

Called, Elected and Assured

“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”
—Hebrews 12:3

IN HEBREWS, CHAPTER 12, the Apostle Paul assures the consecrated that their experiences would be of sufficient length and difficulty that their resolve and commitment will be thoroughly tried. He likens those experiences, and that test, to a race. It is a race that will be won not by the swift, but by those who patiently endure. “Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (vss. 1,2) Paul forewarns his brethren that circumstances might arise that would cause some to succumb to weariness, and question their ability to continue their run “for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—I Cor. 9:24; Phil.3:14

BE YE TRANSFORMED

One of the vital purposes of the race run by the chosen is to bring them to a gradual realization of their personal weaknesses. The purpose is not to humiliate, but to develop within them a more perfect attitude of submission to God's will and transforming power. To enter the race, one must present his body to God thereby surrendering ownership—disowning its appetites and preferences. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1) To finish the race, one must be transformed. "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." (vs. 2) Only if those chosen for the race submit utterly, as clay submits to the strong hands of the potter, can the necessary process of transformation be accomplished in them.—Rom. 9:21

The discovery of one's frailties can be unsettling. Confronted by failings they expected to have long ago overcome, the brethren who have run the longest are often the most vulnerable to doubt. Pondering their frailties for long years, they may question their ability to continue the race. Some say, I expected to feel stronger by now, but I feel weak, perhaps even weaker than when I began. It is here that Satan can enter in and cause confidence to slip. Those chosen to run this race feel strong when they begin. However, as they run, they may stumble. As they stumble, they become increasingly aware of their inadequacies. That awareness, as essential as it is, can cause great consternation for those in the race, all of whom

long to serve God perfectly. It is vital that the chosen understand their faults, and are neither a surprise nor a disappointment to their Heavenly Father. He knew precisely how weak they were before he called and elected them to run the race.

PAUL'S STRUGGLE

It was by God's strength that those called and elected began the race, and it is certain that it will be by his strength alone that they will finish it. Paul struggled with the same issue of personal weakness. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Rom. 7:19-25) Unremitting warfare rages between the intent of the Spirit-begotten mind and the deeds of the corrupted flesh. The battleground is within the elect.

Though frustrated with the weakness of his flesh, the apostle does not indicate that he fears it would inhibit the making of his calling and election sure. To the contrary, he assured Timothy that he had made his calling and election sure. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (II Tim. 4:7,8) It is clear Paul understood that the making of his calling and election sure did not require his victory over the besetments of the flesh before he finished his course. Making one’s calling and election sure is not determined by personal weaknesses. The chosen overcome during the course of their race. Imperfections will afflict the chosen to the end of their course.

RUN WITH PATIENCE

In Hebrews, chapter 12, the apostle earnestly encourages his brethren to patiently endure to the end the various circumstances of the race. He cites the many examples of faithful endeavor in the Old Testament, as well as the ultimate example of patient endurance, Christ Jesus. He encourages the consecrated to resist the temptation to believe the race is only for others who are more qualified, or for those who are less weighted down with sin. He graciously reminds his brethren that he, too, is running the race, and that he is as easily beset with sin as they. The apostle tells the called and chosen that, though the Lord who made it possible for them to enter the race was perfect, he will bring all whom he has chosen to the finish of it if they but continue to believe he has the ability and will to do so, regardless of their personal imperfections. Paul exhorts the consecrated to keep their eye on the prize, not their weaknesses. He reminds them that God is a rewarder of “them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”—Rom. 2:7

EQUALLY QUALIFIED

The prize for finishing the race is so grand that the truly humble often find it difficult to imagine attaining it, feeling others are more qualified than they to run. The Lord, knowing the wiles of Satan, reminds the chosen they are all equally qualified to run the race. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24, *New International Version*) Satan knows that if he can cause the called and chosen to doubt they are equally qualified to run, it is but a small step for some to believe they were never qualified to run at all. The Lord emphasizes that all who enter the race have equally laid hold upon eternal life and have thereby equally escaped all prior condemnation.

The called and chosen begin their race convinced of the declarations in Romans, chapters 5 and 8, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (chap. 5:1) "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (chap. 8:1,2) Paul reminds his brethren that Israel's inability to meet the perfect standard of the Mosaic Law left it condemned for its imperfect deeds. That perfect standard proved that Israel served the law of sin and death. The same chapter then emphasizes that those in Christ Jesus walk after the Spirit, and are free of all such obligations; all perfect standards having been met on their behalf by Christ. The chosen, therefore, prove they serve

‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ referred to by Paul in Romans, chapter 8, by continuing, under all conditions, to believe that in Christ Jesus they are free of the law of sin and death.

PETER’S PERFECT STANDARD

Peter presents a perfect standard which he says, if heeded, will allow the called and chosen to remain unswayed by the corruption of the world that surrounds them. “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love].” (II Pet. 1:5-7) The apostle emphasizes his point in verse 10, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (vs. 10) *Strong’s Bible Concordance* defines the word ‘fall’ (#4417) as ‘fail of salvation, offend, stumble.’

The apostle does not say if one does ‘these things’ one will make his calling and election sure. He says if one does these things one will never stumble. One will be immune to the allure of the world and the personal lapses and failures that impede the making of one’s calling and election sure.

The Apostle James says, “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.” (James 3:2, *NIV*) By this we know that all the called and chosen, including the apostle, stumble. The conclusion is that none in Christ do sufficiently these things that Peter enumerated. All the chosen remain affected by their worldly surround-

ings. None are immune to the personal infirmities that impede the making of one's calling and election sure. The called and chosen all stumble.

EMPHATIC ASSURANCE

If they cannot hope for victory over the personal besetments of the flesh that so plagued even the Apostle Paul, and they cannot attain those things of Peter's perfect standard, which eluded even the Apostle James, how can the chosen gain the certainty that Paul had that they will not 'fail of salvation' due to weaknesses, lapses, stumbling? How are those who stumble to make their calling and election sure?

The Apostle John answers, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (I John 3:14) It would require no effort on the part of the chosen to love their brethren, if their brethren were perfect as the Lord is perfect. The unequivocal assurance of John is that, no matter how weak the runners feel, no matter how few of these things of Peter's perfect standard they are able to do, no matter how unqualified they feel, if they have not lost their love for their imperfect brethren, they are not lost. The testimony of Paul, Peter, and James, assure the called and chosen that their personal weaknesses and insufficiencies will not disqualify them from the race for the prize of the High Calling. The Apostle John assures us that a lack of love for one's brethren will. The love the called and chosen have for their brethren in the race is to be the ultimate indicator of their spiritual health, regardless of personal frailties and inadequacies.

THE ONE COMMAND

The Lord defines the specific kind of love of which John speaks. He does so in a direct command to those in the race. It is his only command. "As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, . . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:9,10,12, *NIV*) The Lord issued this as a command because it is something that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the runners can do. The chosen ones can love their brethren as the Lord has loved them. The Lord loved his brethren with a love that is only generated by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, each of those chosen are to love each other with that same product of the Holy Spirit which is far superior to anything the world defines as love. When those who run and stumble demonstrate their capacity to bestow this specific kind of love upon their brethren who have personal limitations, they are not condemned for their own. Implied in the Lord's command is that a lack of that particular kind of love indicates a lack of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle John is explicit in explaining how it is that the chosen can run the race for the prize of the High Calling, and not be disqualified by their limitations. "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One." (I John 2:1, *NIV*) The word 'sin' in these verses translates as 'stumble.' This, in conjunction with our Lord's command in John, chapter 15, emphasizes that the very one who has chosen those for the race will defend them

before Divine justice no matter how weak they are, as long as they continue to love one another as he loves them. Only if they neglect to love all others who have been chosen, can the chosen separate themselves from the love of God, and from him who speaks to God in their defense.

Even the weakest, with the fewest abilities, are capable of loving those whom God loves. By this means, both the strong and the weak, the runners just beginning and those finishing their course, can make their calling and election sure.

SHARING IN CHRIST

The chosen started their course with great confidence in their Father and his provision for their life in Christ Jesus. Their test is whether they will finish the course with it. "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." (Heb. 3:14, *NIV*) From this, it is clear that one must have an abiding confidence that one's insufficiencies will not debar him from his life in Christ Jesus. In addition, one must, by the power of the Holy Spirit, love all others who have this same confidence. Those runners can make their calling and election sure, not by their perfect deeds, but by not fainting in their renewed minds, certain to the end they have been called and elected even as they realize how imperfect their deeds actually are. Let us then give all diligence to heed the apostle's admonition, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."—Heb. 10:35 ■