

Unmovable and Abounding

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
—*I Corinthians 15:58*

STEADFASTNESS IS A PAR-amount requisite to Christian faithfulness. One who is unmovable from his position of loyalty to God and to the Truth will also abound in the work of the Lord, for the Truth calls upon a Christian to sacrifice all that he has in its service. It is evident, therefore, that to be “steadfast and unmovable” does not mean to stand still or to be idle.

A similar thought to the one expressed in our text is set forth in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where he admonishes us to “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, . . . and having done all, to stand.” (Eph. 6:11,13) We are to make every possible use of the Truth as a defensive armor against the fiery darts of doubt and unbelief, and against all the subtle attacks of Satan, that we may be able to

stand our ground in the Christian warfare. It is those who are thus steadfast and unmovable in the Truth who are the best fitted for “abounding in the work of the Lord.”

We are admonished in the Scriptures to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 3:18) We are also informed that the “path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Prov. 4:18) There are many Scriptures which indicate that the Lord desires our knowledge of the Truth to increase with the passing years. He wants our understanding of his plan to become ever clearer and more comprehensive. We should be guided by these admonitions and search the Scriptures daily that our knowledge of the Truth might, by God’s grace, be increased.

NEW LIGHT?

However, it is also well to note that there is a great danger of not holding fast to what we have learned. The history of the church indicates that many have fallen from their steadfastness in this regard. Scriptures which enjoin upon every Christian the importance of growing in knowledge have been sometimes misused as an excuse for seeking and developing “new light.” Oftentimes, the new light which has been discovered and put forth in the name of making progress has turned out to be not new light, but old error—that is, some doctrine or theory long held by one or more branches of nominal Christendom.

Indeed, our understanding of the Truth is progressive, and “the path of the just” does shine

“more and more unto the perfect day.” All who have been enlightened by the Truth can testify to its increasing clarity, as each day they see in it depths and beauties which they had never before noticed. We all rejoice in this proper growth in knowledge. However, when we find it necessary to discard this or that doctrine of the Truth in order to accept some appealing new theory, we should realize that this is not true progress in grace and knowledge, but a letting slip of truths once learned and proven.

The apostle urges us to take “more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” (Heb. 2:1) He also admonishes us to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” (chap. 10:23) There is a great need for all of us to watch ourselves well along this line. One of the weaknesses of the fallen flesh is that of soon becoming weary of anything that is undertaken. Steadfastness is a virtue sadly lacking in most members of the fallen race. True followers of Christ, however, should seek to develop it, and as they grow stronger along this line, to employ their growing strength to a more resolute and enthusiastic stand for the truths which they have learned and which they have proven by the Scriptures.

There has never been a time in the whole history of Christianity when steadfastness in doctrine and practice was more essential, yet severely lacking, than it is now. A looseness of thought is permeating the minds of people everywhere. One of the insecure foundations of modern thinking is the plea of “open-mindedness.” Although sounding reasonable on the surface, it really fosters the confusion of having

one's mind filled with many ideas while not actually believing any consistent thread of doctrine. This modern viewpoint is a sure recipe for eventual faithlessness and instability, and like all other worldly ideas, keeps knocking at the door of the Christian's heart. It is important that through prayer and a constant and earnest study of the Word of truth, we be fortified against it.

The great majority of the teachers in Christianity today hold to this modern philosophy of being established in nothing, or at best, very little, from a doctrinal standpoint. In their own hearts, they may or may not still hold to the traditional creeds of the churches in which they preach. This uncertainty is due to the fact that only occasionally, and then very vaguely, do they preach doctrine to their congregations. By failing to say anything about the doctrines of their respective church creeds, they are allowing them gradually to be forgotten by the people, while from Sunday to Sunday they preach on moral philosophy, social issues, prosperity achievement, politics, and other mostly nonreligious topics of the day.

NOT OUR PATTERN

We should not expect anything else from the majority of the church systems of our day. These are what the revelator describes by the symbolic term "Babylon"—meaning confusion. Truly, this confusion is great, and on the increase. The growing lack of faith in the inspiration and authority of the Bible's clear teachings has been prophesied in the Scriptures, so we are not surprised. Certainly, therefore, those who are enlightened by the Truth should not

seek to copy the example of being “broad-minded” and “open-minded” regarding what is clearly taught in the Scriptures, realizing that these terms are merely subtle descriptions of unbelief.

We are to be especially concerned with the condition described above if we see any tendency among ourselves to succumb to its subtle influence. On occasion, this tendency may be noted. We may hear the expression among our fellowship, “We should be open-minded, you know.” We must be very wary of such statements, especially if they are made with reference to fundamental doctrine. In some cases, this remark may even be made in such a manner as almost to cause some to feel that they are wrong in definitely believing and holding to a specific item of truth.

Indeed, from the standpoint of the modern unbeliever, who may pose as an outstanding example of one who exercises a noble Christian spirit, it is wrong to believe anything with strong conviction. According to this modern theory of being “broad-minded,” a Christian should stand willing to change his mind on any feature of the Truth, or at least be ready to question it, whenever a suggestion of doubt may be cast upon it. He should thus even be ready to discard his faith, regardless of the fact that over and over again he has proven his “profession of faith” by the inspired Word of God. Brethren, let us not be ensnared by any such alluring “wiles of the devil.”—Eph. 6:11

“THEREFORE”

The admonition of our text to be steadfast and unmovable is prefaced by that very meaningful word “therefore.” This indicates that the thoughts

which follow are related to what has preceded and are in reality the object of the lesson—the conclusion of the facts previously stated. What is the main discussion of this chapter? It is the resurrection of the dead, beginning with the resurrection of Jesus; then the resurrection of his body members; and finally the resurrection of all mankind, when tears will be wiped away and the sting of death removed.

The chapter reveals that in the church at Corinth there were some who were not steadfast in their belief of this basic truth of the Gospel. “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Paul asks. (I Cor. 15:12) False doctrine had come into the church, or we might better say, a lack of belief in the true doctrine was occurring. Paul, with all the logic and persuasion he could command, stood firmly to protect the people of God against this fiery dart of the Adversary.

Paul was not one to take the viewpoint, “What difference does it make what one believes as long as he professes to be consecrated and tries to be Christlike?” Rather, he knew that every fundamental part of God’s plan bears a vital relationship to every other part—hence, one cannot accept what he wishes of the Gospel and doubt or reject the rest, yet be truly pleasing to God. Paul knew that it is the Truth which sanctifies us for the service of God (John 17:17), and that if any key part of the Truth is lacking in our faith structure, we cannot be qualified to serve God acceptably.

The particular question at issue in the church at Corinth was belief in the resurrection. In this chapter of the epistle, Paul reminds us of how futile the whole Christian life would be if there

were to be no resurrection of the dead. We are suffering and dying with Christ so that we may have the blessed privilege of reigning with him for the blessing of the dead world, by raising them from the sleep of death. However, all of this would be in vain, Paul shows, if there is to be no resurrection of the dead.

“Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die,” wrote Paul in his dramatic approach to this serious error which had crept into the Corinthian church. “Why stand we in jeopardy every hour” if death is to end everything? Why should any of us put ourselves in the position where we are persecuted; or why should we use time and strength and means in the service of the Lord and the brethren, if there be no resurrection of the dead?—I Cor. 15:30,32

Many efforts of the follower of Christ who endeavors to let his light shine in this dark world cost him weariness, misunderstanding, and persecution, because the darkness hateth the light. However, it is all worthwhile, Paul argues, because there is to be a resurrection of the dead. All the promises of God for both these and the world in general are to be fulfilled. The faithful followers of Christ will be raised to celestial glory with Jesus, and the world will be restored to the terrestrial glory originally possessed by “the first man Adam,” upon proving their obedience to God’s righteous laws. (vs. 45) Because this is true, and because there is a real objective in Christian’s sacrifice, our “labor is not in vain in the Lord,” and because our labor is not in vain, we should abound “in the work of the Lord.”

When Paul argued the point of the resurrection, he had to resort to available evidence and to the promises of God in order to support his position.

He could not say to the brethren at Corinth that he would bring Jesus to visit them and then they would know that he had been raised from the dead. For those who wanted to doubt, there was no absolute proof. The best that could be said was that men of integrity had seen Jesus when he manifested himself to them. (vss. 5-7) To this Paul could add that he had seen Jesus as “one born out of [or, before] due time.”—vs. 8

Those upon whom the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost rejoiced in that wonderful experience as further evidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead and, having returned to the heavenly courts, had fulfilled the promise he had made to send the Comforter to them. (John 14:16,17) However, here again it was a living faith which turned things hoped for and unseen into “substance” and “evidence” upon which they could lay hold. (Heb. 11:1) Firmly grasping thereto, they could stand up against every “wind” of false doctrine which sought to take away from them their cherished belief and the source of their inspiration and joy.

That which satisfied the hearts and minds of the apostles concerning the resurrection of Jesus satisfies us today. We, too, believe that he was raised from the dead, not because we can see him or touch him, but because we believe the testimony of the inspired apostles. They believed and bore witness to their belief because they were satisfied with the evidence at hand.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IMPORTANT

Properly, we think of the ransom as the great central theme of God's plan of salvation. However,

it is well to remember that in order for the human race to be ransomed and later restored to at-onement with God, the divine plan called for the presence of his only begotten son, Jesus, in the affairs of earth, first to die for the people and later to establish a kingdom for their blessing. In a sense, Jesus' First and Second Presence are for the same ultimate purpose, separated by the Gospel Age during which his body members are being selected to share with him in the work of his coming kingdom.

Most of the prophets promised this visit to earth by a royal representative of heaven. When Jesus came at his First Advent, John the Baptist announced to Israel, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." (John 1:26) Not many of that day believed in the First Presence of Christ. Later in life even John the Baptist began to wonder about it and sought confirmation from Jesus. The nation of Israel as a whole did not believe that their Messiah had come. Shall we say, however, that belief in a development of God's plan so vital to its accomplishment was unimportant, simply to excuse the unbelief of some? Certainly not.

We should remember, too, that faith in the presence of the Messiah at that time was based upon the evidence contained in the various "signs" which accompanied the Master's ministry. There was little in the Old Testament scriptures to identify the Messiah except the signs, that is, the things which would occur when he came. True, he was there as a man, and could be seen and touched, but so far as his being the Messiah was concerned, this proved nothing.

Suppose someone had come to Jesus while he was here in the flesh and had said to him, "I like

your way of speaking; you are kind and sympathetic. I know that through your miracles you are doing the people much good. I like your philosophy of life, too. It is certainly better to love our enemies than to hate them, but I am not sure that you are the Messiah. My thoughts incline in that direction, but if I were asked about it I would have to say that I could not prove it to myself. Nevertheless, I want to be your disciple.” We cannot think that Jesus would say to such a one that it really did not make much difference whether or not he believed him to be the Messiah.

It was not merely the belief that Jesus was the Messiah which was important. That was indeed a vital truth, but the fact that the Messiah had come meant something of additional great importance—a change of dispensation was close at hand. An age in God’s plan was nearing an end, and a new age was soon to begin. It was necessary to recognize the presence of Christ in order to know of this change and thus be able to cooperate with the Lord intelligently and acceptably in the work of the new Gospel Age.

We now believe the Second Presence of Jesus—the Messiah or Christ—has become a reality. Once again it foretells a change of dispensation, soon to take place. At this time, however, it means not merely the ending of an age, but also the ending of a world order. “The heavens and the earth” which began at the Flood are now passing away, and the “new heavens and a new earth” of Christ’s kingdom are soon to be established. (II Pet. 3:7,10,13) The Second Presence of Christ is the signal for these changes. How unwise it would be,

therefore, to say that belief in his presence is unimportant.

The Scriptures are explicit in associating the Second Presence of the Master with the events of the “last days.” There is no satisfactory explanation of present-day events except as found in the belief that the Master has returned—though invisible—to prepare for the establishment of his righteous kingdom. Everywhere we look the “signs” are visible. It is, of course, as true now as at the First Advent, that the one who is present in this role is not known or recognized by the people in general. Furthermore, it is true now, as then, that even professed Christians, with few exceptions, fail to recognize the true significance of the world-disturbing events of our day. However, the faithful footstep followers of Christ “are not in darkness, that that day should overtake . . . [them] as a thief.”—I Thess. 5:2,4

“UNMOVABLE”

If, then, the “sure word of prophecy” has revealed the presence of Christ to us, let us cherish this blessed vision of truth and rejoice in the opportunities it opens up. Let us not be influenced by the arguments of those who say concerning nearly everything in the Bible, “You cannot prove it!” True, we cannot prove to all that the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), but this is no excuse for us to be uncertain about it. There are millions who do not agree with anything believed by the footstep followers of Christ. We believe, nevertheless, so let us hold fast the profession of our faith. Let us be unmovable.

Steadfastness in the Truth is essential if we are to experience in large measure the joys of the Truth, for we can get no true satisfaction out of that which we only half-believe. Steadfastness in the Truth is also essential if we are to be acceptable servants of the Lord. The Truth is God's plan, and when he reveals his plan, it means that he wants us to become workers with him in the out-working of that plan. How can we work for him acceptably if we are not sure of what he wants us to do and are uncertain as to where we stand in connection with his plan?

What inspiration there is, however, in knowing and steadfastly adhering to our beliefs. We are standing near the turning point of the ages, at the very threshold of the new kingdom. Our returned Lord is present as the Bridegroom to gather his bride. He has served "meat in due season" (Matt. 24:45), to the household of faith. In the strength of this rich spiritual nourishment, let us steadfastly hold to the truths of which we have been assured. Holding fast to Scriptural doctrine, let us go forward zealously in the work of the Lord, abounding therein with thanksgiving and praise.

Knowing the true significance of the times in which we live and the great privileges which have come to us through this knowledge, nothing should be permitted to lure us away from our steadfastness, nor hold us back from "abounding in the work of the Lord." At the beginning of the age, the Apostle Peter, writing about the melting elements of a world order following Christ's return, said, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation

and godliness?" (II Pet. 3:11) This admonition, given to all the church throughout the entire Gospel Age, is even more timely today, for now we can see before our vision the dissolving of the present order that Peter talked about nearly two thousand years ago.

Thus, we should be on the alert, and quick to detect the encroachment of every worldly viewpoint and philosophy which would rob us of our steadfastness in the Truth. One of the evidences of the time in which we live is the increasing love for ease and pleasure, but we are to be lovers of God, not of pleasure. There is a widespread and increasing lack of stability and responsibility in the world today. Knowing this, we should increasingly endeavor to become more and more unmovable.

The "pledged" word of this evil day has lost much of its former meaning. Yet we should, more faithfully than ever, "pay . . . [our] vows unto the most High." (Ps. 50:14) Hypocrisy is everywhere rife, but we should seek to be simple and sincere toward all and, especially, sincere before God. To be sincere it is essential to have full confidence in, and to act upon, that which we profess to believe.

Think what sobriety and seriousness is called for on the part of those who truly believe that we are nearing the end of this present Gospel Age, and that Satan's world will soon crumble. Surely to such there can be little else of consequence except "holy conversation and godliness." If we think of "conversation" from the standpoint of what we talk about, it means that we will endeavor to speak only those things which will be unctuous and blessed to all. If we think of "holy conversation" as

including our conduct in life—which it properly does—then we should realize the importance of having our every thought, word, and act such as will be in keeping with our belief.

The great consummation of past ages is upon us! Let us, then, not sleep as do others, but let us watch and pray, and be sober. Let us put on the breast-plate of truth and righteousness. Let us, in fact, put on “the whole armour of God.” (I Thess. 5:6-8; Eph. 6:13-18) With the armor of truth to help us be steadfast and unmovable, let us abound in the Lord’s work, knowing that our labor will not be in vain.

