

Things Worth Striving For

AS CHRISTIANS AND students of the Bible, our minds often turn to that sacrifice that our dear Lord and Savior made on our behalf. We think of the physical and mental suffering that he must have gone through, and we can only imagine the pain and the anguish that he endured as he voluntarily stayed the course.

Yet, through all of this suffering, our Lord persevered unwaveringly, setting an example for each and every one of his footstep followers to copy to the best of their ability. An example which shines so brightly that, in the eyes of those who truly love the Lord, there is nothing more worthwhile.

It is these examples that our Lord set that we feel are things worth striving for. We will consider them at this time, keeping in mind that they should be first and foremost in our lives.

CHEERFUL ENDURANCE

The first thing that we feel is worth striving for is cheerful endurance which will use stumbling stones as stepping stones. Let us consider two scripture

texts. The first is, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.” (Ps. 27:14) The Lord asks us to patiently watch and wait until we learn what he would have us do, rather than we minister to him, trying to determine our own course according to our personal understandings. All of this takes courage, fortitude, and persistency. It is never easy to wait patiently.

The second scripture we will consider on this point of cheerful endurance reads, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:28,29) God has promised that only those things happen to us that are for our highest good. In other words, we must realize that all of life’s experiences are under Divine supervision, which to every one of us should be a source of power and strength. So, no matter what the seeming delays, difficulties, troubles, persecutions, and so-called disasters that come upon us during the course of our life, always keep in mind that these things are shaping and fitting us for things to come that we can’t even begin to imagine. Therefore, we should rejoice at all times, under all circumstances, and give thanks to God for all things.

This then, in turn, leads to character building. The Lord’s people must each individually, in character, become copies of our Lord. In order to copy our Lord in character, we must give up our own wills, hopes, and ambitions as regards earthly interests. That takes

a lot of faith, but we must all remember that in I Corinthians 10:13 we are given the promise that the Lord will not permit us to be “tempted,” or tested, above what we are able to bear.

Our Lord cheerfully endured all things during his lifetime, even unto the end as he died on the cross, that we all might have the opportunity of everlasting life.

ZEAL

The second thing worth striving for is zeal, which can never do enough, yet seeks no credit and encourages no compliments. This is quite aptly pointed out to us by the following scripture, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”—Col. 3:23,24

The persons who are earnest and zealous to serve the Lord, are so willing and so anxious for the opportunity that they will do what their hands find to do. They will also do things unto the Lord, trying to please him rather than men, because of the understanding that only the Lord can provide the great reward of the inheritance. The slightest service done to the least of his brethren is accepted as done to himself.

Once again we see that example of zeal in our Lord Jesus, by the fact that he received from his Father and our Father, his God and our God, all that he has given, or will give, to us. This also set the example that all who would be followers of him shall be servants, not merely in name, but in deed, truth and spirit.

GOODNESS

The third thing worth striving for is goodness, which delights itself in the spiritual welfare of one's brethren. This lesson is illustrated by the following scripture, where we read, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."—Phil. 2:1-4

These scriptures tell us several things. First, we should look for the good qualities in others. Second, we should be full of joy, just as Paul was, when we see the brethren truly loving, sympathizing with, and consoling one another. This would be an indication of unity of spirit, fellowship, and mind. Third, we should do everything to the glory of God. Trying to build oneself up, and striving for preeminence, are the greatest enemies to the Spirit of the LORD. Humility—God cannot exalt any who are not humble. Submission to the will of God indicates faith. We should always think soberly of ourselves. All of our powers come from God. The fact that God has given us a gift indicates that we lacked it. If we look at our own imperfections and the good qualities of others, we shall find ourselves more and more appreciative of others. On the other hand, if we look at the imperfections of others and the good qualities of ourselves, we shall find it more and more difficult to be appreciative of our brethren. Fourth, we shouldn't be overly concerning ourselves with

our own troubles and interests and welfare and talents. Rather we should be concerned with the welfare and happiness of others.

We see the example of our Lord, when he made this promise to his footstep followers. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."—Matt. 11:28-30

Our Lord is promising us a rest, or peace of mind, which can only come through a knowledge of God's plan and character. It can never come from anything in this world. Our Lord invites us to take his yoke, and he will be our partner, taking the other side of the yoke. The secret of rest is in a quiet and meek spirit. Jesus was 'meek and lowly in heart,' and took upon him the yoke of the Father's will, thus setting an example for all of us to follow.

HOPE

The fourth thing worth striving for is hope, which accounts the sufferings of Christ as a temporary light affliction. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. . . . And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."—II Cor. 1:3-7

God is referred to as a 'God of all comfort' because he is working all things for the ultimate comfort of as many of his creatures as will accept his favors, after being brought to a knowledge of the truth respecting them. We have been comforted often, in order to offset the adverse conditions incident to the present pilgrim way. And brethren, it is only after we ourselves have been comforted, that we are qualified to comfort others in the scriptural sense. This might be while still in the flesh, or beyond the veil. All of our lessons and experiences make us capable of communicating comfort to others.

The word comfort does not necessarily contain the thought of relief, but rather that of 'strengthen together,' or added strength. The Lord's people need this comforting, as well as the apostles needed it, even though they were strong. Therefore, we should rejoice to be partakers of Christ's suffering, which we know will require all of the present Gospel Age to complete. We are reminded of this consolation as we read, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (John 16:20) "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Cor. 4:16-18

Our lives are that of continual trials which we must endure but these are minimized by the spirit of a sound mind, which gives us that hope. Our old nature dies in gradual increments which corresponds

exactly to how our new nature grows in increments. This can be likened to the sand in an hourglass flowing from one compartment to the other. This new nature is renewed, strengthened, and built up in the image of God.

The trials that grind, and polish, and shape us come in many forms. They can be the battles with our own flesh, from the world, Satan, from our families, and from the brethren. This warfare is waged between the old nature and the new, whose interests are so antagonistic, that the development and victory of one means the overthrow and destruction of the other.

We are told through the Scriptures not to look for the things that are seen, such as popularity, worldly show, denominational greatness, earthly applause and glory, because they are temporal; but rather to look for the things that are not seen—the spiritual things, the glories to come, the crown, the throne, the church—because these things are forever, and can never be taken away. When the trials are all over, the Lord will make up for all his children have suffered.

Our Lord's life was a testimonial of hope. His hope in the promises of his Heavenly Father was so great, that he did everything asked of him by the Father without questioning or murmuring.

WISDOM

The fifth thing that we feel is worth striving for is wisdom, which knows how and when to speak and when to be silent. "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."—James 3:13

Knowledge truly is important, but only as it develops wisdom, sound judgment, and pure and high-toned sentiment. We will be judged by our conduct, not by our profession. Our meekness and humility must be fashioned after the example set for us by our Lord.

“Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”—Col. 4:3-6

We should pray for one another, not only that we make our calling and election sure, but more importantly that we have an opportunity of service, and the wisdom in presenting the message to others in meekness, humility and gentleness.

We also should secure out of this evil time as large a proportion of time as may be possible for devotion to our own, and others, spiritual welfare, always keeping in mind that this opportunity will never again be enjoyed.

We should pray that the spirit of the Truth fills our heart to the extent that what we say is a praise unto the Lord, and an enlightenment and profit to our opposers, as well as our brethren.

Our words should also be seasoned with salt or, in other words, we should speak the Truth, which like salt has the power of preserving from decay that which is good and pure.

Our Lord always spoke carefully, with meekness, humility, and gentleness. His words represented the

Truth in its purest form. He spent all of his consecrated life preaching that Truth to all those who would hear, in a humble and sincere manner, always praying to his Heavenly Father for guidance.

LOYALTY

The sixth thing worth striving for is loyalty, which even one's own weaknesses and failings cannot dishearten. "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief."—Prov. 24:16

'A just man' will stumble for various reasons, but he will not fall into sin. If the heart is right, the Lord will show him his mistake, and also a way to recover from that mistake. We all have fleshly bodies, and along with them the weaknesses of the flesh. So it is that sometimes the greatest battles in our Christian lives take place within ourselves.

"Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." (I Thess. 5:24) What God has promised, he is able to perform. We needn't ever worry that we are being called to something we are not able to attain. If anyone breaks the contract, it will be ourselves. God will surely carry out his part. He will do for us exceedingly, abundantly, more than we could have thought, or asked, or expected. The Lord knows what is in our hearts, and is well pleased with our imperfect service, when done in a way that is according to his will. So therefore, brethren, our loyalty to the Lord should never be compromised because we have the assurance that God will surely do his part. Think of Jesus' faith and loyalty.

A FORGIVING SPIRIT

The seventh thing worth striving for is a forgiving spirit, which harbors no ill feelings toward anyone. “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”—Matt. 6:14

What better example could we think of than that of the prodigal son. We should be like that father who, when he saw the repentant one coming in the attitude of humility, had his heart touched, and went out part way to meet him, to forgive him, to greet him kindly, and put on the robe of fullest fellowship and brotherhood.

Sometimes we are too inclined to look at the justice of God’s character, copy it, and deal severely with our debtors. However, the Lord is quite clear that the grandest elements of his character are love, sympathy, kindness, and forbearance. God is ready to forgive the loving and generous who are seeking to copy his character. Only the merciful shall obtain mercy; and if we have not mercy at the hands of the Lord, all is lost. This is summed up very well by the scripture, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”—Matt. 5:7

“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32) God delights in mercy, generosity, and sympathy. He forgives us ‘for Christ’s sake,’ because Christ paid the penalty and satisfied justice.

“[Christ] became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” that we might be forgiven. (Phil. 2:8) Jesus modeled this forgiving spirit to the end, when he hung on the cross, and said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”—Luke 23:34

FAITH

The eighth thing worth striving for is faith, which rests in the Lord's providential care, without murmuring or complaining. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."—Phil. 4:11

Apostle Paul was not in want, for he was satisfied that the Father would provide the things which he really needed. Beyond that, he did not want anything more. Paul and the other apostles set the example of contentment, in being in whatever condition in which duty required them to be. They also displayed joyful anticipation, and cheerful submission. So, if we use our talents and opportunities to the best of our ability, we should be content with the result of such efforts, even if they yield only the barest necessities of life. After all, did our Lord accumulate anything during his life here on earth? Of course not. All he had were the clothes on his back, and even those were bartered away as he hung on the cross.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (I Tim. 6:6-10) These verses don't need much commentary. However, we will point out that the Apostle Paul did not say that money was evil or was the root of

evil. He said the ‘love of money’ was the root of evil. Having money and other possessions is not necessarily wrong, but being greedy for money and other possessions is wrong; and will lead to all kinds of trouble.

“He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”—Luke 12:1

CHARACTER

The ninth thing worth striving for is character which shines as brightly in the home as in the congregation of the Lord’s people. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”—I Cor. 10:31-33

Paul sums up his argument in favor of loving consideration for our brethren and liberty of conscience for ourselves. In his Word, the Lord sets the standard of a sound mind, not only in respect to revelry and the use of liquor, but also to food and drink, clothing, all manner of conduct; in fact to every interest and affair of life. Paul asks us to do things in moderation, to be willing to sacrifice self-gratification in the interest of others. He also carries this thought of our personal responsibility in seeking God’s glory to its legitimate conclusion. Anything that would be a hindrance to the spread of the Lord’s cause, a dishonor to the Truth in the sight of others, or a stumbling stone to other brethren, should be sacrificed.

This sacrifice would be considered as a service unto the Lord. The humblest kind of service is acceptable to the Lord if prompted by love. Jesus' life showed his perfect character at all times, regardless of the circumstances he was in. He set the standard to which we strive.

LOVE

The tenth thing worth striving for is love, which ever seeks to reciprocate God's love in heart obedience, praise, and thanksgiving. "She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."—Ruth 2:10-12.

The story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth is one of great dedication on the part of Ruth, and equally great compassion on the part of Boaz. Ruth, having lost her husband, dedicated herself to helping to provide for her mother-in-law. When Boaz came to know of her service to Naomi, he allowed her to glean wherever she wanted in his fields, even amongst the sheaves. He commanded his men to let some grain fall to the ground intentionally so that there would be more to glean. He also instructed that she was not to be shamed in any way. Boaz told her

that this privilege he was giving her was compensation and reward from God for her service, and for her trust in God in a strange land.

Our Lord Jesus also displayed his love for God by obeying his Father's will. He also gave credit and praise to his Heavenly Father, and thanks for all things in a very humble and sincere fashion. For this, God also gave Jesus compensation and reward for his faithfulness, trust, and love in him.

Finally, we would like to say that, if our Lord thought these were important enough things to strive for, that he modeled them through his life and actions, so must we also think these things are worth striving for, and make every effort to reflect and model them in our lives and actions as a praise unto the Lord, as we run for the prize of the High Calling.

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