

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

When we were young we had a burning desire to walk up an escalator that was going down. Of course neither the store nor our parents would give their permission so we had to wait until we were alone and the store was not crowded. Getting started was a challenge since the steps disappeared into the floor just as we tried to mount them but once under way it was easy unless we stopped to catch our breath and then everything that had been gained was quickly lost again. Looking back on it, it wasn't all that hard but it was fun.

In a sense we as Christ's brethren are all trying to climb a down escalator. The world in which we are living is all going down to oblivion and we are trying to go against the stream of humanity up towards God's kingdom. If we stop to rest a minute our course is immediately reversed and we find ourselves travelling down hill along with the world around us. While we are busy climbing up, we find almost everyone else quite content to go the other way. The more crowded it is, the harder it is to go up when all the rest want to go down. All the effort we have put forth to climb up is quickly lost if we stop, and we can go all the way from the very top of the stairs back to the bottom if we have not made that final push to step off the escalator at the very top. Surely many have spent years in the Lord only to stop near the end and lose all that had been gained over a lifetime. Solomon who was so wise fell, for Nehemiah tells us that he "was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless outlandish women caused him to sin."

Ezekiel explains how important it is to keep on keeping on for he tells us that "when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and does according to all the sinful things that the wicked man does, shall he live? All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die."

There is a famous Broadway play entitled "Stop the world, I want to get off." The world isn't stopping and we can't get off, all we can do is climb above those who are going down. There is very little traffic going our way but all the world would hinder our climb, if we let them. We need to know where we are going and steadily climb each day towards the Kingdom. We have to be going the opposite way from the rest of the world for Jesus has told us plainly that only a few will be saved. He tells us to "Enter in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be who go in: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it."

Jesus gives us encouragement saying, "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." We too can overcome but we won't do it standing still. We have to be on the move onward and upward, for as Paul exhorts us, "be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Just remember that the world is represented by the escalator going down but we are the climbers going up and we can't stop the world and get off. We have to be in the world but not of it by overcoming, for Jesus had promised "to him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on His throne."

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According to history, Alexander the Great was one of the finest generals of all time. We are told that following a successful military campaign, Alexander would reward the soldiers who performed bravely and he would punish those who had demonstrated cowardice.

On one occasion, while Alexander was celebrating a victory with his generals, his guards dragged a young soldier before him. The man was charged with deserting his post, and was now to receive Alexander's sentence.

The automatic penalty for such an offence was usually death. For some reason known only to him, this time, Alexander hesitated. He looked down on the soldier, who was trembling and prostrate before him. Alexander asked him a simple question. "Soldier, what is your name." "Alexander" the young man whispered weakly. "What is your name?" Alexander asked again, his voice rising in anger. "Alexander" the soldier repeated, ashamedly. In a flash, the great ruler was upon the man; he grabbed him by the front of his tunic and yanked him face to face. "That's my name," Alexander roared. Then in a suddenly soft, but harsh tone, he continued.

"Soldier, you shall live, but from this day on, you either must change your conduct, or you must change your name."

Alexander's point, was that if the soldier was to share his name he must behave in a way that was consistent with the ruler's reputation and character.

We call ourselves "Christians", and we all know the meaning of this is "Christ in," meaning Christ is in us. What would we think if Christ were to suddenly appear and look us right in the eye and say to us, "either you must change your conduct or change your name." Would we rather change the way we behave or change our name? In a sense we are not really his unless we do behave as he would have us behave.

We remember when Christ's immediate family was standing outside desiring to speak to him. When he was told this, he turned to his disciples and said, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" Stretching his hand toward his disciples he said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever shall do the will of my Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

We see that Jesus, like Alexander, is really saying, "keep my commandments, do the will of my Father or change your name, for you are not my brother and sister if you don't."

We often speak of a person describing them as having a "good name" or a "bad name." We are not talking about the name on their birth certificate but rather the way they behave.

What kind of a name do we have? Are we living up to our name as Christ's brother or sister? There were those living in Sardis who had a name (or reputation) of being alive but Jesus said that they were dead. Let us decide to live up to our name as "Christ's" so that when he comes he will give us "a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows except he that receives it."

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