

# “Fixin’ To...”

**M**any of the southern states of the United States have their own unique way of speaking American English. This creates somewhat of a common bond among these states, at least linguistically. Anywhere south of the Mason-Dixon Line you would be exposed to amusing expressions that are unique to this part of the world.

Take for instance the common address, “ya’ll.” When translated into regular English it basically means “you all.” Then, of course, if there was ever the slight possibility of leaving anyone out, or to be misunderstood by anyone already included in your former address, you can intensify matters by employing the term “all ya’ll.” One of my favourites is the very descriptive “fixin’ to,” or “fixing to.” Nearly anyone of a particular generation in the southern states who was about to take some course of action was “fixin’ to” do it. According to this reasoning, whether it is planning to do something as simple as taking out the rubbish, or something as complex as performing open heart surgery, one can be “fixin’ to” do so...

So here is something that we as a church should be “fixin’ to” do this year, as we remain firmly committed to all other ways we are commanded in Scripture:

We must remain committed to the achievement of *continuity and excellence* in our ministering unto God and his church. Here’s taking a look at *continuity* first. It may not be all that obvious, but continuity is the key to our faithfulness unto our Lord. Actually, the word faithful is defined in terms of the continuation of specific behaviour that someone exhibits toward the person/thing that they want to be faithful to. This kind of faithfulness is necessary in any Bible believing church. See how Paul instructs the Colossians:

“<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,<sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable

and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col. 1:21-23).

Every saved individual is similar to the Colossians in this sense. We were all alienated or estranged from God through our sins. All of us were traveling along “easy street” (Matt. 7:13) until such time that God transported us onto the narrow way by virtue of our faith and repentance. Through this, as Paul says, we were “reconciled” to God. Stated differently, we were made “right” with God based on his unmerited grace alone, not of our own doing.

But this is all the more reason to continue on as the believing, as those who have humbled themselves before God and serve his flock. We can never rely on a past experience of salvation, unless we are presently and actively living as the saved. This is why Paul adds the caveat in verse 23: “...if indeed you *continue* in the faith, *stable* and *steadfast*, *not shifting* from the hope of the gospel that you heard...” In other words, continuing in the faith is what will reveal us as God’s redeemed. It is so important for us to remember this, and it doesn’t matter how long we have been saved. Anyone can be tempted to forget that we prove our salvation through our continued faithfulness.

Paul goes on to tell us what it looks like if someone is continuing on in the faith. It involves being “stable,” “steadfast,” and “not shifting from the hope of the gospel” that we heard—for some of us, many moons ago... Paul is not preaching human perfection here, as some might think, rather he is making the point that true saving faith can reasonably be measured against works. Works do not save, to be sure, but if there is true saving faith, then some measure of a changed life will follow and *continue* on until the day the Lord comes for us.

Historically, for the Colossians it meant not allowing themselves to get swept away by unbiblical views of God. To this extent, Paul warned: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). The Colossians were to stand firm against these attacks of Satan, who elevates himself above the knowledge of God (Gen. 3:1). This, they were supposed to do in a stable and steadfast way, not

allowing themselves to lose sight of what is most important—Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

How does it look for us today? Sure, we, like the Colossians must be committed to “not shifting from the hope of the gospel” and not to be taken “captive by philosophy and empty deceit.” But is this the only form of perseverance in the faith that can apply? Certainly not. To “continue in the faith” can be witnessed on multiple levels, not just the obvious ones. We continue in the faith when we pray for one another, when we serve one another, when we carry one another’s burdens, when we are kind one to another, and many more... These are the practical, yet indispensable, day-to-day ways by which we can and must “continue in the faith.”

This is good old-fashioned “Sermon on the Mount” living. When we are committed to persevering in the faith in *all* ways God commands, then we are gathering treasures in heaven and not on earth, where they can be destroyed or stolen (Matt. 5:19-21). But a mind-shift may be necessary for some of us, and this lies at the heart of Jesus’ words referred to above. If the church (God’s everlasting family) is not important to us, then this attitude will start to reflect itself in ways consistent with it. Ministry will lose its excitement and become unattractive to us because it loses its value. And when something loses its value in someone’s estimation, along with it goes their commitment.

However, if we cherish the church, if we truly love the body of Christ and view it as the truest expression of family anywhere in the world, which it is (1 Cor. 12:12-14)—then it will show in our attitudes and responses to everyday serving. It will never merely be by way of “eye service,” rather it will gush forth like a raging river from our hearts onto the dry and thirsty soil of Christian ministry (Jn. 7:38).

How will this practically look in our church? Well, we will persevere in the faith by continuing the work that God has begun in each of us. Every humble servant of God among us will continue to serve in the capacity that they have, and excel all the more at it (Phil. 4:8).

Now, continuing does not entail mere maintenance. No, when we continue or persevere in the faith we should also strive for

*excellence* in what we do. We should strive to live up to the saying: “*Good, better, best. Never let me rest. Until my Good is better, and my better best...*” When we have this attitude toward God’s people and to serve them in this fashion, we are being scriptural. Long before this saying was even invented, the apostle Peter reminded his readers about this when, reminding them about the importance of a growing Christian character, he said:

“<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,<sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

While highlighting some of the Christian virtues to his readers, Peter, like Paul to the Colossians, emphasises their prevalence among the saved as a means of proving that they understand the gospel. When we actively “make every effort” to show our faith through good works and serving, it actually supports our already present understanding of our Lord’s example, who laid down his life for his sheep (Jn. 10:15). Largely because of its testimony of the transforming power of the gospel of Christ, these Christian “qualities” should be on the increase—we should really be excelling at them.

Finally, Peter warns his readers that if someone professes faith in the Lord Jesus, but does not have the qualities that vouch for it, they concede the fact that they know very little about the nature of their own salvation. He says: “For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was, cleansed from his former sins” (2 Pet. 1:9). To paraphrase what Peter says: If we lack luster in Christian ministry, and our commitment to whatever it is that we have already been doing starts to diminish, be it shying away from teaching a Sunday school class, or not reaching out to someone who is going through a trial, then we commit the grave error of forgetting that we have been forgiven for all our sins, past, present and future.

So my encouragement to us as a church is to *continue* running this race of the faith that we are in, with zeal and excellence (1 Cor.

9:24-27). May our disappointments in circumstances or individuals never overshadow our commitment to our Lord whom we serve indirectly, as we directly serve those He has placed around us (Matt. 18:5). This is the only ‘reasonable’ response to our great salvation (Lk. 7:47; Rom. 12:1-2; Rom. 16:19). May we never grow weary of doing good unto the saints, even to the point of pain and exhaustion (Gal. 6:9; 2 Cor. 11:24-30). Let’s take the advice of the writer of Hebrews who encouraged his readers this way:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-2).

This is wholesome advice dear saints. First, we have to continue to look to ourselves for personal sin and repent of it. Second, we have to continue to look to the race we are in and renew our commitment to running stronger, every day. Thirdly and lastly, we can never do this without keeping our eyes firmly “fixed” (NIV rendering) on Jesus—the one who made everything possible to begin with.

What are you “*fixin’ to*” do for the church of the living God, dear reader? Are you dreaming big dreams for God and his church? Or have you falsely persuaded yourself that you’ve done enough, and so have ceased your efforts. If so, I trust that you have been encouraged to pick yourself up again, and launch yourself back into ministry.