

The Belt and Suspenders Philosophy

For those who are perhaps too young to have heard this, it is an expression symbolizing excessive precaution. In earlier times it seems that many men wore suspenders. These are straps that hung over the shoulders and clamped on to the upper rim of their pants so as to hold them up. The belt around the waist of course accomplished the same thing. The expression to wear both belt and suspenders was used to describe those who were excessively cautious in some area of activity, whether physical economic or otherwise. Those who seemed to exhibit such seemingly extreme precautions were often people who had experienced a failure of some sort even though they had applied precautions normally considered prudent. The Great Depression of the 1930's is an example of extensive economic failures where good prudent and seemingly safe placement of their assets proved to be inadequate. In these cases neither a 'belt nor suspenders' were adequate provisions to protect them from embarrassing, as well as tragic, "exposure" as they lost their pants! The result of this economic disaster, as well as any number and variety of debilitating circumstances led many to develop a "belt and suspenders" philosophy regarding the matters of importance in their lives.

Let's continue for a moment to use the Great Depression as an example regarding this "B and S" philosophy. It didn't take long, once a semblance of property returned for the next and subsequent generations to abandon such an "ultra-conservative" and "stifling" attitude. "It can't happen again" has become the nearly undisputed mantra. Who is silly enough to subscribe to such a belief? Very few, only some of the old coots who are still around and who lived and suffered through that period of history maintain that obsession. Could it be today that the millions in this country who are losing their homes due to foreclosures, and the multitude of others in bankruptcy, might have been well advised to have applied some sort of economic "B and S" before they ventured into this high risk jungle. But who was there to warn them? No one to whom they would listen. Old coots have long ago lost their credibility. Time was when age symbolized wisdom. Today only the young know anything. The old are like John the Baptist, just weird voices in the

wilderness crying out to repent before it's too late. Who wants to hear this when there are so many other very convincing voices offering more attractive choices? That of course, is reminiscent of poor Jeremiah, who was the Lord's true spokesman for over forty years through the reigns of 5 kings of Judah, to the very end of the Davidic dynasty in 586BC. God told him at the very beginning that he would never convince anyone, yet he was to continue to the end, and preach repentance and a return to God or else they would be sent into slavery. But there were a host of false prophets teaching that this could not happen, that the old coot was a fool, that they were the true spokesmen for God. The people continued in the ways of words most pleasing to their ears and their desires. Jeremiah's teaching became so uncomfortable that some of the leaders, including his own brothers plotted to kill him. During this "end time" period, as far as the dynasty was concerned, the people did wear belts and suspenders in that they carried their idols with them to the temple so that they could worship them while they gave lip service to God. Needless to say, this type of "B and S" was not very beneficial.

The temptations of low interest rates, home equity loans, minimal down payments, and compelling arguments after arguments favoring more and more debt with little mention of potential consequences have led millions into bankruptcy and loss of their homes and other possessions. A belt and suspenders policy in which security was a higher priority would have meant a smaller home, a cheaper car, and perhaps no debt-financed vacations and avoidance of other unaffordable pleasures. In our present society to say no to pleasures and desires, and to deny ones self instant gratification, even to the compromise of essentials, has almost become a criminal state of mind. In this age of entitlements and so many governmental "guarantees" who needs such a stifling, punitive philosophy? Current events are confirming that everyone does.

With this serving as an analogy, might we not also apply it in the context of eternal spiritual security? Any and all aspects of physical life are as nothing of value compared to the need to prepare for our eternal condition and place of residence! If at all possible, shouldn't this be the area of activity where the "B and S" philosophy should be most

seriously applied? Let us look at the Gospel of John, chapter 10, and verses 27 through 29. Here Jesus says *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand”* Now that is security! That is the ultimate expression by what is meant by the belt and suspenders analogy. Just one of these most powerful of all hands would be enough, but Jesus wants us to have the ultimate assurance of our salvation, if we are His sheep. He tells us we are in two hands, His and also the Father’s! But, notice these subtle qualifiers, “My sheep hear My voice” and “they follow me”. In the context of the whole of Scripture these are fully loaded phrases. To “hear” and to know are synonymous with “to obey”. The picture here is not of a sheep aimlessly and intermittently following the shepherd, drifting first one way than another, risking falling into a pit or being caught by a beast of prey. It is following Him very closely, close enough to hear His every word, and keeping our eyes on Him at all times while staying on the straight and narrow path He has blazed for His own. That is the condition that qualifies one to be in His and in the Father’s Hand. But our fallen nature makes straying almost impossible to avoid. However, we can greatly minimize its effect if we assume a “belt and suspender policy in our daily lives where following Him is concerned.

First off, knowing God’s inerrant Word is essential before effective following can take place. His sheep “hear” His voice, When, where, how? He does occasionally speak to His own. But I don’t believe that He speaks personally often enough or in sufficient detail for that to be what He meant. The when, where and how are to be found in the Scripture, for God revealed there everything we need to know regarding what He wants of us. Do you know God’s word well enough to say with full assurance that you know Him, that you know His voice and that you know all the ingredients that go into salvation, and finally that you have surely acquired them? Are you sure? Are you doubly sure, like “belt and suspenders sure?”

When I first became a believer, I read through the entire Bible three times. Then I began studying it more carefully. This led me to begin writing these essays. Then I began to study it even more intensely verse-by-verse and word-by-word, preparing for teaching His Word. I search for the true meanings in the Greek and Hebrew languages in which they were written. I collect the pearls from Scripture and try to share them in these essays. Through all of that, I've barely scratched the surface of real understanding. How do I know? Because hardly a day goes by that I don't discover something important that I have missed over and over again in my reading. Have you learned sufficiently the meaning of His Word, and are you dutifully applying it your daily living life, moment-by-moment, the precepts of repentance, belief, faith, love and obedience as Scripture demands of His own? None of us do, or can, but when we have tried as hard as we can, and then give Him even more time, worship and love, then perhaps we have added the suspenders to the belt with which to can feel more secure.

Again I ask how sure are we that we are justified, redeemed, and saved. Do we believe we have applied the belt and suspenders philosophy in reaching that conclusion? Look carefully at these devises. We must make sure that they are strong. A belt made of hay and suspenders made of straw are bound to break, and our "pants" are sure to fall and causing us not only to stumble badly, but also to expose the fact that we haven't adequately prepared for our eternal future.

In that respect, think of yourself, standing before Jesus thus exposed, having nothing to offer except the dismal failure of not having earned any crowns made of materials any better then your belt and suspenders! But that is only if you make it to the Bema seat to receive rewards! What if your belt and suspenders represent the truth of your repentance? If that truth is hay and straw, then it will not be the Bema seat you stand before, but the white throne of judgment before which you will stand naked and absent of that covering of salvation that you presumed you had. This won't be judgment that determines your place in the hierarchy of heaven, but instead it will be the judgment where you will be assigned the degree of heat you will be sentenced to endure in the lake of fire in the outer darkness. Why take any chances. Study Scripture; learn the true

meaning of repentance, belief, faith, and obedience. Pray earnestly for assurance of the blessed free gift of grace that provides salvation through faith. Know you have it through a changed life, a life of humility, worship, and thus *“bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance”* (Matthew 3:8)

Throughout many of these essays, I’ve repeated sung variations on the theme of this same song, the song of salvation assurance. Often I’ve applied scriptural verses to this end, which may be more applicable to the earning of crowns, then they are to the assurance of salvation. Where the verses could be similarly applicable, I chose to assume the “B and S” posture rather than “taking chances”. The Apostle Paul expressed a great deal of concern about gaining and not losing his crowns, as well as assuring salvation. His concern gives us most of what we know about crowns, how to gain, and how to lose them. In 1Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul tells us the following: *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”* In this case, Paul is focusing strictly on crowns. He knows he is saved, yet he demonstrates here how very concerned he is about becoming a “castaway”, that is of being rejected. This is not about losing his salvation. He knows he can’t lose that, but he fears that he will lose his crowns, if he strays at all from his God-ordained purpose! We should all share those fears with Paul, for ourselves. This is because we can, every one of us, enter a spiritual “Great Depression” and lose all of our savings, as did those who lost their earthly “gold” in the 1930’s. To avoid this, Paul seems to have worked “B and S” frantically so as to not let that happen to him.

Perhaps you say to yourself, “I don’t care about the crowns, I’ll be happy just to get through the gate without any crowns.” That is ok, and I suppose that this is the way it is for most folks. However, can we be that absolutely certain” of your salvation, that some deeper examination of the quality of our repentance is too foolish even to consider? Is

now simply settling in to a comfortable lifestyle, and just “coasting to the end of our lives all that is needed? Many seem to think so, and perhaps a few may even be right.

However, a few Scriptural references will set the tone for some additional observations regarding the putting on a “B” and “S” posture regarding salvation. *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”* (Matthew 10:22). *“But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”* (Matthew 24:13). The same words are repeated in Mark 13:13. When Jesus repeats Himself like this, know this is super-important! Paul, the likely writer of Hebrews continued this same theme where in Hebrews 3:16 he writes, *“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast in confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”* (Hope in the Greek “*elpis*” means expectation, confidence, faith, hope). Hebrews 3:14 says, *“For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence to the end.”*

Each of these verses seem to make salvation conditional on holding fast our commitment to Jesus continually to the end of life. This obviously doesn’t mean that we lose our salvation if we occasionally coast or backslide. If we ever had it, nothing can remove it. The big question is did we ever really have it? Because God knows the future, He knows what our life’s process and ending will be like, even at the moment we claim to have accepted Jesus. He knows the depth and sincerity and reality of our commitment. If it is real, evidence of it will “continue to the end.” In these verses, God appears to have imposed an additional condition of the evidence of salvation through the use of the “buts” and “ifs”. To me this suggests that we simply never had salvation if we don’t show a continued evidence of it to the end of your mortal lives. Relying on the presumption that we are saved because we “accepted Christ”, and then not showing a continuous evidence of gratitude, repentance, faith, love, and obedience, must be considered evidence that the original commitment may have been faulty and ineffectual.

There is no more important an issue in our lives than that of eternal security. Therefore I wonder how anyone can do anything less than take a continued “B and S” stance

regarding the assurance of salvation, where ever and when ever God offers us such opportunity. Perhaps a simple “acceptance” of Jesus as Savior is the belt that might support salvation. But until we come to the understanding that He must also be our Lord, and we treat Him as such, we may find that the “belt” is made of a very weak and tenuous fabric on which to risk our eternity. When we truly come to accept Him as both Lord and Savior, we now have the eternal security that only comes from the combination that we might consider to be a truly safe “belt and suspenders.”