

Walking by Faith, not by Sight

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”
—II Corinthians 5:7

In Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth, a most important lesson is found in our opening verse. The Lord’s followers are to “walk by faith, not by sight.” A few verses earlier Paul begins by stating, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle [Greek: temporary residence] were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—II Cor. 5:1

Here Paul describes the Christian’s present sojourn on earth as being a “tabernacle,” or temporary condition. He then contrasts this with a prospective, future eternal life in heaven, likening it to a permanent structure, a “building of God ... not made with hands.” Indeed, our present earthly life is a relatively short span of time compared to a future of eternity. A realization of this is a great assistance, giving us a proper perspective concerning each experience we have at the present time.

In the previous chapter Paul highlights this perspective, writing, “This light, temporary nature of

our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison, because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18, *International Standard Version*

Paul then uses the illustration of clothing to teach an additional lesson, writing, “In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” (II Cor. 5:2) Here the expression “to be clothed upon” refers to the apostle’s earnest desire to be faithful to the Lord, in order to be granted an eternal, spiritual body. Paul then identifies a necessary requirement which must first be met at the present time in order to be granted a future, spiritual body; and thus he uses the qualifier, “if so be,” in verse 3. “If so be that being clothed [Greek: *enduo*] we shall not be found naked.”

Put on Christ

In the New Testament the Greek word *enduo* is used on several occasions when referring to putting on a literal garment. (Matt. 6:25; Mark 1:6; 15:17) However, in our lesson and elsewhere in his writings, Paul uses this Greek word in a higher, spiritual sense—to describe our development of a Christlike character, to “put on” Christ. (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27) Elsewhere, he explains that to “put on” Christ includes the development of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and unselfish agape love.—Col. 3:12-14

We believe these elements of Christian character are what Paul is referring to in II Corinthians 5:3 when he writes concerning "being clothed." A lack of development in these fruits of the Holy Spirit in our character is likened to being without clothing, which Paul describes as being "found naked." It is noteworthy that the Apostle John, using the same illustration of nakedness, particularly warns the Lord's followers living near the close of the present age.—Rev. 3:17; 16:15

Paul continues, "Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest [Greek: pledge] of the Spirit." (II Cor. 5:5) God grants to the consecrated at the present time a measure of his Holy Spirit as a pledge, or assurance, of the future grand and glorious results for which they are hoping, striving, and praying for in their daily walk of faith.

"Therefore we are always confident [Greek: of good courage], knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." (vs. 6) Herein is a warning. To be "at home in the body" denotes feeling contented with present conditions, including our own spiritual development. To have such an attitude may indicate that we are not living as near to the Lord as we should.

Whereas Paul stated concerning his own development, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:13,14

Walking by Faith

How are we to “walk by faith,” and “not by sight?” First, by continually reading and studying the Word of God. This is how we learn and remember his principles of righteousness, and have fresh in our minds the many blessed promises which the Heavenly Father has given to us as we seek to please him.—Ps. 119:97-104

Our Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit, “the spirit of truth,” would be sent by the Father upon his people. This was to be a holy power and influence to help guide and direct Jesus’ followers by providing them a greater understanding of the writings and teachings in both the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is of great assistance to us in walking by faith and not by sight.—John 15:26; 16:7,13

Additionally, we learn to walk by faith and not by sight by striving to take everything to God in prayer, seeking to know his will respecting all of life’s matters, and asking him to direct our thoughts, words, and conduct. (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6-7; Col. 4:2) During the Prophet Jeremiah’s second imprisonment, the word of the Lord came to him, saying: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee.” (Jer. 33:1-3) God’s answers to our petitions to him may come in various ways. They may come to us as we read and study the Bible, from our meetings together with fellow brethren, through divine providential overruling in our life, or through the combination of some or all of these ways.

We should also continually commit our mind to God, asking him to guide our judgment and reason. (Prov. 3:5,6; Jer. 17:7,8) Then, we should go forth

and use these qualities as best we can, always looking for his providential leading and direction. In short, we cannot day by day follow the Lord except as we are willing to walk by faith and not by sight. This is the test which is placed upon each of the Lord's footstep followers.

Beware of Corrupt Teaching

Earlier in his letter Paul warned there would be many who would attempt to "corrupt the word of God," whereas Paul himself earnestly strived, with "sincerity," to speak and teach about Christ. (II Cor. 2:17) One corruption being taught by some is the false idea that the Lord's followers are so much under God's protection that all of their non-spiritual matters should prosper—that is, they should have abundant financial resources, many material possessions, good health, success in business, and immense popularity. Such false reasoning suggests that believing in Jesus assures one to have earthly favors now. Concerning this, what do the Scriptures say? What is the Bible record regarding the experiences of Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church?

Promises to God's People

During Old Testament times, God promised the Israelites earthly blessings if they observed and followed his commandments. Such promises included freedom from diseases, material prosperity, and peace from their enemies. (Exod. 15:26; Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-11) These temporal blessings, however, were an illustration of the terms and conditions which will prevail on earth during God's promised kingdom, which will soon be established

throughout the whole earth during the Messianic Age.—Isa. 35:5-10; 65:21-23; Joel 2:18-27

During the present Gospel Age, however, the Lord's followers are not promised earthly material blessings, nor freedom from illness. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples, saying: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."—Matt. 5:10-12

Here Jesus clearly did not promise his followers that they would be materially blessed, nor that they would be immune from trials and difficulties. Instead, he admonished that his people should expect to be persecuted and falsely accused for his sake; and that when this happens, they should "rejoice, and be exceeding glad." From a natural, human standpoint, this is nearly impossible to do. However, from a spiritual standpoint, it is possible through the promises given to us in the Scriptures, indicating that the results of such trying experiences, if we are rightly "exercised thereby," will ultimately lead to a glorious, eternal blessing.—Heb. 12:11

Satan would like to have us walk by sight, and not by faith. He would like to have us continually tempting God, requiring some outward demonstration of divine favor and protection, instead of accepting the testimony of his Word and, with implicit trust, walking by faith. God has arranged that his prospective spiritual family should learn to walk by

faith. Therefore, he gives to each of us individual trials of faith, which frequently permit suffering and disadvantage in earthly affairs. Our Heavenly Father purposely allows this in order to develop and test our loyalty and obedience to him, and to his principles of righteousness.

Paul's Experiences

Later in his letter Paul recounts some of his Christian experiences, which undoubtedly were both physically and mentally difficult. (II Cor. 11:23-30) The apostle did not consider himself disowned of God under such experiences. Instead, he gloried in them as part of the sacrifice he was willing to make for the Lord's sake. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; ... experience; and ... hope," because difficult experiences help to develop in us a Christlike character.—Rom. 5:3-5

Further on in his letter Paul recalls the words which the Lord gave to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The apostle then states, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."—II Cor. 12:9,10, *English Standard Version*

When we feel self-confident, trusting in self and our own abilities, this is dangerous because we are actually becoming proud, which weakens our faith. (Prov. 6:16,17; 16:5,18) In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian brethren, he identifies the nation of Israel in Old Testament times as being an important illustration, stating, "These things happened

to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction. ... Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”—I Cor. 10:1-12, *ESV*

The more we recognize our own weaknesses and inabilities, and increase our reliance upon the Lord for grace, help, guidance, and strength, the more we will “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Eph. 6:10) “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”—Prov. 3:5,6

Apostle Peter’s Admonitions

The Apostle Peter spoke concerning the experiences that the Lord’s followers should expect, writing, “When ye do well, and suffer for it,” and “take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” (I Pet. 2:19,20) He points out, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (vss. 21-23) Jesus suffered much for having done only good.

Later Peter states, “if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye,” and “if the will of God be so,” be ready to “suffer for well doing.” (I Pet. 3:14,17) He further writes, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of

Christ's sufferings. ... If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. ... If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet. 4:12-16

As the Lord's dedicated followers, when we go through difficult experiences, we should not think of them as peculiar, as though "some strange thing happened" to us. Rather, we should remind ourselves that corresponding trials have happened to all the prospective members of the body of Christ since Pentecost, and these will continue until the final members of the church have each been tested, polished, accepted, and glorified.

When experiencing oppositions in the home; persecution from former friends, neighbors, or others; if we suffer financial disaster, poverty, sickness, pain, or physical accident; in all of these things the Lord's people are to be content, conscious of the Father's love and providential care in respect to their every interest.—Phil. 4:12,13; I Tim. 6:6; I Pet. 5:6,7

Having full confidence while going through difficulties is a part of the development of faith. To be assured that we are children and "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," and to have faith in the Heavenly Father's oversight, while at the same time suffering difficult experiences permitted by divine providence, is a severe test of faith. (Rom. 8:17) We must walk by faith and not by sight, if we are to be eventually accepted as part of Christ's "little flock." (Luke 12:32) Let us then receive with confidence, love, and trust, whatever benefits or troubles the Lord's providence may permit to come

upon us. Let us profit from them, learning the needed lessons contained in each experience.

Paul writes, “No trial has assailed you except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) If the fire becomes so hot that to go any further would injure or destroy us spiritually, the Lord will prevent this, because “he knoweth our frame.” He is “gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.”—Ps. 103:14; 145:8

Experiences of Jesus and the Early Church

God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, was “one tested in all respects.” (Heb. 4:15, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Therefore, it should not be our expectation to be spared difficulties, including experiences such as loss of honor amongst men, suffering slander, or being less than prosperous financially, compared to others. (II Cor. 6:1-10, *ESV*) We should remember that our Master willingly “made himself of no reputation,” and “though he was rich, yet ... he became poor,” in his desire that others “might be rich” in faith and, if faithful unto death, become joint-heirs with him.—Phil. 2:7; II Cor. 8:9

Frequently the apostles and early church members had difficult experiences. Timothy’s “often infirmities,” Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” and Epaphroditus’ sickness “nigh unto death,” were various physical ailments that came about due to their faithfulness in serving the Lord. Similarly, such experiences are also permitted now upon the Lord’s

faithful followers.—I Tim. 5:23; II Cor. 12:7; Phil. 2:25-27,30

Types of Suffering

We should distinguish, however, between suffering for righteousness' sake and suffering for wrongdoing. The Apostle Peter admonishes, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." (I Pet. 4:15) Paul further points out that the doing of evil things may result in deserved personal suffering coming to us.—Phil. 3:18,19

On the other hand, when, in our best judgment, we see a door of opportunity open to us by God's providence, we should enter into it zealously and self-sacrificingly. If, then, it results in physical or social suffering, which others might consider as the consequences of foolishness, let us "not be ashamed," but instead let us "glorify God" on behalf of such afflictions, rejoicing to have been "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." —I Pet. 4:16; Acts 5:41

If illness or disease comes to us which is not a result of sinful or selfish behavior, we should endeavor to receive such experiences with patience and thanksgiving, realizing God has permitted us to have these experiences. Furthermore, we should strive to learn the spiritual lessons from such trials, including the need to have more compassion and sympathy for the poor groaning creation. During Jesus' First Advent, it is recorded numerous times that he was "moved with compassion" for others.—Matt. 9:35,36; 14:14; 20:34

God has not promised to miraculously repair our mortal human body. Such miracles would likely be

injurious to us spiritually, because they would lead us to walk by sight, and not by faith. Instead, God justifies us by faith, while leaving us, physically, imperfect. We should constantly remember that his dealings with us at the present time are not according to the flesh, but as “a new creature,” and that our “flesh profiteth nothing.” (II Cor. 5:17; John 6:63) We have dedicated our flesh to being used up in serving and obeying the Lord, even unto death. Therefore, our chief concern must be to develop our spiritual New Creature—the new mind, will, and character, reflecting the image of Christ.—II Cor. 3:18

Jesus miraculously fed the multitudes. Should we therefore expect to be miraculously fed? On the contrary, just as our Lord Jesus, the head of the New Creation, refused to call upon divine power for his own personal comfort or protection, neither should we as his followers. (Matt. 4:2-4; 26:53) Our Lord never prayed for deliverance from natural troubles, but cheerfully endured them as a part of his sacrifice; and so we must do also.

Life's Experiences

While God's Word is the basis for all our instruction, yet it is not our only source of knowledge. There are various lessons to be learned through the many different events of our life. God's providences lead us into these experiences in order that we may develop spiritually. Our experiences and providences cause us to think, appreciate, study, and ask ourselves: “What does this experience mean?” “What spiritual lesson should I learn from it?”

God has called us with a “heavenly calling,” to receive, if faithful unto death, divine, spirit life.

(Heb. 3:1; II Pet. 1:4) Our hoped-for eternal destiny is not that of an earthly nature. The real object and purpose of our call is to fit and prepare us to be God's New Creation, superior to men and to angels. As we grow to appreciate the full scope of God's plan, we see a reason why God is permitting us to have trials and adverse experiences now. Our Lord Jesus was to be a merciful High Priest; hence, if such experiences and sufferings were necessary for him, how much more are they needed for our spiritual development.—Heb. 5:8,9

The Result of Trials

A metallurgist tries metals and “proves” them. He does this by heating the metal to a high temperature and then adding a flux, a substance which facilitates the removal of impurities from the metal. So too, the Lord proves each of his followers in order, if we are rightly “exercised thereby,” to take away the impurities in our character, by the experiences he permits us to have. (Heb. 12:5-11; Deut. 13:3) As the impurities in our heart and mind become apparent to us, we will more and more cooperate with God in their elimination. Let us remember, too, that it is not necessarily true that the one having the most trying experiences has the most impurities. Jesus had more trials than any of his followers, and yet he was perfect.

Tests are also permitted to prove the degree of our faithfulness to God, and to see how much we are willing to endure for “his sake.” Thus, true Christians grow in holiness, being sanctified through the Truth. (John 17:17,19) The word “sanctify” embodies the thought, “to make holy.” (Lev. 20:7-8)

God's truths have a sanctifying power in the heart because they fill the longing of our innermost desires. Every day of our lives should make us more sanctified, more fit for God's service in the future.

Paul explains, "This light, temporary nature of our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison." (II Cor. 4:17, *ISV*) Let us remember that, while going through difficulties and trials, the brightness of our future will depend upon the heart and character development we attain now, at the present time, as a result of our "walk by faith, not by sight." ■

Please, Lord

Lord, endow me with strength to face

Life's biggest griefs and ills,

And give me also grace to bear

Life's little cares and chills.

Oh, make me patient, loving, kind—

Please grant me, Lord, a quiet mind!

—Carol Kittinger Hindle