

Spiritual Balance

*“God hath not
given us the spirit
of fear; but of
power, and of love,
and of a sound
mind.”*

—II Timothy 1:7

NEITHER RADICALISM

nor fanaticism are component elements of true Christian character. It is never necessary to be a fanatic in order to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord and his

Word of truth. The Apostle Paul said, “This one thing I do,” but this one thing included all which is embraced in the will of God for the Christian. (Phil. 3:13) The follower of Christ may, indeed, appear to be one-sided as viewed from the worldly perspective, but not so from God’s standpoint, if he gives heed to all that the Lord would have him do and be. Paul was not radical in the sense of being an extremist along one particular line of Christian endeavor. Yet he was uncompromising in his full loyalty to God and to his will.

In our text the apostle reveals that it is the influence of the Holy Spirit of God in the Christian’s life that gives him strength to perform the divine will. It is the Spirit of God that creates the desire to sacrifice for others, which is godlike love in action. It is the Spirit of God also that gives the Christian soundness of mind. The spirit of power and love

and a sound mind is contrasted by Paul with the spirit of fear. One who is filled with fear, and controlled more or less by it, cannot, at the same time, exercise balanced judgment.

One of the most essential prerequisites to the exercise of the spirit of a sound mind is, therefore, to slay the monster fear by the exercise of faith and confidence in the promises of God. We are assured through his Word that irrespective of how formidable our enemies may be, he will help us to overcome them. No matter how weak we are, his grace will be sufficient. No matter how much we lack wisdom, he will give us liberally of his wisdom. God has promised, in fact, to supply all our needs.—I John 5:4; II Cor. 12:9; James 1:5; Phil. 4:19

By relying upon these promises, none of which has ever failed, the Christian is able to approach the study of the divine will with full assurance. No matter what may be involved, no contingency can ever arise in the doing of that will which has not been foreseen and provided for by our all-wise Heavenly Father. This means that we need never hesitate in undertaking any course in life which God indicates to be his will for us. No part of the divine will has to be omitted or only partially obeyed because of human limitations. Our obedience to all that God requires will most assuredly result in what our text describes as the spirit of a sound mind.

Acceptable spiritual balance is obtained through a study of the Word of God and the application of its precepts in our daily lives. However, it is necessary that we properly interpret the Word of truth and yield ourselves fully to its influence. As the apostle indicates, our “rightly dividing of the word of truth”

is to be for the sole purpose of showing ourselves “approved unto God.” (II Tim. 2:15) This means that the slightest degree of selfishness or insincerity in our study of the Bible will prevent our understanding it properly. Unwillingness to apply the Word, and to be “doers” of it in practice, perhaps more than any other one thing, accounts for much misinterpretation of the Bible’s teachings.—James 1:22-25

GOD TESTS OUR SINCERITY

God is dealing with the Christian according to his faith and the sincerity of his consecration. For this reason he has permitted his Word to be written in such a way as to serve as a practical test of our real desire to know and do his will. The well-worn statement that “the Bible is like an old fiddle on which any tune can be played,” is true if, in our study of it, we seek merely to find justification for the manner in which our fallen flesh desires to gain control over our Christian life.

Practical application of Christian principles is presented in the Bible in such a way that if we have any degree of self-will, we can justify almost any extreme position which may meet the approval of our selfish fancy. An example of how we may misuse the Bible in this way is illustrated by the contrasting presentations of the Apostles Paul and James relative to the importance of faith without works, and faith supported by works, in the Christian life.

Paul says we are “justified by faith,” and in setting forth the importance of faith he cites the example of Abraham. (Rom. 4:1-4; 5:1) Paul also says, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” To emphasize this

thought, he adds, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8,9) James, on the other hand, shows that if Abraham had not acted on his faith, wherein would be the evidence or proof of his loyalty to God and his will.—James 2:21-24

Certainly these texts make it plain that salvation is not obtainable upon the basis of our own works, but rather upon the proof, or demonstration, of our faith. However, this does not justify any misuse or distortion of the Scriptures to substantiate the erroneous thought that being inactive in the service of the Lord is part of the divine will. Yet, if we are looking for an opportunity to avoid the privilege of sacrifice, we could mistakenly find in the words of Paul a comfortable resting place on the couch of inactivity.

In reality, while Paul states that faith, not works, is the basis of our relationship with God, he affirms in numerous places James’ teaching concerning the need for works to prove our faith. Faith “worketh by love,” Paul says, and he commends the brethren at Thessalonica for their “work of faith, and labour of love,” and prays that the “work of faith with power” might be completed in them. (Gal. 5:6; I Thess. 1:3; II Thess. 1:11) Thus, if our mind is properly balanced by the full testimony of the Scriptures, we will take into consideration that while salvation is of faith and grace, yet God expects those who obtain it upon this basis to show forth his praises by laying down their lives in his service.

ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE SERVICE

Concerning the matter of “works,” the Scriptures show it is possible that we might claim to be busily engaged working for the Lord and yet not have his

approval. Jesus, telling of some who would come to him and claim his friendship on the basis of the “many wonderful works” they had done in his name, indicates his response to be, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matt. 7:21-23) This text should surely have an influence in helping us to maintain spiritual balance, by seeking to know and do only those works which are acceptable in God’s sight.

Unquestionably, it is pleasing to God for a Christian to be actively engaged in his service. In fact, the ideal Christian life is one that is wholly and directly spent for God, even as was that of the Master’s. However, few are in a position to render such direct and full-time service. The Bible itself delineates the energies of the Christian by pointing out the earthly obligations, especially toward one’s family, that must be met before any may properly feel free to devote time and strength in the direct service of God.
—I Tim. 5:8

The sincere Christian will find no great difficulty in conforming himself to these various Scriptural requirements. However, if we are not sincere, it will be possible to find in them an excuse to shirk the responsibilities of our consecration vow which calls for the presenting of our bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” our “reasonable service.”
—Rom. 12:1

The divine commission given to the church unmistakably implies self-sacrificing activity in proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom. The examples of the apostles in this respect indicate clearly what they understood this commission to mean. Their instructions repeatedly emphasize the

importance of faithfulness in the Lord's service. However, this does not mean that the only requirement of a Christian is that he be endlessly active in a feverish campaign of great works.

Indeed, the Bible says a great deal about working for the Lord. If one wishes to believe that he can simply "work" his way into the kingdom, he can perhaps justify himself in such a course, and ignore all the other important instructions for growth in Christian character. In so doing, however, he will not be exercising proper balance in his spiritual affairs. Let us rather, be on guard against this one-sided viewpoint of the Christian life, and avoid being of those who claim the Master's favor upon the basis of the "wonderful works" which they have performed.

The true balance between faith and works is to realize that our standing of justification before God is based entirely upon our faith in the merit of Christ's shed blood, and that this blessing is nothing we have merited ourselves, but is the "gift of God." Beyond that, and out of utmost appreciation to God for his bountiful provisions for us, our hearts should spontaneously respond to God's goodness, as did Saul of Tarsus, asking, "What wilt thou have me to do?"—Acts 9:6

Diligently searching the Scriptures for an answer to this question, we find instructions to the effect that we are to be "ministers of reconciliation," that as such we are to be faithful "ambassadors" of the truth, and that we are to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season." All this, however, is to be based on our continual appreciation of the fact that we ourselves were first "reconciled" to God "by Jesus Christ."—II Cor. 5:18-20; II Tim. 4:2

Acceptable service is that kind which results because the love of God has so touched our hearts that we simply cannot refrain from showing forth his praises at every opportunity. The evidence of such self-sacrificing love and devotion will ascend as “an odour of sweet smell” to him. (Phil. 4:18) Thus by our works is our faith made manifest, even as James suggests.

NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW

Another illustration of how the Lord tests the sincerity of our consecration is the manner in which he deals with us in respect to our earthly needs. Jesus reminded his disciples of the Heavenly Father’s care over those who serve him, using the sparrows, ravens and lilies as illustrations of his loving care. (Luke 12:6,7,22-31) He assured his disciples that they are worth more than “many sparrows,” and can trust God fully with respect to all their material needs. Jesus further urged them to such whole-hearted devotion, service and singleness of purpose with respect to their spiritual interests, that their earthly affairs would not cause them worry and anxiety. He said, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.”—vs. 22, *English Standard Version*

This is a very heart-searching command, and very few have been able to fully apply the great principle here laid down for the guidance of the Christian life. Some, however, have taken these words too literally, and as a result, have ignored temporal responsibilities. Surely this is not what Jesus meant, nor did the apostles get this thought from his instructions to them. Later, we find the Apostle

Paul giving specific instructions to the church that its members were expected to give proper thought to material needs. He tells us that each should “provide ... for his own, and specially for those of his own house.” If one does not do this, Paul continues, “he hath denied the faith.”—I Tim. 5:8

To be spiritually balanced, we must take this and other passages of similar import, and line them up against the words of Jesus, such as found in Luke 12, seeking to know and practice the harmony of thought between them. Jesus’ instructions undoubtedly mean that the consecrated believer is to regard his whole life as devoted to the service of God and to seeking first his kingdom. He is to do this in full confidence that the Heavenly Father will oversee his earthly interests.

On the other hand, while one can consecrate himself personally to the Lord, he cannot consecrate his family in the sense that they must become a part of the sacrifice he is making. Thus, the practical carrying out of one’s consecration vows cannot preclude obligations to those dependent upon his care and support, to the extent which the Scriptures instruct.

We can lose our spiritual balance in another way, by misinterpreting the instructions to provide needful things for ourselves and for those of our household as justification for sacrificing very little on God’s altar. In other words, it is possible to wrongly consider providing for our own as meaning luxurious things, or the storing up of treasures on earth, concerning which Jesus warns us against.—Matt. 6:19

If spiritually balanced, we will realize that God would have us use the necessary time and energy to

provide and care for those who are properly dependent upon us. However, even these necessary obligations, by divine grace, we will discharge as unto the Lord, and to his glory, while redeeming as much of our time and substance as possible to be used directly in the divine service.

WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION

The Apostle Paul admonishes us, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” assuring us that it is “God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12,13) These words emphasize that in the final analysis no one can work out our salvation for us, that it is a personal matter between us and the Lord. This means that we are individually responsible for what we believe and the things we do. As individuals, we are to “prove all things,” not accepting anything as true simply because it reaches us through some trusted friend, or leader, no matter how much confidence we may have in them. —I Thess. 5:21

To work out our own salvation means also that we will have a love for Christian liberty, not permitting ourselves to be bound by earthly sects and creeds. In the exercise of true liberty in Christ, we will lay claim to the promises of God as individuals and realize that they apply to us, irrespective of the opinions of men. Holding these divine promises as our own, we will rejoice in the Lord no matter what our experiences may be. If we have privileges of service for the Truth, we will rejoice. If at times God’s providences dictate otherwise, we can also rejoice knowing it is his will.

While exercising our individual privileges as Christians, we are not to ignore the fact that we also have a responsibility toward others. Indeed, the Lord in his wisdom has arranged that many of the blessings which we receive as individuals come to us through fellow Christians. Working out our own salvation does not imply that we can be successful while ignoring fellowship with others of “like precious faith,” or neglect the assembling of ourselves together “as the manner of some is.”—II Pet. 1:1; Heb. 10:25

The Scriptures remind us that God works in his people, not only through the prophets and the apostles, but also through various other servants—“evangelists, ... pastors and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11,12) This means that in order to be properly balanced as to our individual standing before God, we must also cooperate with others whom he may choose for “the work of the ministry.” Surely we cannot be individualists to the extent of ignoring the messages of the prophets and apostles, nor can we safely be “independent” Christians in the sense of disregarding the help that may come to us through the elders of the ecclesia, or others whom the Lord may use to work alongside us.

It would also be a mistake to follow the line of Christian individualism to the point of disobeying the Lord’s instructions relative to proper order and decorum in the church. Rather, each member of the body of Christ should be in full harmony with the scriptural instructions concerning organization and cooperation within the local ecclesia arrangement. “Let all things be done decently and in order.” —I Cor. 14:40

“CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER”

The Apostle Paul admonishes us to “consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” (Heb. 10:24,25) These arrangements by which we can mutually uplift and help one another are important aspects of how God works in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” This means that each of us, as an individual Christian, should be of service and support to others in the narrow way. This does not in any sense suggest that we should be “busybodies,” or be “lords over” each other. (I Pet. 4:15; 5:3) Rather, it places before us our privilege to “consider one another” to encourage love and good works.

It is not the eloquent sermon that always proves the greatest blessing. Sometimes a few words of comfort spoken privately, even by a brother or sister who may not possess talents for expression, may prove to be a divine message of consolation to one in need of encouragement, and may be more effective than a hundred eloquent sermons. Thus, let us be watchful for every opportunity we see to lay down our lives for each other as we journey together in the narrow way.

As individual Christians, we enjoy the blessings of personal relationship and communion with the Lord. Additionally, we are to be on the alert to avail ourselves of every opportunity to associate with our brethren in Christ, as well as to encourage them. At the same time, both individually and collectively, we must ever be on guard against any subtleties of the Adversary, lest he “get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”—II Cor. 2:11

Let us sincerely and humbly seek the Lord's guidance in all of life's matters, trusting fully in his ability to overrule for our good every issue of our consecrated lives. (Rom. 8:28) Such assurance is ours if we wholeheartedly submit to his will and endeavor diligently to carry it out in our lives. Let us also seek to avoid interpreting the Scriptures in a way to favor the selfish desires of the flesh. As followers in the Master's footsteps, God's will for us is to sacrifice, and he has promised to give us the strength to carry us through, and to be "faithful unto death."—Rev. 2:10

Absolute honesty at all times with one's self and with the Lord is most difficult for any Christian. It can only be manifest in a truthful interpretation of God's Word, no matter what the cost may be, and a zealous, faithful performance of the divine will. For the consecrated believer to keep his life sincerely devoted to God requires a constant battle against the tendencies of the fallen flesh, which are augmented by the spirit of selfishness in the world around us, and that emanate from our Adversary, Satan.

These words of David are appropriate for every consecrated Christian to take well to heart: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. 19:12) The method by which we understand our errors lies largely in our willingness to have the Lord cleanse us from them by "the washing of water by the word." (Eph. 5:26) Indeed, we should be glad to have our errors, our secret faults, and any spiritual imbalance in our lives, cleansed away by the Word of truth. If this be true, then we may enjoy the spiritual advantages of those to whom God, through his Word, gives the spirit of a sound mind. ■