
Words of Truth

Focusing On The Prize

By: Brian A. Yeager

The Apostle Paul suffered very often in the flesh (II Corinthians 11:12-33). Yet, he said: *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* (Romans 8:18). Most of the things we suffer, in this present day in the United States of America, are not related to our faith in Christ. What Paul suffered, was certainly because of his faithfulness to God (II Timothy 1:8-12). The Lord had appointed him to suffer such things (Acts 9:1-16).

How was Paul so capable of remaining focused on the Lord's will when the Lord's will was the very cause of his many pains? Why do so many Christians struggle physiologically with things they suffer in this lifetime, when those sufferings are mainly caused by things such as time and chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11)? Paul preached a message of hope which brought about his sufferings (II Timothy 2:8-10). What we (in this country) suffer are things that anyone, even an atheist, suffer too.

So, I ask again, in a time wherein it is comparatively easy to be a Christian, what do we as saints have to be anxious about? When I compare anything I have "suffered" through to the life of early disciples of Christ, I see little to complain about? How about you? I have never had to fear losing my life for the sake of the Gospel (Matthew 14:1-12, Acts 12:1-2, and Romans 8:36). I have been called bad things (Matthew 5:10-12) and have been cast out of erring congregations. However, in comparison to what the saints faced in the first century, those things are nothing. So, how did the faithful such as Paul go through much more trying times than we do without becoming physiological messes?

Paul Was Focused

Consider how Paul stayed mentally strong while suffering through many difficult fleshly things: *"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but*

I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, 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. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Philippians 3:8-15).

You just read what Paul focused on. He focused not on the things he lost or suffered, but on the prize at the end. His focus was on finishing this life faithfully (I Corinthians 9:24-27). When he penned some of his last words in this life, you can see that he accomplished his goal (II Timothy 4:6-8). Paul faced things I cannot imagine. Paul was once stoned and was in such bad shape that he was considered dead (Acts 14:19). The very next day he left to preach the Gospel elsewhere (Acts 14:20-21). His message to the saints was that through much tribulation we enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). He was capable of such things because he was focused on the prize, not on the temporary things he had to suffer to get that prize.

Not Caught Up In The Temporary

For more insight, consider this: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that 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 our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 4:8-5:1).

Conclusion

If you find yourself down mentally because of things in this world, change what you're thinking about (Philippians 4:6-8). Learn to be like Paul in being able to focus on the prize instead of the path to that prize. This lifetime is so short (James 4:13-16). Don't waste it in mental anguish when you can enjoy it because of what is at the end of this life!
