

WHAT IT MEANS TO SUFFER WITH CHRIST

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Text: Phil. 1:29, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”

I would like to talk about “suffering with Christ;” or what the “sufferings of Christ” consist of. It is a practical question that often comes to mind—“am I sharing in the sufferings of Christ?”

A study of the life of Jesus and the apostles reveals that they endured much in the way of physical suffering in the service of God, and also persecution. A study of our lives reveals a dissimilarity—should this disturb us? Are our lives supposed to be exactly the same as Jesus and the Apostles? Does the expression “sufferings of Christ” mean only direct persecution in God’s service?

Answering the last question first, we say that the expression “sufferings of Christ” has a very broad meaning—far beyond the thought of physical suffering or direct persecution in God’s service. We would like to refer to a few words of our Pastor along this line and then examine the Scriptures which bear out his conclusions—“Any sufferings that we have because of our membership in His Body are a part of the sufferings of Christ. Whatever it has cost you, therefore, to give up your own will, to keep your will submissive to God, to be faithful to the principles for which Christ stands, all that is part of the sufferings of Christ.” (1915 Question from Question Book, page 679, 4th par. —“Sufferings—How the New Creature Suffers.”)

After quoting 1 Pet. 5:10 (“after suffering awhile”) our Pastor made this remark—“We think that the suffering takes in all of the present life’s experiences.” (R4750:2-4) In our Pastor’s estimation, therefore, the meaning is—endurance of all hardship and difficulty necessary in maintaining our standing as New Creatures, and standing for the Truth. As to what this would mean, would vary according to each individual’s circumstances—**THIS IS IMPORTANT TO GRASP**. For instance we have the case of servants being subject to unjust masters—they endured injustice for the sake of their own New Creature development and so they will bring no reproach upon the Truth by wrangling for their rights in an unchristian manner. Peter is the authority for this—1 Pet. 2:18, 19 —“Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.”

A knowledge of the original meaning of the word “suffering” is assistful. Consulting Strong’s concordance we find the definition as “something undergone, i.e. hardship or pain.” Hardship of any kind, endured for the sake of the Truth or for God’s service or for

the sake of ourselves as New Creatures is suffering with Christ.

A consideration of the Scriptures will give us a balanced grasp of what it means to suffer with Christ. We have divided our list of Scriptures into three categories: first, those which show us what causes our difficulties; second, those which give us examples, such as were endured by our Lord and the Apostles; and third, expressions of comfort and hope to those who suffer with Christ.

Jesus and the Apostles endured experiences which are easy to link up with the idea of direct persecution because of the Truth. The Scriptures are many and we are already familiar with them. Jesus endured hateful treatment from the elders, chief priests and scribes, finally being crucified by Roman authorities. Paul and the other Apostles and their associates also endured experiences which are easily understood as direct persecution. Here is a partial list of the Scriptures: Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; Acts 3:18; 9:15, 16; 13:50; 15:5, 19; 16:16-25; 17:5-9; 17:32; 21:27; 23:1, 2; 23:12; 24:5, 6; 24:27; 27:9-44.

Now let us turn to other phases of enduring hardship which are extremely important to grasp if we are to have the witness of the spirit, entitling us to believe we have God's smile of approval, without which we might become confused and discouraged. (Correct knowledge is so very important to intelligent effort and zeal and the possession of the peace of God.) We will give examples of how we suffer as we consider each line of Scripture.

The first Scripture is Heb. 10:32-36 and has to do with being a "gazing stock," of being "companions" and "patient endurance." Here is how it reads: "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. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Now we will give an example of being a "gazing stock" and of being "companions," and of "patient endurance." We all claim to be Christians, and do not follow any man; but those who do not understand how we use our Pastor's writings to understand the Scriptures, are wont to call us "Russellites"—and in so doing, we feel the sting of their disapproval and contempt. We are "reproached" and are the "companions" of one another in this "reproach" and we have to exercise "patient endurance" and refrain from returning evil for evil and feel pity for those who misunderstand our belief and our life of consecration. All this is part of the "sufferings of Christ"—hardship endured for the sake of being Christians. It is natural to want the approval of our friends and neighbors—and it is not

easy to take the disapproval of those who have not taken the time and trouble to understand our position and belief.

Another interesting Scripture is found in 2 Tim. 1:8, 12, “Be not thou 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; For the which cause I also suffer these things nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Paul says here to be “not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord,” and we can think of the interesting and delightful explanations of the types and pictures as explained in Tabernacle Shadows; and this has to do with the many animal sacrifices in connection with the typical atonement day and those which followed during the year. But some look upon all these typical sacrifices as “the bloody sacrifices” of the Old Testament, and great emphasis is placed upon the word “bloody”, and the impression given is that we are dupes and fools to be favorably impressed and believe such things. Again we link this up with the “sufferings of Christ,” because these sacrifices were commanded by our Creator, and so particular were the directions given that any deviation was punishable with death; showing that these typical sacrifices were intended to picture “better things to follow.” We know all these pictures and types were important and we pay attention to them because they pictured “better things to come,” giving us a more detailed grasp of God’s plan of lovingkindness.

Two other scriptures touch upon another facet of “suffering with Christ.” They are 2 Cor. 1:5 and 6, and Col. 1:24, and they read as follows: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” Col. 1:4 reads this way, “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.” We are to “bear one another’s burdens” and comfort and strengthen one another with our sympathetic understanding. We may go through many experiences incident to our being the followers of Christ, and we grow in understanding and sympathy as we endeavor to put into practice the principles of Christian character. This prepares us to reach out to support the various members of the body of Christ as they too, go through similar experiences. What a great field there is here for showing our unselfish love for our brethren in Christ. These are part of the hardships that a good soldier of Jesus Christ is required to bear; and this is rated too as sharing in the “sufferings of Christ.”

Paul revealed to Timothy some of the things that he endured—this is found in 2 Tim. 2:9-12. Let us see what he said, “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that

they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.” How did Paul suffer as an “evil doer”?—by preaching the truth of the gospel he brought upon himself the wrath of the opponents of the gospel. He did this to show forth the glory of God’s Word and plan and this was done for the “elect’s sake”—for his brethren in Christ. We are to follow the example of Paul and in doing so we will incur the displeasure of those who are antagonistic to our religious views. We are looked upon as evil-doers, who refuse to support popular religious views. All this is a part of the “sufferings of Christ,” because we do this for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of his people, who are members of the Body of The Christ. And we must do all this without returning “evil for evil” and this takes quite a lot of faith and self-control and patient endurance.

Another interesting line of thought is brought to our attention in 1 Peter 4:1-4 —“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts [desires] of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.” The very last part of this quotation is full of practical meaning to us—“they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.” Isn’t it true that after we consecrated ourselves to do the Lord’s will, our lives started in to be different? Our friends and associates would take note of this and make comments indicating that they think we are now “goody-goody” and accuse us of acting superior to them. But what can we say?—not too much, and we shall just have to wait until the “day of visitation” for mankind to understand the true meaning of the Christian life. A precise illustration of our change in living is in the matter of “evil surmising” and “evil speaking.” How much the natural man indulges in this sort of thing; but we must come to an accurate understanding of what constitutes evil surmising and evil speaking, and avoid these as contrary to the Spirit of Christ. We must be different, and this difference will be detected and resented on the part of those who knew us before we became Christians—they will feel that by our refusal to join with them in evil surmising and evil speaking we are critical of them and acting self-righteously. Endurance of opposition for our adherence to the principles of righteousness is another part of the “sufferings of Christ,” and is vitally important that we have sufficient moral courage to “live differently.”

The Apostle Paul speaks of “keeping under his body.” This is found in 1 Cor. 9:4-27, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run,

not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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.” “Keeping under the body” requires an uncompromising love for all the principles of righteousness, and an uncompromising faithfulness to our consecration vows. The perfect standard of righteousness is to be our ideal for conduct and our powers of mind and body must be under full control of the will of the New Creature. The flesh, the body, does not like this; and there is a constant necessity of judging all our thoughts and motives and acts to prevent the flesh from interfering with our Christian lives. The exhortations of the Scriptures must be our guides for thought and action, and the precious promises must be looked to for inspiration for action and hope. There is need of constant vigilance on the part of the New Creature, and this is a part of the endurance that is included in the “sufferings of Christ”—hardness endured for our own sake as New Creatures; and by extension to our brethren in Christ. Those who are “keeping the body under” know full well what vigilance and determination is implied and can readily agree that this is part of the “hardships of Christ.”

Peter speaks of resisting the Adversary “steadfast in the faith.” This is found in 1 Pet. 5:8, 9, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” We find a practical illustration of this in our Lord’s case when he was tempted of the Devil. The Adversary quoted scripture, thus appearing as an angel of light; but our Lord knew the scripture was misapplied. So our Lord resisted the Adversary by quoting other scriptures—he used the “sword of the spirit” which is the Word of God. In all three temptations, he countered with “it is written.” Satan endeavored to trap Jesus into doing things differently than the Word of God taught. We are to follow the example of Jesus and in doing so it is necessary for us to put forth great effort to come to an accurate knowledge of the Word of God so that we will know exactly what we are to think, to say and to do; especially the spirit that we are to have. Peter tells us that we are to be sober and vigilant and this means conscientious effort that we be not deceived by Satan who always appears as an angel of light. We are to have faith in God—faith in God’s power and wisdom to guide us aright and this takes effort and alertness. All of this is included in “suffering with Christ.”

In Heb. 2:18 we read, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.” Jesus went through all kinds of experiences and this developed his character so that he was able to sympathize with others and give them comfort and encouragement; and he has provided his followers with comfort and encouragement all through the Gospel Age, by giving us the Word of God with its exhortations and promises. We too are required to go through many difficult experiences to develop us in the various Christian graces. As we pass through these experiences we may not know for sure their meaning to us in the way of Christian development. But

later on, when we note others going through similar experiences, we can think back to what we went through and then reach out with sympathetic understanding to our brethren and give them encouragement. All this is a part of the Christian life and included in the “sufferings of Christ.” We are not to think of the “sufferings of Christ” as meaning that we are in agony when we go through Christian experiences, rather the meaning is that of difficulties, hardships, conscientious efforts in connection with the Christian life. For example when anyone is preparing for a profession of some kind, he goes through a lot of things to the end that he may be schooled and trained for his profession. He is not in mental or physical agony when he is in training, but he certainly is expending great effort and enduring many hardships. So with the Christian—he is expending great effort and enduring many hardships in the preparation for his eventual profession of being associated with Christ in blessing the world of mankind when the Highway of Holiness is opened up for mankind. And he is given the opportunities to practice the various principles of the Christian profession in the present life.

Another avenue of Christian endurance is brought to our attention in Heb. 12:3, 4, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” All during his ministry Jesus was contradicted or opposed by sinners—the leaders of the Jewish people. And finally he was nailed to the cross, and when he was on the cross he was taunted in the words “IF thou be the Son of God.” These words implied that he was looked upon as a deceiver and his life and teachings were “contradicted by sinners.” Have we not had the experience of contradiction on the part of those who were not interested or who were antagonistic to the truth we spoke? Many a brother or sister, who has tried to give a good witness to the truth, has been met with the words, “Oh, you think you know it all.” This is a contradiction for the words imply that we are not believed. This too is part of the “sufferings of Christ,” and we must use care that we do not fight back with ugly words of reproof, but must realize that others are under the fall and they are saying what they do because they are not possessed of understanding as they will when the “knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.”

Peter speaks of “suffering for righteousness’ sake.” This is found in 1 Peter 3:14 to 17, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.” Many people will take advantage of others in business deals or in politics or in other human relationships, when they think they can get away with it without being known or caught “in the act” so to speak. With certain kinds of people it is a common practice to take advantage of every opportunity of gain for self, and the Golden Rule has no place in

their conduct. We as Christians must NEVER do anything dishonest or take advantage of others in any selfish way. We must stand for what is right no matter how unpopular such a stand might be. We must never join with others in any scheme for selfish gain where others might lose or be put to a disadvantage. It costs something to adopt such a course in life and we are heartily disliked by some people. This too, is part of the “sufferings of Christ.” The principles of righteousness are original with God and we are to adhere to them as Christ did and set us an example.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:10 as follows: “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” One brother, years ago was told that he was “weak in the head” because he believed in God and the Bible as God’s Word. No doubt many of the Lord’s people have been slandered because of their confident faith in God and because they refuse to believe the Evolutionary Theory which is so popular in educational circles today. The “sufferings of Christ” include all reproaches and slanders because of our confident faith in the plan of God.

The apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” It is natural to enjoy recognition and have everyone be friendly toward us, and gain a hearing ear. Jesus “came unto his own [nation] and his own [nation] received him not.” He claimed to be the long-promised Messiah, but not knowing that Christ must first die as a ransom price to redeem mankind, before he could restore the nation of Israel, his own nation rejected him—they did not “know” him. And not knowing that the Messiah, the Christ, is to be a composite body with Jesus as the Head, the world of mankind does not “know” the followers of Jesus for what they are—the body-members of the Anointed One. This Anointed One, Head and Body, is to bring in everlasting righteousness and set up a strong Kingdom for the blessing of mankind. So this non-recognition of the Messiah—Head and Body is also a part of “the sufferings of Christ.”

The Apostle Peter touches upon the matter of suffering for doing well. This is found in 1 Pet. 2:18-21, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear [reverence]; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For ever hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” What an example Jesus set for us, his followers—“when he was reviled, he reviled not again; and when he suffered, he threatened not.” But what

did he do instead? “He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” What does all this mean? It means that Jesus did not attempt to “return evil for evil” but he left all judgment and vengeance to God; he placed himself in the full care of God to do whatever God willed for him and did not attempt to “get even” or demand just treatment. Paul expresses the matter in a very simple and pointed manner in Rom. 12:19, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” I think we would be safe in saying that there is nothing harder to endure than unjust treatment and keep our feelings and emotions under full control of the Spirit of the Lord. But this high attainment is a “must” for us and requires absolute faith in God’s wisdom, his power and love, waiting until His own time to bring in a “new heavens and a new earth” wherein dwelleth righteousness and equity. As Peter tells us “Christ set us an example that we should follow in his steps. How vital is our understanding of God’s Plan to give us mental strength to follow the example of Christ. We thank God daily for the knowledge that there are better times coming. Paul gives a very similar thought to Peter in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Why is this? Because Satan is the god of this world; and as Malachi says (3:15), “And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”

In 2 Thess. 1:4 and 5, Paul writes, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.” Many have the thought that the Kingdom of God is merely in the hearts of the followers of Christ; but we believe the Scriptures to teach that the Kingdom of God is a literal kingdom that is to be set up in the earth. The popular idea is very popular and held to tenaciously. We witness to and preach a coming kingdom of God which is to displace Satan’s kingdom and all the kingdoms of this earth. This is too much for some and we are opposed for the Kingdom which we represent and this too is part of the “sufferings of Christ.” Our Pastor has stated the matter very succinctly in Volume III, page 209, par. 1 and 2—Suffering with Christ means advocating unpopular truths and exposing popular errors.

There is another class of difficulties that may not even be thought of as included in the sufferings of Christ, yet they are and if we are faithful in the meeting of these difficulties we can have more of the witness of the spirit. Paul mentions these difficulties in 2 Cor. 7:5, “For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.” This is Paul’s struggle with false teachers. He said he had no rest in his flesh. It was important in the estimation of Paul to counteract the efforts and teachings of those who were false teachers so they would not mislead the Lord’s people. False teachers not only promulgate ideas that are contrary to the Truth, but they also use methods that cause great harm in the church. Paul did not back away but preached the truth with great courage for

the sake of the Lord's people. So here is an important phase of the "sufferings of Christ" that we must not neglect, for the sake of our own selves personally, and for the sake of brethren with whom we are associated. Christ died for the church, and we must not permit false teachers to mislead those who have been purchased with the precious blood of Christ.

Paul in his epistle to Timothy speaks of enduring hardness as a good soldier. This is found in 2 Tim. 2:3 and 4, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." We are professional soldiers, so to speak, and we must be fully devoted to the Captain of our Salvation. We must make intelligent effort to keep ourselves free of any of the affairs of this life that would interfere with our consecration vows. This too, is thought of as "suffering with Christ"—following His example as closely as we possibly can. For instance we would not take on any business enterprise that would take up all of our time in the making of money as a primary object in life. Rather we would "redeem the time" away from the making of money that we might have more time for study and spiritual activities for our own personal benefit and for the benefit of our brethren in Christ. We can remember the remark of a Sister one time many years ago—she said, "Some day, I am going to do something big for the Lord." The Lord does not need anything big done for Him; rather we are the ones that need to have things done for us; and money-making, for the sake of money-making, is not one of those things.

The final scripture we have selected regarding the sufferings of Christ is Acts 17:32, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again in this matter." It seems odd that some would "mock" when the resurrection of the dead would be preached; but the reason for this is that some believe there is no future life at all, and others are fascinated with the idea that we have inherent life, an immortal soul. But it is a part of our message that we must insist upon the scriptural proposition that we are mortal beings and do actually die and pass out of existence until the time comes for the Redeemer to bring us back from the sleep of death "in the dust of the earth." Practically all Christian people believe Satan's lie, that "ye shall not surely die," and they think that we only seem to die—that it is only the body that dies and something called an "immortal soul" goes right on living. So we have to endure opposition when we contradict the "immortal soul" concept; and this too is part of the "sufferings of Christ."

Now we shall consider a few Scriptures assuring us of God's favor and revealing to us the rewards to those who endure the "sufferings of Christ." We shall start with 1 Peter 4:12 to 14 and 19, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad

also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified... Wherefore 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.”

And Heb. 6:10, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Peter expresses it beautifully in 1 Pet. 5:10, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

Paul gives some very encouraging thoughts to Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:11, 12, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

Paul says that the sufferings endured in this life are not worthy to be compared with the reward in the next life—Rom. 8:17, 18, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 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.”

I would like to close with a few pointed remarks of our Pastor on the words of Peter—I Peter 5:8 9, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” These remarks of our Pastor are found on Reprint page 1859, dated September 1, 1895 in the Article entitled Sobriety, Vigilance, Steadfastness. Here is what he wrote: “When we consider how strongly our adversary is entrenched in the world—in its ideas, its maxims, its institutions, its policy, its hopes, aims and ambitions—and the Christian life as in direct opposition to all these; and when we further consider how, because we were once partakers of the spirit of the world, the enemy of our souls has strongly entrenched himself in our weak fallen natures; and still further, how, with shrewd subtlety this invisible, intelligent personal foe is plotting and scheming to allure, deceive and lead us into sin—when with sober judgment we consider all these things, then indeed we realize that we are in the midst of a great conflict.

“...Even with all the watchfulness and readiness which we can command, the ability to withstand the enemy and to resist his attacks causes more or less suffering, and often taxes the powers of endurance to the utmost. Indeed we must expect that the tension on our powers of endurance will sometimes be so great as to threaten disruption, and as to

surely cause it if we trust to our own strength. We are forewarned to think not strange of the FIERY trial that shall surely try us if we are indeed the sons of God and soldiers of Christ, as though some strange thing happened unto us. (1 Peter 4:12-16) These things should be expected and carefully prepared for by the Christian soldier.

“Peter intimates that the power by which we are to resist the adversary is the power of faith—‘whom *resist steadfast in the faith.*’ And John expresses the same thought, saying, ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.’ (1 John 5:4) If we are not strong in the faith, how can we endure hardness for it? Faith must grasp the exceeding great and precious promises of God and appreciate their value. Faith must lay hold also upon the power of God and find grace to help in every time of need. And faith in a personal righteous God, whose eye is ever upon us, must steadily cultivate those elements of character which are always pleasing and acceptable to him, and which Peter tells us are most essential to our final overcoming in this warfare.—2 Peter 1:5 to 10.

“He urges that, in addition to our faith in the exceeding great and precious promises which inspire zeal and give us renewed courage, we should give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.’ Then he adds, ‘For if ye do these things, ye shall *never fall.*’

“The steady persistent cultivation of these graces of character will also clarify our spiritual vision, enabling us the more fully to comprehend the truth of God, and thus, ‘by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,’ we shall be able to ‘withstand all the fiery darts of the adversary’ and to win the victory of faith and make our calling and election sure.

“With this view of the great battle of life to the Christian, what a work we realize to be before us, and what necessity for sobriety, vigilance and steadfastness! It is a life work a life battle against a mighty foe entrenched in our flesh. The powers without are strong indeed but the civil war with the powers within is by far the most to be dreaded. If we become in any measure intoxicated with the spirit of the world;—if we give way to self-gratification, love of ease, pleasure, a little indulgence of any of the old dispositions of envy, malice, pride vain-glory, vaunting of self, headiness, high-mindedness, wrath, strife or any such thing—even a little, Oh, how great is the peril to which we are exposed!

“Beloved, let us war a good warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil, seeking and finding daily and hourly, fresh supplies of grace; for every day and every hour is a time of need if we are but awake to realize it. It is to the warfare with the powers entrenched within that we are again referred, when it is said, ‘He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.’ (Prov.

16:32) Yes, the task is a greater one, and represents a greater, as well as a nobler effort. Let us fight the good fight of faith along this line. Let our lives be a daily and hourly struggle to overcome the evil that is in ourselves, to purify and beautify our own characters. Thus shall we be the more fully prepared to strive faithfully and steadily against the foes without—to war a good warfare to the end.

“The Apostle, out of the fullness of his love and sympathy for all his comrades in the army of the Lord, adds to the earnest exhortation this parting benediction—“The God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” It is only through endurance of hardness as good soldiers of Christ that this desirable condition can be attained—viz., perfect self-control and ability to resist evil, established faith, patience and virtue, settled, abiding rest in Christ, and hope through his word of promise. This undoubtedly was the Apostle’s own experience as he grew old in the Master’s service, and so may it be ours. Let each departing year find us nearer perfection!”

Closing Hymn—Guide Me - #71.