
Words of Truth

Hebrews 10:32-33

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“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used” (Hebrews 10:32-33).

The saints that are being addressed in this epistle are being told to remember the former days. The term translated “former” [πρότερον] means: “previously: — before, (at the first, former...” (Strong’s # 4386). The specific time they are being told to look back to was when they were illuminated. The term translated “illuminated” [φωτίζω] means: “To shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitively) to brighten up (literally or figuratively): — enlighten, illuminate, (bring to, give) light, make to see. To give light, to shine, to enlighten, light up, illumine; to bring to light, render evident; to cause something to exist and thus come to light and become clear to all; to enlighten, spiritually, imbue with saving knowledge; to instruct, to inform, teach; to give understanding to” (Strong’s # 5461).

Thankfully, the term translated “illuminated” is used earlier in this letter and that usage gives us the clear meaning of what they were told to look back on. In the following quote, the word translated “enlightened” is the same Greek word as was translated “illuminated” in the context we are studying. Notice: *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:1-6).*

When you put all of that together, these people are being told to look back at their initial conversion. To look back to when they received the knowledge of the truth and the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:36-41, Acts 8:5-25, and Acts 19:1-7). That was a powerful teaching tool in the first century for Jews that struggled with letting go of the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-5). When someone errs from the faith, it is important for them to look back and remember from whence they have fallen (Revelation 2:1-5 and Revelation 3:1-3).

From what is written in the context we are looking at, they endured affliction after initial obedience to the Gospel. The word translated “fight” [ἄθλησις] means: “struggle (figuratively): — fight. To contest, to combat, to strive, struggle, hard trial” (Strong’s # 119). There is not a clear contextual clue to when these things occurred. What we do know is that there are various accounts of saints facing persecution after being converted to Christ (Acts 6:7-8:4, Acts 17:1-10, I Thessalonians 2:13-14, and II Thessalonians 1:3-10). As we well know, the faithful in Christ are promised that we will suffer persecution because of our faithfulness to the Lord (Matthew 5:10-12, Luke 6:22, John 16:1-3, Acts 12:1-2, Acts 14:22, Romans 8:28-39, II Timothy 1:8-12, II Timothy 2:8-12, II Timothy 3:11-12, I Peter 3:14-18, and I Peter 4:12-19).

During those times wherein these saints suffered affliction, they were made to be a gazing-stock [spectacle; expose to contempt (Strong’s # 2301)] by reproaches and afflictions. One of the best ways I can think of to consider what this means is to look at what Paul wrote about being a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Notice: *“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day”* (I Corinthians 4:9-13).

In those sufferings wherein they were made a spectacle to the world, they were not alone. While there is not much comfort in this fact, the faithful should know that all brethren will soon or later understand what it means to suffer for Christ. The term translated “companion” [κοινωνός] means: “a sharer, i.e. associate: — companion, x fellowship, partaker, partner...” (Strong’s # 2844). Paul told Timothy: *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God”* (II Timothy 1:8). Peter wrote: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”* (I Peter 5:8-9). John wrote: *“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (Revelation 1:9).

These saints are being reminded that they have suffered for the cause. They are being told to look back at the beginning of their faith. None of us want to come so far and suffer so much just to fall short later in life (II John 1:8). Ultimately, the comfort we look to in times of suffering is the reward of eternal life with our Lord in Heaven (I Peter 1:1-9). We need to stay faithful so that our hope is not in vain!