

With Most God Was Not Pleased

"We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the body"—Romans 8:23.

CHAPTER 10 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a stirring exhortation to eternal and untiring vigilance—an earnest and urgent admonition to constantly and repeatedly examine our foundations and consider our position—a solemn warning that the tide we are fighting is very powerful and if we ever pause to rest on the oars we shall be swept down the stream.

The keynote of Paul's words is **diligence**; unceasing and unwearied attention; earnest heed to the things we have received lest at any time we should let them slip. Paul is always driving at this principle of watchfulness, of alertness—always trying to impress his hearers with the danger of even a momentary relaxation of that eternal vigilance that is the high price of God's approval.

A lifelong, unrelaxing battle for righteousness, obedience and godly self-control—that is Paul's basic theme. Let us consider some of the things he says about it. At the end of the chapter previous to this one, we read (1 Cor. 9:27)—

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Speaking of the constant warfare this required, he exclaimed (Rom. 7:24)—

"O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!"

And again he says of this struggle (Rom. 8:23)—

"Ourselves also which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the body."

And further (Gal. 5:17)—

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

We are called to **war**. A war in which there is no respite. A war that demands all our energies and attention. A war to which all other considerations are subordinate. A war upon the outcome of which ALL OUR FUTURE DEPENDS.

No outward accomplishments or achievements, fame or position, whether in the Truth or out of it, will so decisively affect the judgment of the final day. No consideration of circumstances or position approaches in importance the unseen struggle within.

In Paul's mind, there is almost a reckless heedlessness of the external factors of our lives. He says—

"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20).

"The time is short—let them that have wives be as though they had none—let them that weep be as though they wept not, and them that rejoice as though they rejoiced not" (vs. 29, 30).

"Art thou bound?—seek not to be loosed; art thou a servant?—care nothing for it for the fashion of this world passeth away" (vs. 27, 21, 31).

Of course, this must not be carried to foolish and hurtful extremes. There are many specific commands which bear on the shaping of the outward details of our lives, but Paul's point is:

Don't let anything confuse, delay, or displace the main issue.

The whole final outcome will rest on the result of the war within ourselves—everything else is subservient.

"To him that overcometh," we read seven times in Rev. 2 and 3, as describing the recipients of the promise. Overcometh what? Overcometh the world (John 16:33). What is the world? Evil. *"Overcome evil with good"* (Rom. 12:21). And the battle is right inside ourselves between the spirit that purifies and the flesh that defiles.

We are locked up all our lives in a small room with a deadly enemy. We can't get away from him, though many wander far in the attempt, seeking rest and finding none, blaming their disquietude on their circumstances. We can have no peace unless we destroy this adversary (Rom. 8)—

"If ye, through the Spirit, do put to death the deeds of the body, YE SHALL LIVE".

And we can have no hope of putting him to death if we permit anything to distract our attention from the task. Paul declares (2 Tim. 2:4)—

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life."

This is the Spirit's counsel and illustrates the urgency of the case. Paul further says:

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE. And be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:1-2).

And he sums up the issue in the stirring words at the end of the 13th chapter of Romans:

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."

"Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and MAKE NOT PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

Truly an exalted calling—worthy of all our attention. Nay, even more, demanding all our attention. The whole teaching of Christ and the Apostles is that this is a big battle, a lifelong struggle.

Was Paul an exception when he found that ceaseless effort and constant watchfulness was necessary to a successful overcoming? Are we stronger than Paul? If Paul found that his success demanded that he cut himself off from the entanglements of this life and devote all his energies in one direction, can we possibly think that it is unnecessary in our case? Can we fight two battles successfully when he found that one taxed all his powers?

The thought is often expressed that the Sunday morning meeting affords a welcome opportunity to withdraw from all worldly distractions and apply ourselves wholly to the Word of God. There is much truth and comfort in this thought, but somehow we always feel uneasy when it is expressed. What right have we to get into "worldly distractions" in the first place? Did Paul? Did Christ?

The Scriptures teach that every thought, word and action should be motivated by the primary consideration of self-control and pleasing God. This should be the uppermost thought AT ALL TIMES. This is our whole concern.

The question of our temporal preservation and welfare is a secondary consideration. That is something for which God assumes full responsibility—if we seek to please Him. He gives us no grounds for reversing this order of importance—even for part of the time. Rather He forbids it—

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

He gives us no grounds for voluntarily accepting any set of circumstances which, regardless of how they affect our material well-being, make our task of self-control and godly obedience more difficult, and add to present distractions at the expense of our attention to higher things.

But, whatever our circumstances may be, whatever we are called upon to do, in every aspect and task of our daily life—the controlling thought should be, not expediency or policy or 'smart' practice or worldly wisdom or self-assertion, but an open and honest and unconcealing avowal of the principles that please God, which are humility and gentleness and seeking not our own and a cheerful and ready suffering of injustice.

Maybe we shall suffer a little for it and be taken advantage of and not get so far in worldly things and be considered fools and 'easy marks'—doubtless this will be the result, BUT—we shall be developing a character and self-control and record in the book of God's approval that will stand us in good stead when all present things have passed away.

If we find, or think we find, that our position or employment requires us to suspend the application of these principles at any time, there is obviously something vitally wrong somewhere. At our daily work is where Solomon's words apply—

"Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"
(Prov. 23:17).

Though we work beside them, we work on an entirely different basis. They depend upon themselves for all they get and sometimes this method seems highly successful, but—let us not envy sinners. We depend directly upon God and work to please Him—the employer is but an incidental factor completely under God's control and we know that God is just and that we may leave our welfare entirely in His hands.

Paul's repeated exhortation is that **nothing** must interfere with the continual application of the primary principle of our lives, and he urges a **constant**, continuous examination of ourselves in this matter. In the chapter before us he says—

*"Wherefore, let him that **thinketh he standeth** take heed lest he fall."*

The Apostle's chain of reasoning reaches back into chapter 9, where he says (v. 24)—

"Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but ONE receiveth the prize."

It is clear that the point he is taking from this illustration is the solemn fact that many run who will never receive the prize. Many complete the course but there is nothing waiting for them at the end. Many are called but few are chosen. Many who understand God's Word will say in that day, *"Lord, Lord!"* (Matt. 7:22), but will be turned away without recognition. *"So run,"* Paul continues, *"that ye may obtain."*

Just running is no assurance of God's favor. We must SO run that we may obtain, for many run and obtain nothing. We must know where we are running and keep our mind on it. Paul says (1 Cor. 9:26)—

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly."

And Solomon exhorts—

"Get wisdom and forsake her not, that when thou runnest, THOU SHALT NOT STUMBLE" (Prov. 4:5, 6, 12).

Paul goes on (v. 25)—

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

Young's Concordance gives "self-constraint" for "temperance." The idea is discipline in the interests of fitness.

"Now they do it" (he says) "to obtain a corruptible crown (the perishable laurel wreath), but we an incorruptible."

How much more, then, should we practice self-discipline, keeping under our body, bringing it into subjection and ruthlessly stifling the instinctive and unreasoning reactions of the flesh which are the root of all misunderstanding, unpleasantness, strife and trouble, lest—as Paul says—when we have preached to others, we ourselves should be castaways.

Then he continues, beginning the next chapter (1 Cor. 10)—

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink."

Here again is the same thought. Paul reminds them that a nominal affiliation with God's purpose is no assurance of His blessing or favor. He illustrates this from the position of the Israelites.

The Israelites were led by the pillar of cloud, even as we are by the pillar of revealed Truth. They were baptized into Moses as we are into Christ. They were nourished with the spiritual meat and drink of God's providing—AND YET (v. 5)—

*"With many (RV: MOST) of them God was **not well pleased**, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."*

Why? Because they presumed upon the strength of their position as the especially chosen of God, and forgot that His favor was no inherent right of theirs but depended solely upon their strict obedience to Him. What does Paul say?—

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: AND THEY ARE WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

Let us examine the examples he lists, where the Israelites encountered the temptations common to all men, and which are given for our guidance.

THE GRAVES OF LUST

The first (v. 6) refers to Numbers 11:4, where we find they lusted for flesh, for the good things of Egypt and complained—

"There is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes."

The lesson is strikingly obvious—nothing but this monotonous manna, nothing but the **bread from heaven!** Oh, for the pleasures of Egypt which we left to follow God!

Forgotten was the fact that God was leading them to the promised land of freedom and plenty. Forgotten was the fact that the pleasures of Egypt were inseparably connected with a **bondage and servitude that had no end but death.**

Do **we** sometimes question the value and necessity of the monotonous, flesh-wearying bread from heaven, and seek to enliven ourselves with a little jaunt into the pleasures of Egypt?

God is not mocked. What was His answer to the Israelites?—

"The Lord will give you flesh until it COME OUT AT YOUR NOSTRILS, and it be loathsome unto you."

A grievous plague followed and before they left that spot to continue their journey,

"And Moses called the name of that place 'The Graves of Lust,' because there they buried the people that lusted" (Num. 11:34).

THE GOLDEN CALF

THE next illustration Paul cites is that of the golden calf:

"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

The Golden Calf still has an extensive following. Most people regard it as the only haven of safety and deliverance. Not so, however, the people of God who know that more often than not it is an instrument of destruction rather than deliverance, and at best only a useful but quite dispensable tool in the hand of Providence.

Solomon compares the two schools of thought and renders a verdict that bares the fatal weakness of the Golden Calf—

"For WISDOM is a defense, and MONEY is a defense; but the excellency of knowledge is that WISDOM GIVETH LIFE to them that have it." (Eccl. 7:12).

The golden calf gave the Israelites a comforting feeling of security, but not for long. They found it was no protection against the wrath of God, and far from bringing them life, it brought many of them a quick death. That in which they had trusted was the very cause of their destruction.

THE WAGES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

PAUL continues his story. The next incident (v. 8) is that in which Balaam the prophet and Balak, king of Moab, figure. It is described in the 23rd and 24th chapters of Numbers. We see these two wicked men peering from a hilltop at the might and magnificent array of the camp of Israel—

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob; and thy tabernacles, O Israel! For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?"

"Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel! According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What hath God wrought!'"

What a picture of invincible security!—

"He crouched as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

But unfortunately this is not the end of the scene. These two men do not give up so easily, and there is a lesson to be had from their tenacity if not from their unrighteousness. Truly at times (Luke 16:8)—*"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light"* It was so in this case.

Through the crafty counsel of Balaam, Balak found a crevice in the shining armor of Israel and so destroyed many thousands of them. He tempted them to lay aside their breastplate of righteousness. He enticed them to venture forth out of the strong tower of God's favor and protection. And,

"There fell in one day twenty-and-three thousand"

Peter mentions this incident, too (2 Pet. 2:15). John adds force to the symbol in the Revelation. Speaking to the church at Pergamos, the Spirit says (Rev. 2:14)—

"Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel."

"OUR SOUL LOATHETH THIS LIGHT BREAD"

"Neither let us tempt Christ," continues Paul (v. 9), *"as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents."* Turning to Numbers 21: 4-6, we read—

"And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spoke against God, and against Moses,

"Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread; neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread!

"And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died."

"Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted." Is not his assurance sufficient that all things work together for good? Do we have to have everything explained?

"The soul of the people was much discouraged." Our sympathies are with them, as they must be with any who are discouraged, but we cannot deny that they had no excuse on this occasion. They would not have been discouraged if they had kept their minds on their blessings and miraculous delivery from Egypt, and not brooded on their temporary hardships.

By holding our troubles up close to our face and staring at them, we too may be discouraged; but let us try to keep everything in its true proportion and not belittle Christ's great and self-sacrificing work by warped, ungrateful self-pity.

"FEAR THEM NOT; THE LORD IS WITH US"

"Neither murmur ye," Paul goes on (v. 10), *"as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer."* He is referring to their despair at the report of the ten spies—

"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron and said,

"Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt and all the congregation lifted up their voices and wept that night." (Num. 14:2).

In vain Moses pleaded (v. 9)—

"Fear them not, THE LORD IS WITH US."

What was God's sentence?—"According to your faith be it unto you"—

"As truly as I live, saith the Lord, As ye have spoken in mine ears, SO WILL I DO UNTO YOU. Your carcases shall fall in the wilderness and ye shall not come into the land" (Num. 14:28).

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"NOW all these things," says Paul, **"happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."**

But Paul does not conclude without comfort. He does not want to leave the impression of a vengeful God, standing ready to strike at every misstep. It is God's love he is emphasizing, not His wrath.

In the 13th verse he seeks to dispel any impression that man's road is one of arbitrary pitfalls. God doesn't buffet him for His own amusement, or even just out of concern. On the contrary, says Paul, **every incident of our lives is arranged by the untiring watchfulness of divine love**; every trial is adjusted to our capacity by the insight of omniscient wisdom; every weight is gauged in the unerring scales of all-discerning knowledge.

With divine patience, God is slowly garnishing His Temple with vessels of honor. The process is bitter, but it is glorious. Each trip to the furnace brings the gold forth purer. The higher and nobler the purpose for the vessel, the hotter the fire and the sharper the tool that shapes it and the more rigid the scrutiny it receives.

As one star differeth from another in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), so it is in the Kingdom of heaven. **The more we can stand, the more we shall suffer.** Christ suffered the most, came forth the purest, and will shine the brightest.

Godly suffering is a sign of sonship and acceptance. Absence of trial indicates unworthiness of God's fatherhood (Heb. 12:6-8). Therefore the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name (Acts 5:41). *"But God is faithful,"* Paul concludes—

"Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 19:13).

The Psalmist declares (34:7)—

"The angel of the Lord encampeth around about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

We believe this—**but do we arrange our lives in full faith of it?** Do we depend on it, and step forth confidently in the assurance of it; in spite of appearances, obeying God in what the world would consider a fool-hardy disregard of consequences; or are we afraid to trust our weight in childlike faith to the everlasting arms that are underneath?

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord," we read in the next verse of the same Psalm; and Christ echoes the same thought—

"ACCORDING TO YOUR FAITH be it unto you."

David continues (v. 19)—

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

"Wherefore," Peter adds (4:19):

"Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"—1 Peter 1:7.

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