

Our Sufficiency

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”
—II Corinthians 3:5

IN II CORINTHIANS 3:3-6, the Apostle Paul explains that “the epistle of Christ,” is being written by the Spirit of God on “the fleshy tables” of our hearts. He contrasts this with the writing of the Ten Commandments on tables of stone. The writing of God’s law in our hearts constitutes us “able ministers of the new testament [covenant],” just as the tables of stone served, under the direction of Moses, as teachers of the Law of that covenant to the people. This places the followers of Jesus in a very high position in the outworking of the plan of God—so much so that Paul deemed it advisable to add the important words of our theme text.

This is a timely reminder for all the Lord’s consecrated people. However, probably very few of these feel that they are really worthy of the high position to which they are called—the High Calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. They realize that in their own merit they are not worthy to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. They know that they are not “sufficient” of themselves

to be made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6), to reign with Christ a thousand years. Paul’s reminder would seem also to have an important application to the attitude of heart and mind which we maintain toward our present privileges and responsibilities, and especially in our association with the brethren.

One of the illustrations which might help us to grasp this thought is the case of Moses. Concerning him, the Scriptures state, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” (Num. 12:3) Prof. Strong indicates that the Hebrew word here translated “meek” suggests the idea of being depressed or needy. In other texts it is translated “poor.” It seems to carry essentially the same thought as that which Jesus expressed, when he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3) To be “poor in spirit” implies that one senses his inadequacies and the need for help beyond his own ability.

AT THE BURNING BUSH

Moses’ feeling of insufficiency particularly comes to our attention in connection with the Lord’s commission to him at the burning bush. Here he expressed his sense of inadequacy to carry out the assignment the Lord gave to him. Moses had not always felt this way. Forty years before this he had felt very sufficient to do something for his brethren, the Hebrew people, who were being oppressed as slaves in Egypt. He became very belligerent about it, and slew an Egyptian whom he found smiting one of his fellow-Israelites.

The Lord, through his providence, knows how to humble the hearts of those whom he calls into his service—how to make them “poor in spirit.” Because of his slaying the Egyptian, Moses was obliged to flee from Egypt, and he went into the land of Midian. There he married a daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian, who was also a sheep rancher. Moses became a shepherd and helped to care for Jethro’s flocks, a position he occupied for essentially forty years.

Forty years is a long time in human experience, and here, as a tender of flocks, the once self-sufficient Moses had the opportunity to reflect upon his failure in Egypt. Perhaps his humble occupation as a shepherd gradually brought about in his heart a keen sense of insufficiency. Seemingly he reached the point where he felt both unworthy and unable to do anything very important, especially as a servant of God to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage.—Exod. 2:11-25

When the Lord informed Moses that he had chosen him to deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt, Moses replied, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (chap. 3:11) It is doubtful that forty years before this Moses would have raised such a question. Seemingly he was then willing to take the side of his people and do anything he could for them, although there is no record that the Lord had then specially commissioned him to do so.

THE LORD’S ASSURANCE

When Moses expressed his feeling of inadequacy for the task assigned to him, the Lord replied with

the assurance that he would supply his needs. The Lord said, "Certainly I will be with thee." (vs. 12) Moses was impressed by this and began to ask questions concerning the various problems which he foresaw would arise in this great undertaking. Patiently, the Lord assured Moses regarding these details, and we find the one who was to be the great lawgiver and leader of Israel ready and willing to embark upon the task assigned to him.

Moses had learned the great truth expressed by Paul, namely, that he was not sufficient of himself, but now, by faith, he knew that through his God he could be sufficient. How clear the record is that the Lord did go with Moses, and that he did give him wisdom and strength in his every time of need. One of the outstanding aspects of Moses' forty years of service is that in every crisis, with one recorded exception, he turned to the Lord for help. That help was always ready and was graciously provided.

All those who are "poor in spirit" likewise realize their need of divine guidance and help. It is not enough that we be in this attitude of heart only at the time we make a consecration to serve the Lord. Later in his life, Moses had an experience in which he felt that he could accomplish things in his own strength and in his own way. This was at the time when he smote the rock twice, instead of speaking to it as the Lord had instructed him. He said to the Israelites, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"—Num. 20:10

In this instance, Moses failed to depend on the Lord. "Must we fetch you water?" he asked the people, as though by his own sufficiency he could duplicate the miracle which the Lord's power

performed on a previous occasion. An interesting particular about this incident is that water did gush forth from the rock, and “abundantly.” (Num. 20:11) However, the Lord was displeased with Moses’ attitude—so much so that he did not permit him to enter the promised land.—vs. 12

In this experience, the fact is revealed that at times the Lord overrules the waywardness of his people so that it might seem to them that he is blessing their efforts. This should be a warning to all of us to be exceedingly cautious, lest, in our zeal to do something in the Lord’s service, we take matters into our own hands, forgetful of our initial poorness of spirit. The Lord might not interfere with what we propose to do in his service, and we could easily assume that we are successful because of our own ability. This would be a form of pride, and the Lord hates a proud spirit.

PROPERLY DETERMINING GOD’S WILL

Sometimes the Lord allows us to do things which may not be his will. People become successful in the world, perhaps, through clever planning and perseverance. We could easily surmise that this is the way we should determine the Lord’s will in our affairs. On this basis, if we try hard to accomplish something we want to do, and do accomplish it, we might conclude that it was the Lord’s will. Actually, what this could mean is that we have determined the Lord’s will simply upon the basis of what he has not hindered us from doing.

Paul gives us the proper method of determining the Lord’s will. As we study it, we find that it precludes human reasoning and worldly methods. He

writes, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”—Rom. 12:2,3

We are not to follow the ways of the world in seeking to determine the Lord’s will. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Moses asked, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?” When a great opportunity of service was presented to Moses his first thought was one of humble insufficiency. He did not determine the Lord’s will upon the basis of what he considered himself capable of accomplishing. This should be true of us also.

If we make a rational appraisal of our own abilities, we will realize that there is nothing we can do in the Lord’s service in an acceptable manner, except as he guides and otherwise blesses us, and through Christ, extends his mercy in connection with our imperfect efforts. In the beginning, it was essential to be “poor in spirit” in order to realize our need of the Lord, and of his grace to help. It is just as essential to maintain this sense of need throughout our entire course in the narrow way, if the Lord is to continue to use us.

FORGETTING THE LORD

The Lord does great things for his people for which they should ever be *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) thankful. He has given us his truth, and through the anointing of the Spirit he has made us ambassadors of Christ. In the exercise of our ambassadorship, the Lord provides daily help and guidance. As we watch the overruling of his providence, we marvel at the things he accomplishes through us, and this despite our insufficiency. Ironically, this showering upon us of the Lord's abundant blessings may result either in good or in harm.

The result will be good if these blessings of the Lord daily increase our appreciation of him, and produce an ever deepening conviction that, under all circumstances, our sufficiency is of him. However, it would be unfortunate should we lose sight of the Lord and begin to attribute what he is accomplishing in and by us entirely to our own ability. This was Moses' failure toward the end of his illustrious forty years of service. His viewpoint changed, at least temporarily, from the feeling expressed by his question, "Who am I?" to the self-sufficient attitude revealed in his statement, "Must we bring water from this rock?"

GOD'S ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

Saul of Tarsus was another ardent servant of the Lord, but until he recognized and accepted Christ, his zeal and service was not according to knowledge and was contrary to the Lord's will. When Paul did accept Christ and enter into the service of the Lord, he maintained his poorness of spirit. He knew that he had been appointed to be one of the twelve Apostles, but said that he was "the least of the apostles." (I Cor. 15:9) Remembering his sin in persecuting the church, he freely acknowledged

that “I am chief” among sinners. (I Tim. 1:15) How heavily his previous course in persecuting the brethren must have weighed down upon him. No doubt at times he anguished at the very thought of it and must have marveled at the grace of God in continuing to use him.

Paul also had “a thorn in the flesh.” (II Cor. 12:7) This was probably his poor eyesight, which could have been brought about at the time of his conversion by the light which shone down upon him brighter than the sun at noonday. This light actually did blind him for a time. While he received his sight back, it was perhaps not the clear vision which he enjoyed before. Whether it was this or something else which he later referred to as “a thorn in the flesh,” he felt that if it could be removed he could serve much more efficiently, so he asked the Lord to remove the “thorn.”

Paul recognized that this “thorn” had been given to him, as he said, “lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations” with which he had been blessed. Perhaps, however, he reasoned that he had now passed this test and it would be best if the “thorn” were removed. He petitioned the Lord to this end. He explained, “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.”—vs. 8

The Lord had a different view, and answered Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” This satisfied Paul, as he explained, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in

persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, than am I strong."—II Cor. 12:9,10

OUR WEAKNESS, THE LORD'S STRENGTH

From Paul's testimony it is evident that he had Moses' viewpoint of himself. This was the viewpoint expressed in the question, "Who am I?" In this response, Moses did not take the position that he was wholly incapable of doing anything for the Lord. Rather, he rightfully questioned whether he had the qualifications needed to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. Moses did not refuse the assignment, but simply inquired of the Lord as to how he would meet various situations which he knew would arise. Moses felt that he was not effective as a speaker, so the Lord gave him Aaron as a mouthpiece. He showed Moses how he could make good use of the rod in his hand.

By the Lord's answers to his inquiries, Moses perceived that while he could not be the deliverer of Israel by his own wisdom and ability, the Lord could use him and would make every necessary provision for his insufficiencies. This was also true with Paul, and it is true of all the faithful followers of the Master. God uses his mighty power to supplement our weaknesses. In this way, we can go on from victory to victory, performing those tasks in his service which he chooses for us. If, however, we choose our own way on the basis of what appeals to us the most, and with the thought that these things we can do, ignoring what the Lord's will might be, there is the possibility that the Lord's help and guidance would not be forthcoming.

SERVING IN THE BODY

The question arises as to just how we can determine the Lord's will, especially in the matter of serving him in the harvest work. There are no hard and fast rules laid down for us in the Scriptures along this line. However, general principles are set forth, which, when we reason upon them with a pure, honest, and humble heart, will help to guide us. For example, when Paul admonished us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, he continued by reminding us that we are a part of a "body" of Christians. He said that in this "body" there are various qualifications and offices. He wrote, "As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."—Rom. 12:4,5

One of the principles here set forth is that we are not alone, but part of a group, and that this must be taken into consideration in determining the will of the Lord. Not all in this body are qualified to do the same thing. Not all are called by the Lord to render the same service. All should watch the providences of the Lord, and be ready and willing to serve in any way he might indicate to be his will in this "body" arrangement. Peter wrote, "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he

may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”—I Pet. 5:5-7

To be subject one to another requires waiting on the Lord. If we lose sight of our poorness of spirit, our insufficiency, if we begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, then we may decide that in our particular case the Lord does not expect us to be subject one to another, but wants us to pursue our own course. We might begin to reason that, after all, the Lord does not want to see our talents wasted, and if the brethren do not recognize our talents, why should we be subject to them?

This is the viewpoint and way of the world. If one is employed by a certain company, and his services and talents are not properly appreciated, he looks for another place of employment where he can more easily “get ahead.” In the world, generally, no one condemns this practice. This, however, is not the way for the servants of the Lord to determine his will for them. The Lord knew the sort of experience that would best prepare Moses for the service which he would later entrust to him. Moses thought he was ready before he was forced to flee to Midian. The Lord allowed him to wait forty years, serving as a shepherd, until he was brought to a sense of his great need for the Lord’s assistance if he was ever to accomplish anything worthwhile in his service.

If we think others do not appreciate us as they should, let us endeavor to realize that it is really the Lord who is testing our humility and our willingness to wait upon him. This is an essential lesson for all the Lord’s people. Within the “body” there are various services to perform. Are we happy to serve in an inconspicuous manner? Do we realize

that we are not really qualified to do anything in the Lord's service except as he gives us wisdom and strength?

Another important consideration is our motive for serving. This is a matter which concerns our innermost heart relationship with the Lord, for he does not always prevent those with wrong motives from making an outward display of service. Paul wrote, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife." (Phil. 1:15) Paul did not compliment these. Neither did he condone what they were doing, although he was glad that the Gospel was being preached, even if in a wrong spirit. The point being stressed here is that the Lord did not prevent these brethren from serving, even though their motive was wrong. For us, individually, our motive in serving is of utmost importance, without regard to the "success" of our service.

FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLES

In order to make sure that the Lord is really blessing us in our service in his vineyard, it is essential to follow all the principles of righteousness given to us in his Word in deciding upon our course of action. A pure motive is one of the most important considerations. We need always, even as at the time of our consecration, to recognize our poorness of spirit and that we cannot really do anything except by the Lord's grace and help. Let us never undertake anything for the Lord in our own strength.

If we are privileged to be associated with a group of the Lord's consecrated people, it is important to be subject one to another. Let us not be overly concerned even if the brethren fail to recognize

what we believe to be our real worth and talents. Let us realize, rather, that whatever abilities we have are known to the Lord. He permitted Moses to wait for forty years, and it will do us good to wait on the Lord until he sees that we are prepared to serve him with our heart as well as with our head and our hands. If we begin to be concerned about our talents, it would be an indication that we still have a degree of self-sufficiency. The Lord might just be waiting until we feel as Moses did when he asked that question, "Who am I?"

The matter of having a proper assessment of our sufficiency concerns all of us. It is not limited to those who serve in the more prominent positions in the church. No matter how small our sphere of service might be, it is important that we should ever keep in mind that we are not sufficient in our-selves to do anything. This is the lesson the Lord is teaching us. He wants us to realize that we will only be qualified for that future glorious position in the kingdom if we now realize our own insufficiency, and continually look to him for wisdom, for strength, and for grace through Christ. Let this be a daily goal in our service to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. ■