

Our Spiritual Focus

***“I can do all things
through Christ
who strengthens
me.”***

***—Philippians 4:13,
New King James
Version***

THIS SOUNDS LIKE A BOLD statement, “I can do all things,” especially when we compare it to other Scriptures such as, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (I Cor. 10:12) We

realize, however, that Paul understood it was only “through Christ,” who strengthened him, which made it possible for him to do “all things” that God desired him to do. Indeed, it was “the power of Christ” that rested on Paul during all his experiences as he spent his life in service to the Lord.—II Cor. 12:9

It is important to remember that, just as it was with Paul, God, through his Son Christ Jesus, will strengthen and equip all those who focus on him and depend upon his grace in every aspect of their lives. The psalmist wrote, “It is God that girdeth me with strength.” (Ps. 18:32) Relying upon the divine help promised to us, we should then humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God,” in all our service to him.—I Pet. 5:6

OUR FOCUS

We can define the word “focus” as the center of one’s interest or activity, the development of a clear mental vision and perception of those interests, and the actions which spring forth from them. Concerning our spiritual focus, these words of Paul come to mind: “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.”—Eph. 1:18,19

We might state briefly that in our efforts to be in the divine service and to focus on doing “all things through Christ,” three daily goals must be striven for:

(1) A careful and continual study of God’s Word. Jesus said that these things had been hidden “from the wise and prudent,” but revealed only “unto babes,” those of a humble character who desired to be taught of God.—Luke 10:21

(2) A realization and appreciation of the leading and illuminating of our hearts and minds by the power and influence of God’s Holy Spirit.—John 16:13

(3) Growth in fervent zeal for the accomplishment of all God’s plans and purposes, and therefore being “zealous of good works.”—Titus 2:14

The accomplishment of these goals requires that we daily focus as much of our time, energy, and talents as possible upon spiritual activities, realizing the seriousness of our walk with God. Gaining a complete victory is not an assured thing, and we must be daily vigilant in all aspects of our Christian life.

Concerning himself, Paul wrote, “If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”—Phil. 3:11,12, *NKJV*

As he did with Paul, the Lord has “laid hold” of us, having called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (I Pet. 2:9) God has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (II Tim. 1:9) Our Heavenly Father desires that we keep our hearts loyal to him, and through character development and sacrifice make our “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

Confidence in God and reliance upon his promised grace helps us maintain humility and meekness in our experiences. At the same time, it gives the needed courage so that we may say as Paul did, “Our sufficiency is of God.” (II Cor. 3:5) Here the word “sufficiency” is from the Greek word *hikanotes*, and denotes “ability.” Such divine sufficiency comes in the form of God’s many providences and the daily assistance of our Advocate, Christ Jesus, which make us spiritually stronger as we continue our earthly sojourn.

It is evident that the words spoken by Paul, as recorded in our theme text, demonstrate the great faith that he had. We note some of the many instances in which the apostle spoke of faith’s great importance. “The life which I now live in the flesh

I live by the faith of the Son of God.” “We walk by faith, not by sight.” “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Gal. 2:20; II Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:22) Faith is an especially important aspect of our spiritual focus.

By faith, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we can enjoy the privileges and opportunities associated with knowing our Heavenly Father and his dear Son. At the same time, however, we realize that at present there are certain glorious things of the future which we see only obscurely. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (I Cor. 13:12, *NKJV*) We are assured, though, that if faithful, we shall be like our Lord, and will see clearly, know perfectly, and understand fully, all things pertaining to the divine arrangements. In the meantime, faith is indispensable to attaining victory: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4

The development of faith as a critical part of our spiritual focus is a gradual work. It starts with a faith begotten of reverence for our all-wise Creator, and for Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith.” (Heb. 12:2) From this starting point faith must progress to greater heights. We are reminded of these words of the prophet: “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isa. 40:31) Consecrated believers who “wait upon the LORD” in faith, are not to walk as most in the world do, which is by sight. Rather, as the Bible points out in numerous places, “The just

shall live by faith.”—Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb.10:38

The Apostle Paul expressed the powerful results of a deep faith in God with these words: “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “Wherefore ... 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.”—II Cor. 4:14-18; Heb. 12:1,2

“ALL THINGS”

When Paul says in our opening text, “I can do all things,” he is hearkening back to the previous two verses, in which he says, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Phil. 4:11,12) We are to be ready to “suffer need” and to “be abased” from time to time. These are necessary for our discipline and for maintaining proper humility of character.

If we fret under such circumstances, let us beware, for we are likely not as fully developed spiritually as we should be. If, on the other hand, the Lord gives

us a little exaltation today, a little encouragement of success in his service, we are to receive it joyfully, but remember our own unworthiness and insufficiency apart from God. Let us learn how to be in need, and yet not to desire anything beyond what the Lord sees best to give.

“THROUGH CHRIST”

It is only “through Christ” that we can do all things. Our Master is the personification of the wisdom which comes from above and is one of the cardinal attributes of God. (James 3:17) Through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, divine wisdom is imparted to us through an understanding of God’s Word, as well as through his providential direction of all our experiences. If we are attentive to the receiving of divine wisdom, we are sure to get understanding of whatever truth or teaching is necessary to our development and progress in the narrow way.

“Through Christ” and his example we also are instructed as to a proper character, summed up in unselfish love. It is indeed a critical part of our daily walk to develop and put into practice the actions of love, and by so doing have it make its indelible imprint upon our character. We find this expressed for us in these words of Paul: “As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.”—Col. 3:12,13, *New American Standard Bible*

We note that the foregoing words are addressed to those “chosen of God.” At the present time the Heavenly Father is choosing a select group from the world of mankind, a “little flock.” (Luke 12:32)

To these have been given the opportunity to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

“PUT ON THE NEW MAN”

Paul says in Colossians 3:2, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Along with this, the apostle tells us in verses 9 and 10 to “put off the old man with his deeds,” and “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge.” The “old man” is our fallen, fleshly nature, and the “new man” is the new will and mind being developed in us through the power and influence of God’s Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul states further, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—Eph. 4:23,24

Putting on Christ requires that we transform our minds through dedication, sacrifice and service to the divine cause. (Rom. 12:1,2) Bringing about this transformation also involves much in the way of special testings. At times, God may even allow fiery trials to test our faith and the depth of our consecration. In all of these experiences, however, as Paul has reminded us, “ye are dead” according to the flesh, but “your life is hid with Christ in God.”—Col. 3:3

Putting on the “new man” should also have this effect, as stated by the Apostle Peter: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” (I Pet. 3:15) We note that Peter indicates it is not only important that we tell others of our hope, but that we

additionally give “a reason” for it to those who ask us. This, too, is part of putting on the “new man.”

Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world. ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:14,16) The complete desire of our hearts and minds should be to serve the true and living God. As Paul expressed, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the sight of God and our Father. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” (I Thess. 1:3,4) Let us, therefore, continue to daily have the tracing of the character likeness of the Master written in our hearts, minds, words and actions.

“ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW”

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) The new life that we have, together with all its new hopes and prospects, is only found “in Christ.” This means that we are to think, speak and act as he did, to the extent of our ability while still in this fallen fleshly condition. The mind is the most critical area of development, and so the apostle emphasizes this when he writes: “Let this mind be in you, that was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) In the prior verses Paul tells us about the Christlike mind: “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

Another aspect of the mind of Christ is the desire to tell the glad tidings to others. As his consecrated followers, we are commissioned to be his ministers. Thus, we are exhorted, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. . . . Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” (II Tim. 4:2,5) Preaching the word of truth should be done with patience, gentleness, forbearance—that is, it should always be “in season” for the hearer, even if it may be “out of season” for us.

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road, many things became “new” to him. Now, instead of persecuting Christians, and thus persecuting Jesus himself, he fully accepted the privilege to die with Christ and for his cause. We recall his testimony: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20) The apostle’s resolve is also an exhortation to us: “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”—I Cor. 2:2

Paul’s spiritual focus was unwavering following his conversion and enlightenment. “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Then, as a reminder to all the consecrated,

he adds, "Let us therefore, ... be thus minded." (Phil. 3:13-15) The apostle's experiences should serve as an example for us, and they should help us in applying ourselves to the one focus we should have: "For me to live is Christ."—Phil 1:21

"WHO STRENGTHENS ME"

The last part of our opening text speaks of Christ, "who strengthens me." Jesus invited his followers, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) Our Lord also assures us that when others may revile or persecute us, or falsely say "all manner of evil" against us, we should "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. 5:11,12) Paul's conclusion was, "Since God is on our side, who can be against us?"—Rom. 8:31, *New International Readers Version*

"All things are yours; ... And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." (I Cor. 3:21,23; John 15:7; Col. 1:11) In the strength of these promises, and many others found in the Scriptures, we receive courage, and can "do all things" which the Lord asks of us. At one time, we were "without strength," but in "due time Christ died," giving us the opportunity to live in him and in his strength.—Rom. 5:6

Those who faithfully lay down their lives daily in sacrifice and service and do "all things" through Christ who strengthens them, will be granted a share with him in glory as his joint-heirs. Together,

Christ and his body members, the church, will comprise the great royal priesthood which will lift up the world of mankind in the coming Messianic kingdom, for which mankind has so long prayed, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth.” —I Pet. 2:9; Matt. 6:10

As the body of Christ is now being developed, all who have been accepted as probationary members can attest to the Lord’s strengthening influence in their lives as he waits for the completion of his Bride. Thus, may we each be spurred on to greater fervency in our sacrificial walk by the glorious promise of being associated with Christ Jesus in helping to restore mankind to perfection and everlasting life, when all tears will be wiped away, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, because these former things will be passed away. (Rev. 20:4,6; 21:4) Let this joyous prospect be our spiritual focus each day until the end of our earthly sojourn.