

Qualities Worth Striving For

“Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

—*Philippians 1:27*

AS CHRISTIANS AND STUDENTS of the Bible, our minds often turn to the 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 anguish that he endured as he voluntarily stayed the course of his sacrificial walk, even unto death. Through all of his experiences, Jesus persevered unwaveringly, setting an example for all of his footstep followers to copy to the best of their ability. His was an example which shines so brightly that, in the eyes of those who truly love him, there is nothing more worthwhile to emulate.

The many examples that our Lord set are, we feel, qualities worth striving for in our Christian walk. We will consider ten of them in the ensuing pages, keeping in mind that they are of utmost importance in our lives. As our opening text states, with “one mind” let us be “striving together for the faith of

the gospel,” which our dear Master opened up for his footstep followers.

CHEERFUL ENDURANCE

The first quality which we believe the Christian should strive for is cheerful endurance. The development of this character trait will assist us to turn what might at first seem to be stumbling stones into steppingstones of great value. Let us consider the Scripture, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” (Ps. 27:14) Here God asks us to patiently watch and wait until we learn what he would have us do, rather than try to determine our own course according to our personal understandings or preferences. All of this takes courage, fortitude and persistency. It is never easy to wait patiently.

Another scripture passage to examine 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 experiences which are for our highest eternal good will come to us. We are to realize that all of our life’s affairs are under divine supervision, which to every one of us should be a source of spiritual strength. Thus, no matter what the seeming delays, difficulties, troubles, persecutions, and so-called disasters might be that come upon us during the course of our lives, always keep in mind that these things are shaping and fitting us for future use by our Heavenly Father

in the accomplishment of his plan to bless all mankind. Therefore, we should give thanks to God for all things and under all circumstances.

Jesus cheerfully endured all things during his lifetime even unto the end as he died on the cross. With us also, cheerful endurance will lead to faithfulness. We must each individually become character copies of our Lord to the greatest possible extent. In order to emulate Jesus in character, we must give up our own wills, hopes and ambitions as regards earthly interests. This takes much in the way of faith, but let us remember that in I Corinthians 10:13 we are given the promise that God will not permit us to be tempted, or tested, above what we are able to bear.

ZEAL

A second quality worth striving for is zeal. True zeal can never do enough for others, or for the Lord, yet seeks no credit and encourages no compliments. This is quite aptly pointed out to us by the following verses: “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

Those who are earnest to serve the Lord are so willing and anxious for the opportunity that they will do all that their hands find to do eagerly and without hesitation. (Eccles. 9:10) They will do all things unto the Lord, seeking to please him rather than men. Only by such motivation can we gain the great “reward of the inheritance.” The smallest service done to the least of the Master’s brethren is accepted as done to himself.—Matt. 10:42; 25:40

Once again, we see the example of zeal in our Lord Jesus. That which he received from his Father, he has devotedly shared with us, that we too may call upon God as “our Father.” We can also call upon Jesus as our exemplar, helper, elder brother and friend. (John 13:15; 15:13-15; Luke 8:21) He set for us the example that if we would truly be followers of him, we will zealously serve him and his people, not merely in words, but in deed, in spirit, and in truth.—I John 3:18,19

GOODNESS

The third character trait we should strive for is goodness. Goodness delights itself in the loving concern for all and especially the spiritual well-being of our brethren in Christ. This lesson is illustrated by the following scripture, which states, “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 verses 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 our 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 two of the greatest enemies to maintaining the Spirit of the Lord. Fourth, we should not be affected only with our own troubles, interests, welfare and talents. Rather, we should be just as concerned with the well-being and happiness of others.

We see the example of our Lord's goodness, as shown 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

Jesus has promised us a rest, or peace of mind, which can only come through a knowledge of the Father's plan and character. By his goodness, our Lord has invited us to take his yoke, and he will be our partner, sharing life's burdens with us. The secret of rest is in a quiet and meek spirit. (I Pet. 3:4) 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 characteristic worth striving for is hope. The Apostle Paul wrote: "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

The Heavenly Father is referred to as a “God of all comfort” because his divine purpose is working all things for the ultimate comfort and blessing of as many of his creatures as will accept his favors after being brought to a knowledge of the truth respecting them. We, as followers of Christ during the present age, have been comforted often in order to offset the adverse conditions incident to our current pilgrim journey. It is only after we ourselves have received solace that we are qualified to console 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.

Our lives in the Christian way include many trials, which we must endure for the crystallization of our character. We are able to bear these, even to the extent of rejoicing, because of the hope which we have “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” (Heb. 6:19) As our old nature dies in gradual increments, our new mind and character nature grow in small, daily steps of progress. They are renewed, strengthened, and built up in the image of God and of his Son, Christ Jesus.—II Cor. 3:18; 4:16

Jesus’ 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. Like Jesus, let us not look for things that are seen, such as popularity, worldly show, or earthly applause and glory. These are all temporary and will fade away. Rather, let us strive for the unseen things—spiritual things,

the glories to come, the blessings to be made available to all the families of the earth—because these things will last forever, and bring honor to our Heavenly Father. Certainly, such hope should more than make up for what we may suffer in this life.

WISDOM

The fifth attribute that we should earnestly strive for is wisdom. The Apostle James wrote: “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 this is only so as it develops wisdom, sound judgment, and pure and honorable words and deeds. We will be judged by our conduct, not by our verbal profession. Thus, our wisdom must be that which “is from above,” fashioned after the example set for us by our Lord.—James 3:17

Quoting from the Apostle Paul, we read, “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

As indicated in the foregoing text, we should pray for one another, not only that we make our calling and election sure, but also that we have an opportunity of service, and the wisdom in presenting the Gospel message to others in meekness, humility and gentleness. We also should secure out of this evil day as large a proportion of time as may be

possible for devotion to our own and others' spiritual welfare, keeping in mind that these opportunities, once gone, can never again be enjoyed.

Jesus, our supreme example, always spoke carefully, with meekness, humility, grace and gentleness. His words represented the Truth in its purest form. He spent his entire earthly ministry preaching the Gospel to all those who would hear, in a humble and sincere manner, and always praying to his Heavenly Father for guidance.

LOYALTY

The sixth quality the Christian should strive for is loyalty. True loyalty to God will manifest itself and not be disheartened even when one's own weaknesses and failings may arise. "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 mischief," that is, he will not be morally evil. If the heart is right, the Lord will show him his mistake, as well as a way to recover from the error. We all have fleshly bodies, and along with them inherent weaknesses. Thus it is that most of the great battles in our Christian lives take place within ourselves.

"Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it," the apostle said. (I Thess. 5:24) What God has promised, he is able to perform. We need not worry that we have been called to something we are unable to attain with the Lord's help. If anyone breaks our covenant, it will be ourselves. God will surely carry out his part. He will do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." (Eph. 3:20,21) The

Heavenly Father knows what is in our hearts, and is well pleased with our imperfect service, when motivated by the desire to do all things according to his will. Therefore, devotion to the Lord should never be compromised because we have the assurance that he will always be faithful and loyal to his people.

A FORGIVING SPIRIT

The seventh thing worth striving for, and one of utmost importance, is a forgiving spirit. Such a heart attitude harbors no ill feelings toward anyone. Jesus said, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”—Matt. 6:14,15

What better example can we call to mind regarding forgiveness than Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. We should be like that father who, when he saw his repentant son coming in the attitude of humility, had his heart touched, and gladly went out to meet him. He forgave him, treated him with kindness, and put on him the “best robe” of fullest family fellowship and brotherhood.—Luke 15:11-24

Sometimes we may be inclined to look at the exactness of God’s justice, and in attempting to copy it, deal too severely with our debtors. However, the Lord is quite clear that the grandest elements of his character are love, sympathy, kindness, and forbearance, and that these work in harmony with his attribute of justice. God is ready to forgive the loving and generous at heart who are seeking to copy his character. Only the merciful shall obtain mercy, Jesus said, and if we have not mercy at the hands of the Lord, all is lost.—Matt. 5:7; James 2:13

“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 sin’s penalty—death—and satisfied justice. “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” that we might be forgiven.—Phil. 2:8

CONTENTMENT

Another critical feature of Christian character to strive for is contentment, which, by faith, fully rests in God’s providential care, without murmuring or complaining. Paul testified concerning his own experiences, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”—Phil. 4:11

The apostle was not in want, for he was confident that the Father would provide the things which he really needed. Beyond that, he did not desire anything more. Paul and the other apostles set a great example of contentment and were pleased to abide in whatever condition that duty required them to be. This was all possible because of their deep faith and trust in God, “come what may.” Like the apostles, if we use our talents and abilities to the best of our ability, we should be content with the results, whatever they may be at any given moment, even if our noblest efforts yield only the basic necessities of life. After all, Jesus did not accumulate anything during his life here on earth. All he had were the clothes on his back, and even those were bartered away as he hung on the cross.

Paul wrote to Timothy: “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

In the foregoing verses, we note that the apostle did not say that money was evil or was even the root of evil. He said the “love of money” is the root of evil. Having money and other possessions is not necessarily wrong, but being greedy or coveting money and other possessions is wrong and will lead to all kinds of trouble in our Christian walk of faith. The Master said to his followers: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”—Luke 12:15

CHRISTLIKENESS

The ninth thing worth striving for, and one which we must achieve to the greatest extent possible, is Christlikeness. Such a character will shine 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

In these words concerning a Christlike character, Paul stresses that we do nothing that might give offense to others. Whether it be in respect to food and drink, all manner of conduct, and every interest and affair of life, we should be willing to sacrifice self-gratification in the interest of others. Such a method of conduct, Paul says, will be “to the glory of God,” because it is in harmony with his word, and with the character of his Son, Christ Jesus.

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 our brethren, should be sacrificed. The humblest kind of service is acceptable to God if prompted by love. On the other hand, some great service we may engage in, if prompted with even just a small amount of pride or dishonor, will be much less pleasing in the sight of the Heavenly Father. As our great example, Jesus’ life showed his perfect character at all times, regardless of his circumstances. He set the standard to which we must strive.

LOVE

The tenth and final quality we must strive for is selfless love, which ever seeks to reciprocate God’s love in heart obedience, praise and thanksgiving. The Apostle John wrote: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”—I John 4:10,11

The Old Testament account of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth is one of great love and

dedication on the part of Ruth, and equally great compassion on the part of Boaz. Ruth, having lost her husband, dedicated herself to helping 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 for Ruth to glean. He also instructed that she was not to be shamed in any way. Boaz told Ruth 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.—Ruth, chapters 1 & 2

Our Lord Jesus displayed his great love for God by obeying his Father's will. He gave credit and praise to his Heavenly Father and thanked him 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. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."—Phil. 2:8,9

In conclusion, Jesus believed that all the qualities discussed in the foregoing pages were important things to strive for during his earthly sojourn. He daily demonstrated them through his life and actions. Thus, we also must realize these things as being necessary, and make every effort to reflect and model them in our conduct and deeds as a praise and honor unto God. ■