

Be of Good Courage

*“Be of good
courage, and he
shall strengthen
your heart, all ye
that hope in
the LORD.”
—Psalm 31:24*

The Scriptures encourage the Lord's people to be full of faith, hope, confidence, and trust. As we look out into the world we see particular reasons why this should be so. The majority of people in

the world are full of fear, apprehension, distrust, and worry. For this reason they fail to get the best out of life's opportunities. They see the pitfalls of sin and trouble in many different directions, and therefore they have reason to be distrustful, to be fearful.

True Christians, however, have come into a special relationship with God, and he with them. He has assured them that he will supervise their affairs, as would not have been their experience had they not come into relationship with him. They are, therefore, to hope and to trust in him. They are to heed the things which he has said, and to take courage in the thought that all of their experiences are under his supervision.—II Cor. 4:15-17

God's people have stepped out from the world and joined the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ—the standard of righteousness, truth, holiness, and opposition to sin. They will be beset by powerful enemies. Against them will be arrayed Satan himself, who will seek to oppose them, as he has opposed all of God's plans. He can make no direct attack upon the Lord, but he can attack his plan and those who believe in him. It is Satan who instigated the riots, the tumults, and the persecutions in the days of Jesus and the apostles, and who subsequently has brought about the oppression of the Lord's people ever since.—II Cor. 2:11; 11:14; II Thess. 2:7-10; I Pet. 5:8,9

Satan has not done these things with his own personal touch, but through his deluded servants. (II Thess. 2:11) He has always opposed righteousness and all those who love righteousness. On this account Christians need to have great courage; for if they allow the Adversary to beat their courage down, he may soon put them out of the battle entirely. A retreating soldier, who has lost courage, is of little use in battle. Instead of losing courage, we are to resign our earthly interests to our Father and trust him that in the present life he will guide us, and will overrule everything for good to those who are "the called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:28

Besides the Adversary, we have the general spirit of the world to oppose us. The world will often consider us foolish to think that we have any special divine supervision. Such a spirit may silently say to us, "God has made all the worlds, the thousands of angels, and everything in the universe. Do you imagine that he has any special interest in you? If there is a God, he is so great and we so small that

he cannot take any notice of us." Thus our faith may be beaten down. When we come in contact with worldly people we may find, as it were, a wet blanket thrown on our simple trust, even though they do not say a word to us. We need to have good courage and to hope in the Lord. As Paul expresses it: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God."—I Cor. 2:12

Additionally, we have our own fallen flesh. Each of us has in ourselves, in our own body, a most formidable opponent. (Rom. 7:18,25) The Scriptures represent that when we gave ourselves to the Lord and he gave us his Holy Spirit, we there began a transformation process and became embryo New Creatures "in Christ." (Rom. 12:1,2; II Cor. 5:17) This embryo New Creature, the new mind, will, and character, is developed in our mortal bodies until the moment of resurrection, or spiritual birth, when we shall pass from the earthly to the heavenly condition. "It [the New Creature] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."—I Cor. 15:42-44

Nevertheless, while we are in the flesh, we have all of its fallen tendencies with which to do battle. At the same time, as New Creatures we have disowned these—we have turned our backs upon sin. (Rom. 6:1,2,11,12) We have exchanged the earthly interests and hopes for the heavenly interests and hopes. By our daily experiences the Lord is testing us. We must be ever vigilant to overcome the flesh. It requires a great deal of courage to fight down its tendencies to sin. It requires still more courage that,

while continuously battling the weaknesses and frailties of our flesh, and conquering it in good measure, we should additionally engage in sacrifice and service to the Lord. All of this requires much courage, and of ourselves we are insufficient.—II Cor. 3:5; Phil. 3:3

We are exhorted to put our trust in the Lord, and are assured that we “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” us. (Phil. 4:13) His is the only power sufficient for us. It will require all our courage, all our faith and hope—every helpful element that we can put into the fight—in order to bring about final victory. However, the Lord supplies sufficient grace so that we may be overcomers. (II Cor. 12:9; Heb. 4:16) This does not mean that any of us will live a perfect life, or that we will always fully exercise good courage. We may fail from time to time, but our loving Heavenly Father is leading us on, and we will learn valuable lessons from our missteps.

Different Kinds of Courage

Some, having stronger faith and hope, with their minds fully centered on the Lord, have gone forward courageously. This is “good courage” in the sense of it being strong courage, proper courage. We might associate with our text the thought that our “hope in the LORD” is to be backed up and made strong by a good courage, a right kind of courage, a godly courage.

There is also a courage that is born of pride, which would say: “Do not back down. Do not let anybody get ahead of you.” In battle soldiers may vie with one another, having a desire to do something especially conspicuous, which will bring the applause of their leader or fellow soldiers. They need something to inspire *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) them—a desire for fame perhaps—in order to give them courage to risk losing their own lives, or to take the lives of other human beings. This is the kind of courage that will seemingly help them to gain the victory in their battle, though it be an unworthy motive for inspiring courage.

A courage from right principles, however, based on faith and trust in the Lord, is not one of swagger or boasting, but one that is noble and pleasing to God. It has its source in a realization of what God has promised, that he is watching and desires us to be joint-heirs with his Son in his kingdom. (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 3:21) He is thoroughly testing us to see whether we will prove faithful. This courage must always be to do things in the right way—the Lord’s way.

The Exhortation Applies in All Situations

This exhortation to proper courage affects us in every aspect of life, whether we are in one situation or another. It would apply to someone with a measure of power and influence—that such a one should be courageous enough to do the right thing—that which is understood to be the Lord’s will. Such courage would say to us, “Do your duty, whatever may be the Lord’s will for you. Hope in the Lord, even though your motive will often be misunderstood.” We should have the good courage to stand for what is right, whether our reward be in this life or in that life which is to come. We recall the words of the Lord to Joshua at the beginning of his leadership of Israel: “Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, ... turn not from it to the right hand or to the left.”—Josh. 1:7

The exhortation to be of good courage is also for the business person who is a Christian. Worldly friends may say, "You will fail in your business. You cannot advertise your business. If you tell the truth, the people will not patronize you; they will go to a place where a host of lies will be told them." If the Christian takes such advice, he or she may do a larger business but will make a failure of the chief affair in life—the development and practicing of a righteous character.

The same applies to all the Lord's consecrated people, regardless of situation or place in this life. Each is to advocate right principles, and not be faint-hearted or fearful to express the Christian character in word and deed. (John 3:21; James 1:22,25) Where there is a principle at stake we should take our stand and say, "My thought is thus and so, and I shall be obliged to maintain my position. I will content myself with doing what I feel is my duty, not wishing to coerce others; but I will be faithful to the principles I have come to believe." Thus even those who would think differently would know that the one speaking to them has a conviction, and was of good courage in expressing it in honesty and sincerity.—Rom. 12:17

Courage Proportionate to Faith

There are trials and difficulties in the life of all the footstep followers of Christ. The right kind of courage finds an opportunity to exercise itself in each of God's children. This is the kind of courage the Lord is looking for, and is such as must be found in overcomers. It is only to these that a place will be granted in the kingdom of heaven. Hence

the lesson of our text is: Be of good courage; for this is the way in which we shall demonstrate our faith in the Lord. Those who hope in him and are loyal to him will be courageous in proportion to their loyalty and their faith.—Matt. 9:29

This kind of courage will stand by us in all circumstances. Our Lord, in addressing his disciples on one occasion said, “You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake. ... Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.” (Matt. 10:18,19, *English Standard Version*) Here the thought seems to be: “Do not be worried if you shall be brought before those in authority.” The Lord’s people, whatever circumstances may arise, will have such faith and trust in God that they will conduct themselves courageously, relying on divine power in all of life’s experiences.

The way in which God will give us a mouth and wisdom may vary according to circumstances. It may be by suggestions from another; perhaps in the hearing of the experience of someone else; or it may be that a text of Scripture that would be especially helpful comes to our mind. The thought is that our trust is fully in the Lord, and that we are not to be fearful.—Heb. 13:6

The Lord addressed the words quoted above to his disciples—unlearned men. For them to be brought before “governors and kings” would naturally cause them much apprehension. What should they say? How could they answer those men—those great, learned men? The disciples were very humble, and they realized their ignorance; but the Lord guided them. Education was much less general

then, compared to today. Today, practically all are educated to some extent. Nevertheless, the assurance of the Lord would still apply to us now, just as it did to his disciples.

If we are in any straits or difficulties, we are to remember that the Scriptures assure us, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear [reverence] him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) This thought should tend to make us calm and collected in our minds, and should enable us to conduct ourselves courageously, knowing that we are in close relationship with him. Thus can we have full confidence in the Lord. Furthermore, we will realize that we are not wise enough to understand fully just what God’s purposes respecting us may be in each and every experience. We know not, therefore, how the Lord may overrule in this or that matter.

“Faith Can Firmly Trust Him”

The early disciples pondered as they thought of the things that Jesus had predicted for himself. With confidence, Peter had said to him, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16) They must have thought: How could God allow any harm to come to him? The disciples concluded that these things he had spoken must be just figures of speech, such as when he told them that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. (John 6:53-56) So now when he said, “the Son of man is ... to be crucified,” they thought it was one of his peculiar sayings that they could not understand.—Matt. 26:2

Hence the disciples were quite disturbed, wondering and astonished, when Jesus was arrested

and taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin, and instead of using his powers and his eloquence, he was silent, and allowed himself to be contradicted and maligned. Then their Master was taken before Pilate. Now, the disciples thought, Jesus surely will not hesitate before the Roman governor! Hence the surprise and astonishment of the disciples again when things turned out so contrary to what they had expected. Yet, such a course on our Lord's part was necessary in the Heavenly Father's plan, not merely for Jesus, that he might suffer and then enter into his glory, but necessary also for the world, because the redemption price, a perfect human life, must be provided as a "ransom for all."—I Tim. 2:5,6; I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:18

If in God's wisdom it is best in any way to bruise us and put us to shame, as was done with our Master, we are to be of good courage. He will strengthen our hearts, because we trust in him and have confidence in his overruling of our experiences. We know that he is too wise to err, and that there must be a motive, a reason for the permission, whatever it may be. We know assuredly that the saintly ones are precious in the sight of the Lord, and are as the apple of his eye.—Ps. 17:8

Whatever may be the outcome of any matter to us, we are to accept it as from the Lord, whether we are able to discern the reason for it or not. We are to have faith and hope, even though the way is rough, and though things might seem to be the very reverse of what we expected. "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."—Ps. 27:14 ■