

I Take Pleasure in Infirmities

"I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong"—2 Cor. 12:10

In our studies of the Holy Scriptures, which are "able to make us wise unto salvation," and which as we Christadelphians do daily, we are constantly encouraged by the things that we read. Sometimes by example and then by direct pleading and teaching we are helped to continue in that newness of life in Christ Jesus—

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

This truth is well demonstrated in Paul's letters to the Corinthians in which we are invited to—

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

It is good that we do this constantly rather than wait for others to call attention to our walk and conduct.

"If we would judge ourselves we would not be judged."

We may feel justified in applying Paul's words in these letters to the Corinthians to ourselves; for no doubt many of the problems he deals with in that ecclesia are extant among us today. By examining ourselves in the light of his words, we may thus be able to walk worthy of our high calling.

Though Paul was an educated man, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a learned man of his day, yet the apostle did not boast of this or attach any value to it, but rather of the *grace and knowledge he had received of God* (2 Cor. 3:4).—

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

The apostle's approach to the Corinthians was in bodily weakness and sorrow of heart. After his much work among them, his sorrow and concern was added to, for he said:

"I fear lest, when I come, I shall find you such as I would not" (2 Cor. 12:20).

Paul's one great care was for their spiritual well-being, above all else; for he told them that he was determined not to know anything among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And let our way of life be the same—not according to worldly learning—not according to the *creature*, but the *Creator*; for, as the apostle states—

"My speech and preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in **demonstration of the spirit and of power**" (1 Cor. 2:4).

In our study of the apostle's life, and especially in conjunction with his work at Corinth, we find a good example for us to follow. We shall not fail to see that his life was not filled with outward joys and pleasantries; for we note the tenor of his words to them—

"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you"
(2 Cor. 2:4).

Here is the apostle's mind then, and we ask *how do we measure up*, as we examine ourselves in the light of the Truth? Was the responsibility of the lightstand only the apostle's, or was it not the responsibility of *all* the members?

Paul's desire was to see the manifestation of that *One True Body*, functioning well and in perfect harmony, so that come what may there would be no deviation from the straight course of godliness. But the apostle, like all the true followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, encountered much that brought sorrow and anguish of heart, rather than joy.

As he gives us a catalogue of his many trials in 2 Cor. 11, he closes, in v. 28, with these words—

"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."

But Paul was not complaining of his great responsibilities, nor trying to get away from them; for he said in v. 29—

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended and I burn not?"

The burdens, cares and responsibilities of the Truth were to the apostle of great importance because he was able to see *the great need for God among all people*.

"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern mine infirmities" (v. 30).

Paul had a thorn in the flesh, a physical weakness, for which he besought the Lord thrice that it may be removed, but he was able to rise above it; for we see shining forth through all his words the desire to obey, honor and glorify God, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts.

As we view him, placing before us great sincerity and truth despite the many reverses and troubles that came upon him for his testimony, we recall his encouraging words—

"Our **light affliction**, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Paul doted not on the present, which he knew was temporal and fleeting. He was working and hoping for those unseen, eternal things that would be his under God's grace, if he was faithful to the cause of Truth. And we can say surely we have no worthwhile excuse if the present be our meat and drink, and in Christ's presence we have nothing to offer. We should be able to say with Paul (2 Cor. 12:10)—

"Therefore I TAKE PLEASURE in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong".

Paul speaks of God's choice of what may appear foolish things to confound the wise, and weak things of this world, or which the world considers weak, but which confound the mighty and powerful; but out of it all will come the glorious beauty of strength of perfection such as has not been seen before. This is illustrated as he speaks of Christ:

"For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you"

(2 Cor. 13:4).

But it is in v. 5 that he speaks so pointedly to present needs:

"**Examine yourself**, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that **Jesus Christ is in you**, except ye be reprobates."

We do need this careful examination of ourselves, as the things of the Truth in Christ Jesus, are not yea and nay. There is no uncertainty or differences of opinion and administration of the principles to which we stand so intimately related in the bonds of the covenant.

But let us not be downcast or discouraged by what we find upon examination; for what we strive for is not the impossible. Did not Paul say: —

"I can do ALL THINGS through Jesus Christ that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

The Power of God is on our side as we strive for victory against the flesh. We should think of the words in v. 8—

"For we can do nothing against the Truth, but for it."

This we must be sure to apply to our daily lives—that whatever we may do, it is not detrimental to the holiness of the Truth, but rather to its furtherance.

And coming to the end of Ch. 13 of the 2nd epistle, let the mind that was in Paul be in us: though he was writing to them for their benefit in his absence from theirs he felt it was for their good, lest if present he might be inclined to use sharpness.

He realized that the Truth in Jesus was given, not that the brothers and sisters would be *destroyed* by its administration, but *edified*, in a true self-examination, and walk before God unto all pleasing.

"Finally, brethren; (he says) farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (v. 11).

Yes, the God of love and peace is with us *when we are in such a state of spiritual life in Christ*. How could we fail then, with God on our side, though all things else be against us?

If these things be in us AND ABOUND, God—the God of love, the God of peace, and the God of all mercies—will be with us to the end.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen."
—W.J.P.
