Endurance

AS FOOTSTEP FOLLOWERS of Jesus we have learned from the Scriptures that we are to develop and maintain endurance in the carrying out of our consecration vows. The quality of endurance has been well defined as 'continuing under pain or distress without impatience and without sinking.'

The condition of pain or distress referred to in this definition may well come upon us as soldiers of the cross in suffering for righteousness' sake. This could be in the form of persecution—either by revilings, or by the infliction of actual bodily harm. Christian suffering may also take the form of weariness, or other infirmities of the flesh which result from our faithful and enduring efforts to proclaim the true Gospel of the kingdom.

The most outstanding example we have of endurance in suffering, brought on by faithfulness in Divine service, is our Lord Jesus. From Jordan to the cross his was a very strenuous service. Daily he gave his all, never sparing himself. Literally he "poured out his soul [his very being] unto death." (Isa. 53:12) His journeyings from place to place were exceedingly difficult as compared with traveling today. Even though Jesus was a young and

perfect man, his ministry is generally recognized as an exceptional feat of endurance.

It is also very apparent from the Scriptures that the healing of the sick, as performed by Jesus, although through the use of the Divine miracle-working power that was at his command, was not without expending his own energy in his healing ministry—giving out his own vitality. (Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) It could be truly said of Jesus that he "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."—Matt. 8:17

Jesus thus gave himself faithfully and with endurance. He cheerfully endured pain and suffering, desiring only that the Father's will be done in and through him. He knew that faithful endurance also called for continuance in the work of bearing witness to the Truth; that not until he had thus been faithful unto death would his part of this great work be accomplished.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

Another faithful servant who endured prolonged physical suffering for the Lord's sake, ever willing and glad to "spend and be spent," was the Apostle Paul. (II Cor. 12:15) His general pattern of experiences in every place he visited on his various missionary journeys, included revilings, and often the inflicting of physical pain by one means or another. Writing about this, Paul said of himself:

"In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a

day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."—II Cor. 11:23-28

In writing to Timothy, Paul, who had endured so much for the Lord's sake, exhorted, "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (II Tim. 2:3) To show that he never expected others to do what he was not willing to do himself, Paul could say, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."—II Tim. 2:10

Paul added a wonderful testimony relating to his many tribulations. He said, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me." (II Tim. 3:11) Let it not be understood, however, that the instances of Paul's physical endurance in the Lord's service were easy for him, because he wrote, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage." (I Cor. 9:27, *American Standard Version*) Or, more literally stated, Paul said, "I became a slave driver to my body."

It is important to note that in spite of Paul's zeal for the LORD, and his resolute determination to carry out all that was required of him, his experiences were not endured in his own strength. He had special help from the LORD, as indicated in his exhortation to Timothy: "Join me in bearing suffering for the gospel, by the power of the God."

(II Tim. 1:8, *Moffat Translation*) What Paul meant by this was that he was able to bear the suffering that came upon him in the service of the Truth because of the help supplied by the LORD.

This special help was through the Holy Spirit, a holy power; and we are similarly to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10) As in the case of all the faithful ones who have gone before, our Heavenly Father is able to do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."—Eph. 3:20

In contrast to the experiences of some in the Early Church, we today are not called upon to make even fifty miles on foot, in order to carry out our commission to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom. In many respects our experiences as followers of the Master result in much less suffering than was endured by many who preceded us. But this is all the more reason for holding back nothing in the way of time or strength as we endeavor, by all the means at our disposal, to prove our willingness to endure whatever suffering may result from our faithfulness.

To walk in this way, as our Lord set us an example that we should follow in his steps, implies not only a passive conformity to his disposition or spirit, but also an active, energetic zeal in the promulgation of his Truth at all hazards.

While the hazards or risks of danger to which we are exposed today in witnessing to the Truth are vastly different from those of the early disciples of Jesus, yet there are dangers. Many of these are subtle, deceptive, discouraging, and, if we are not watchful, will cause us to stumble, as well as to be unfruitful and unfaithful in the LORD's service.

Let us not permit any deceptive human philosophy to convince us that we need no longer endure self-sacrifice in the service of the LORD, the Truth, and the brethren. Theories, which offer plausible excuses for not continuing to endure hardness in the proclamation of the Truth, are very tempting to the flesh. Nothing but the sincerity of our consecration, and the determination to endure faithfully to the end, will safeguard us against such delusions. This attitude of endurance and faithfulness will keep us faithfully in the Truth, and loyal to it.

We who have come to realize our Father's unspeakable favor to us as better than this present life with all it could have or give; we who have faithfully laid upon his altar every earthly good thing, every hope and ambition, every power of our being, rejoice to tell the good tidings to others. We rejoice to sound forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into this marvelous light. The message is too good to keep! If we could not proclaim it, it would be as a "burning fire shut up" in our bones, so we must tell it. (Jer. 20:9) We are willing that the telling of it cost us something—cost us money, misunderstanding, and persecution of former friends, and possibly the breaking of home ties. We are willing that it shall cost us the frown of the world and of organized Christianity.

Today, as in the past, we have the privilege of witnessing to the Truth by word of mouth in private conversations, and in public assemblies. We also have the privilege of writing letters to friends and relatives when it seems opportune to do so. Now we are further blessed by the availability of the printed message of Truth. There are the radio,

television, and Internet that we can help to support, and in the follow-up of which we can participate. By all these means the Gospel of the kingdom con-tinues to go out to all the world "for a witness unto all nations," and we rejoice.—Matt. 24:14

The great variety of ways now available for witnessing, including the recorded lecture service, enabling us all to have some part in our Master's great and glorious service, inspires confidence and gives us courage—courage to endure faithfully as ambassadors of Christ. Surely all who are standing firm in the one Spirit will delight to cooperate in one way or another as the Lord gives them oppor-tunity. All certainly will be able to contribute through their prayers on behalf of this service of "vigorously cooperating for the faith of the glad ti