walking in the Light of God. And when we walk in the Light of God, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

  - **Way 3 – Not letting pride get in the way of our relationship with God.** According to James 4:10 if we humble ourselves in the presence of God, He will ultimately exalt us.

  - **Way 4 – Not allowing our pursuit of material things get between us and our relationship with God.** According to Jesus, we do this by storing up treasures in heaven, with the way we live in this life. Matthew 6:20
• **And finally Way 5 – Remaining focused on what lies ahead.** According to **Proverbs 3:5-6** we must trust in the Lord with all of our heart and let Him make our path straight.

• The lesson is yours to take into your heart and act on.

**INVITATION**

• If you’re here this morning and you have not confessed Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, we encourage you to take these necessary steps to secure your salvation today. We have no promise of tomorrow -- we never know the day nor the hour that our soul may be required of us.

• If you’re here this morning and you need to confess a public sin or simply need the prayers of the congregation, we encourage you to allow us to pray for you.

• Whatever your need, won’t you come forward as we stand and sing.