

Striving, Resting, and the Word

by Coty Pinckney 08/22/08

On Sunday we focused in part on Hebrews 4:11:

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

We noted the paradox of this verse: We are to work real hard to rest. And we showed that this does not mean, "Work real hard NOW to rest IN THE FUTURE." Psalm 23 and Matthew 11:28-30 clearly show we are to be resting now, while we are working. Our rest in Christ is, instead, similar to a runner – a Usain Bolt, a Ryan Hall – relaxing while running the race of his life. He is working hard – yet, other than the specific muscles required for running, he is completely relaxed. In the image of Matthew 11, we are yoked together with Jesus. He gives us rest – simultaneous with our taking up His yoke. His power does the labor, the pulling, as we are paired with Him.

The Hebrews passage clarifies further how we are both to strive to rest, and to rest while striving. The author writes:

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest . . . 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The word "for" links the command to how we live out the command. And there is only one way to depend actively on God: Through His Word.

How does the Word help us do this?

First, the Word is *living and active*. It has energy! That's what we need to run the race.

We see this throughout Scripture: God speaks – and darkness becomes light. God calls – and Abraham becomes the forefather of the people of God. Jesus cries out, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man lives.

And we see this in our personal lives. We go to the Word frantic, rushed, desperate – and when we open it, meditate on it, let its living and active power sink in to us, we are changed. Our eyes are opened to Who God is. We see God in the midst of our trial.

Second, the Word is *sharp and cutting*. The Word cuts through our facades, our pretensions, and our masks; the Word slices our excuses and evasions. It penetrates deep into our souls, showing who we are and how desperately we need Christ. Consequently we are "naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

That doesn't sound pleasant. But it is absolutely necessary if we are to depend on God, if we are to rest in Him. We must see ourselves as having no ability to effect His purposes, no energy to bring about His plans, apart from His working. We must acknowledge that prior to salvation we are lost, weak, and helpless, deserving His condemnation; and we must recognize that subsequent to salvation we remain ineffective and unproductive, good only to be thrown in the fire and burned (John 15:6), unless we are continually dependent on His Word.

Finally, through the Word we learn of our High Priest who has conquered sin:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

The Word condemns and comforts. The Word shows us how far short we fall of God's standards – and provides the intercessor who fulfills those standards on our behalf. The Word tells us of God's severity towards sin – and of His mercy towards His repentant people.

So we can draw near to Him! Mercy and grace is ours – whatever our need.

Are you opening yourself up to the penetrating power of the Word? We have this great gift of God's Word written, available to us always – are you in it every day, allowing it to clear up all the fog, to cut through all hindrances that keep you from running well?

Read the Word. Love the Word. Depend on the Word. Share the Word. And thereby both strive to rest, and rest while striving.