



You'll Get Over It!

Vance Havner:

"I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." — Revelation 2:4.

Both in the world of nature and in the world of human nature we have a habit of getting over things. Whether for good or ill, the law of recovery is always at work.

Here is a landscape devastated by flood or hurricane. Crops are ruined, trees are uprooted, everything is wrecked by a mad upheaval, as though Mother Nature had run wild in a fit of temper. It looks as though the view could never be lovely again. But the months pass, and after awhile grass grows again and flowers bloom again and fresh crops are grown, and soon you would never know that there had been a disaster. For Nature tenderly heals her wounds, she gets over it.

Walking over battlefields of other days, one sees the healing of the scars of conflict. We have to look carefully to see the marks of former wars, and, although it will take longer this time, we trust that time will obliterate the wounds of this latest carnage. In England bomb explosions brought to light the seeds of plants that had not grown for years, and many varieties of flowers and shrubs sprang up in bomb craters as Nature wrought again her miracle of getting over it.

The human race has gotten over a lot of things. Wars and pestilences and famines have threatened to wipe us out and alarmists have cried, "We'll never be the same again!" but somehow we have survived. The human race has an astonishing power of recovery.

We individuals get over things. Some of us once were given up to die, riddled with disease, but we are still going, with some of our parts missing, maybe, but still "among those present." The hospitals have records of getting over it that fairly take one's breath away. For Nature is the great restorer, and the moment you hurt your finger she rushes her repair force to the scene of trouble and will do wonders if given a chance.

We are always getting over things. Babies are very precious, but it is a good thing we get over our baby traits — if we do. It is natural for the baby to put things into its mouth indiscriminately — and some of us never grow up in this regard, but we should. We can excuse the baby for putting a carpet tack in its mouth but what shall we say of grown-ups who put "coffin tacks" in theirs! It is natural for the baby to cry for what it wants, but if I should go down the street wailing for an ice-cream cone I should be investigated, for "when I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child," but having become a man I am supposed to have put away childish things. I have read of a man who boasted that at fifty years of age he still prayed the same prayer he used at five, "Now I lay me down to sleep . . ." Any man who has not found a better prayer than that in forty-five years ought to be ashamed of himself. He would be insulted if you told him that he had the mental development of a child of five; he would be a monstrosity if he had the body of a child of five, yet he prides himself on the spiritual development of a five-year-old!

Someone has said, "When a man grows up and doesn't grow up, he is a fool." A lot of trouble is caused by people who don't grow up. They look normal and would resent being called cases of arrested development, but they make others miserable by childish traits and tantrums which they should have outgrown long ago. If some middle-agers dressed according to their dispositions they would still be wearing rompers and pigtails!

But the law of recovery works both ways. While we get over things we should get over, we also get over things we should not get over. Many a man starts out in his chosen profession with noble ideals and high dreams, but the years take their toll, the perversity of humanity discourages him, the monotony of life depresses him, until what started as a golden consecration ends in a grouchy cynicism.

Sometimes old ministers grow bitter and sour. They started out brightly enough, but they saw so much of the evil of men's hearts, that they were disappointed in men they once trusted; they had the Spirit quenched within them, until they became human wet blankets, saying to every young enthusiast, "Yes, I used to feel that way; you'll get over it!"

But not all preachers get over it. Some carry their springtime zeal through summer and autumn into the snows of winter, mellowed and refined, but still aflame. "The devil has no happy old men," but real Christians become more childlike -- not childish -- as the years go by.

Indeed, our Lord said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," and I am sure that one thing He meant for us to see in that is that children have not become used to living, they are still fresh and full of expectancy. Life is crammed with surprises. They have not gotten used to it. Of course, we have a crop of youngsters today who get over it far too soon and become blase and fed-up before they are out of their teens; but I am speaking of normal children. And a Christian ought to live with a sense of wonder, always expecting God to do some marvelous thing (Hosea 12:6). We really do not expect much from God these days. We pray for rain and leave our umbrellas at home. We pray for revival but don't really expect one to start today. We have been told that whatsoever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive, but we ask, doubting, or, at the most, we ask, merely hoping, and our expectation is not unto Him.

Right here was the trouble at Ephesus. She had got over her first love. Married couples do that today: bliss turns to boredom and ends in a divorce court. The same thing happens in the Church. Ephesus had started out on fire for God. She was still orthodox and busy but something was lacking. She needed a revival. Many a church has started out with a few saints aflame for God, but later they became rich and increased with goods with need of nothing. They may still be doctrinally sound and religiously active but they have got over their first love and they need to remember and repent and repeat the first works.

Mind you, modernism and worldliness are not the only evils in the Church today. There is a dreadful state among orthodox Christians whose doctrine is as sound as a dollar and who could not be called worldly by any stretch of the imagination, but who have become fed-up and heavy until they are harder to arouse than the grossest sinners. They have read so much and heard so much that nothing surprises them. They have lost their capacity for being stirred. Their reaction to any sermon is, "We have heard all the preachers and read all the books. Nothing that you could say would be new. We are veterans and we don't propose to get excited. We've heard all this and got over it and so will you." That sort of thing is hard on a young Timothy, and if he doesn't let God use him to get them out of their state the devil will use them to get him out of his!

The history of the Church is a story of getting over it. Senator Borah said there were two stages in every movement, the apostolic and the mechanistic. The Church has her periods of great awakening, when the fires of apostolic zeal burn high. Then, the fires die, she becomes settled and complacent and mechanical. She gets over it. And the Lord has to send an awakener to rouse her again.

We individual Christians get over it. We leave our first love, we lose the joy of salvation, we get to where grace does not appear as precious as the hour we first believed. We get used to it, and while we recite the phrases and sing the songs, the color and freshness are gone. We take it all as a matter of course; we become like those iron fountains of A.J. Gordon's illustration, in which the water gushes out of iron lips that never taste it! If we were honest, we would sing:

"Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?

Where is the soul-refreshing view

Of Jesus and His Word?"

It is not necessary for us to fall into heresy or gross worldliness to get over it. We may believe the truth, stand for the truth, and yet in the very activities of the truth grow so accustomed to the truth that we "traffic in unfelt truth."

Christmas Evans, the great Welsh preacher, riding horseback one Saturday afternoon on his way to preach, was "convicted of a cold heart." He tethered his horse and spent hours in the woods in prayer until his heart was thawed out "like the breaking up of a hard winter." He had "got over it," but, unlike some of us, he found it out. A preacher had better stop in his tracks if he finds himself moving from the apostolic to the mechanistic stage; he had better do something radical then and there. He had better drop everything and get into the woods with his Bible and read until he has a new Bible and pray until he has a new prayer, and come back a new man with a new message. A lot of churches think they need a new preacher when they simply need the same preacher renewed. Many a preacher thinks he needs a new pastorate when he needs to be renewed in the same

pastorate. Robertson of Brighton wanted to resign from the ministry, but God impressed him that what he needed was to have his commission re-signed.

Not every preacher loses out because he went into false doctrine or had a moral breakdown. Some leave their first love in a round of church duties. Perhaps more leave it that way than in any other, for it is so deceptive: they are not aware of getting over it. They work at it harder than ever, but the harder they work, the farther they get from the thing they started out to do. The church at Ephesus was not having bingo instead of prayer-meetings. They were a fundamental, hard-working crowd, getting farther away all the time from the thing that mattered most, their love for Christ. We seem to think that the very momentum of Christian activity will keep us in spiritual trim, but it carries us away from what we started out to do and be. We Christian workers sometimes assume that just because we are in the midst of spiritual labours all the time, that will keep us warm for Christ. But nothing is more dangerous, for familiarity with the things of God, if it does not breed contempt, may breed complacency. We get over it.

Whether church or preacher or layman, we had better watch lest our hands outrun our hearts, lest we let the abounding iniquity of this age make our love wax cold. Some think it a mark of maturity to be unresponsive to revival: it is a mark of that Laodecean lukewarmness that nauseates the Lord.

We had better get back to it, for all our activity is useless if we leave our first love. All our meetings, our rallies, our reunions are sounding brass and clanging cymbal until we recover that. We try to make up for it by adding more committees, drives and picnics, but adding more wheels is a poor way to make up for having less steam!

It amounts to this: what we need is a revival. If you can't have one in your church get alone with God and have one yourself. Tell Him you're slipping, getting over it, getting used to being a Christian, and that you don't like it. Get back past all the world confusion and church quarrels and differences among the saints and the weaknesses of the brethren, back to Christ, to One you can trust. Come to Him afresh and fall in love with Him again and get such an eye-full and heart-full of Him that you feel like you did when you were converted. If it brings tears to the eyes and a tremor to the voice and an "amen" to the lips, well and good. If someone thinks you're having softening of the brain, tell them it is softening of the heart, and that you're getting over "hardening of the hearteries." Maybe you will strike fire in other hearts and start a revival. Certainly you will come nearer doing so than by criticizing the preacher, watching the faults of the deacons and the frailties of the missionary society.

Whatever it costs, no price is too great to kindle aflame the fires of our first love. If you are getting over it, heed the call of our Christ: Remember and Repent and Repeat, "or else . . ." There is another R: He will "Remove" you from your place of usefulness. Many churches, many preachers, many Christians are on the shelf, disapproved, because they would not learn their three R's.

The only way to keep from getting over it is to get back to it!