

The Christian and Difficult Times  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Importance of Faith

BPH

Assembly Bookshelf  
2016

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## The Importance of Faith<sup>1</sup>

**II Timothy 3:1-5** But realize this, that in the **last days difficult times** will come. NASB

No doubt the times we live in are difficult or perilous times. As in the days of Noah, people are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, yet most people (as in the days of Noah) do not know that our days are numbered.

**Matthew 24:37-39** "But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.<sup>38</sup> "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. NKJV

Yet Noah in his day knew their days were numbered and so acted accordingly. Why?—Because Noah was a man of great faith. By faith, Noah believed the word of God, and so obeyed Him in every way.

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<sup>1</sup> This booklet was written per the request of some of our brethren living in India. May our prayers be with them as they continue to seek to serve the Lord in these difficult times of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are truly taking to heart Paul's word concerning the proclamation of the gospel, when he said to Timothy—"Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God." (II Tim. 1:8). May we keep them in our prayers as they faithfully seek to bring the gospel of Christ to every lost soul in India.

**Hebrews 11:7** By **faith** Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. NASB

In perilous or difficult times, **faith** is so important in the life of a Christian, for it sustains us through many trials, tribulations, and in some cases persecutions. As such, because of our topic at hand, we will look at the importance of faith during difficult times from three different perspectives—faith and the Faith, faith and governing authorities, and finally, faith and His Presence and fellowship. But first let me provide a short disclaimer.

Paul once said that he would not presume, or would not dare to speak of anything except those things which Christ had done through him (Rom. 15:18 NASB). To do otherwise would be for him to pretend to be someone he was not and would cause him, as he said in another place, to think of himself more highly than he ought (Rom 12:3). As such, I cannot directly speak in regard to actual physical persecution, like unto the physical persecution experienced by Paul or other Christians during the early church, and, indeed, throughout human history, even to modern times in different parts of the globe. To do so would be presumptuous on my part. Only those who have suffered as such, have the authority to speak of those things. (However, later in the paper, I will provide two testimonies of two Christians who could speak with such wisdom and authority—Polycarp, a Christian who was born in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and who knew the apostle John—and Adoniram Judson, one who suffered greatly, serving the Lord in Burma in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.)

Nevertheless, I can speak in regard to “difficult times,” for such things have been experienced by many throughout the world and in the West. And even though difficult times do not rise to the level of direct persecution, they do provide a

means, whereby the spiritual lessons gained from the one, can become a preparation for the other.

And so, dear brethren, with this in mind, may we seek to faithfully serve our Lord and Saviour during these difficult times of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ever seeking guidance from His Word, and ever praying that we might, by His grace, always remain faithful in any eventuality. So with this in mind may we begin our study.

## **Faith and the Faith**

Paul, or should I say the Holy Spirit, specifically tells us “difficult” times (perilous times in KJV) will characterize the last days—

**II Timothy 3:1-5** But realize this, that in the **last days difficult times** will come.<sup>2</sup> For men will be **lovers of self**, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,<sup>3</sup> unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,<sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God;<sup>5</sup> holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. NASB

And, before, or even congruous with those times, the Holy Spirit also says that some will fall away from the Faith.

**I Timothy 4:1** But the Spirit explicitly says that in **later times** some will **fall away from the faith**, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons NASB

Now, technically speaking, some believe the “last days” mentioned in II Tim. 3:1-5, and the “later times” (latter times in the KJV) mentioned in I Tim 4:1, actually refer to two distinct periods of time, while others believe they basically refer to the same period of time. Generally speaking, those

who translate it as “later” times believes it simply means those times to come after the death of the apostles, and so they take it as referring to times that precede the last days. On the other hand, in most cases, those who translate it as “latter” times believe it simply is another way to say “last days,” and so it is understood as a synonymous term.

The reason for these various views is that the Greek word, ὕστερος in I Tim. 4:1, translated in some versions as “later,” and in other versions as “latter,” is a word that can carry both meanings (depending on the context). The word can simply mean “later,” meaning any point in time later than the present time of reference (e.g. Matt. 21:29). Or the word can mean “latter,” meaning the last thing in a series of things (e.g. Matt. 21:37; 22:27).

Sometimes in Scripture the Holy Spirit will inspire certain Greek words or certain Greek constructions that will allow two different perspectives to be possible. This is the beauty of the Greek language. When this occurs, one must consider the real possibility that the Holy Spirit is purposely emphasizing two different perspectives for a specific reason. As such, if this was the intended purpose behind the Holy Spirit having Paul use the Greek word ὕστερος, which could legitimately be understood as “later,” or “latter,” then, perhaps the Holy Spirit is purposely having Paul use such a word that could be taken either way, because He is trying to warn Christians that a failure to cling to “the Faith,” eventually leads to a “loving of self” (and all the other negative characteristics of II Tim. 3:1-5), and/or a “falling away from the Faith” will always coincide with a “loving of self,” and all the other negative characteristics. Either way, the Christian should take this seriously. For the purposes of this paper, we will only look at the second perspective in which the word is understood as “latter,” in which case, it bespeaks the same period of time as the last days.

Finally, to these two verses of Paul, we must add one more verse given by our Lord Jesus, which also characterizes the “last days,” and/or the “latter times.” In the Gospel of Luke the Holy Spirit inspires Luke to record the following words of our Saviour

**Luke 18:8** "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, **will He find faith on the earth?**" NASB

In the Greek, there is an article preceding the word “faith,” which some have taken to mean “the Faith,” the same Faith mentioned in I Tim. 4:1, which, of course would be the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). But I believe the Greek article is what some have called an anaphoric article pointing back to the “faith” of the “importunate” widow in verses 1-7. And so it would not be referring to “the Faith,” rather, it would be referring to the faith of the widow, who never faltered in her belief that the judge could grant her justice in her case. It is referring to the power of unwavering faith! Thus, from the Greek, the clause could be translated: “...will He find **this faith** on the earth?”

Consequently, when we put all these verses together the first thing we see is that the Holy Spirit is emphasizing the importance of “the Faith” (I Tim. 4:1) and the importance of “faith” (Luke 18:8) during any time of difficulty, and most certainly during any time of persecution that might arise (II Tim. 3:1-5) when men will be preoccupied with “loving themselves.”

So with this laid down as a basis for our study of the importance of faith in these last days, let’s consider why “the Faith” and “faith” is so important and why “love of self” will undermine them both.

The first thing we need to remember is that **faith** is the basis of our salvation, for it is by **faith** that we are justified before God (Rom. 5:1).

**Romans 5:1-3** Therefore having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have obtained our **introduction by faith** into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance. NASB

As such, this initial faith is what introduces us into the full knowledge of “**the Faith**,” those wonderful doctrines of Scripture and of grace which are ever necessary for our salvation, doctrines which reveal to us the wonders of our salvation and the wonders of our God, doctrines which must ever remain inviolate, and which every Christians should hold close and dear to their heart. And, if one asks the question, “Why is this so?” I would answer it is because “the Faith,” being the foundation of our Christian life, is what bring us into a full and intimate knowledge of God the Father and His Only-Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, sustains us, as He sustained the apostle Paul in all his tribulations and in all his persecutions, to the point whereby Paul was able to cry out near the end of his life—

**II Timothy 1:12** 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. KJV

So dear Christian, knowledge and understanding of the Faith in difficult times is necessary, for it nullifies, when held in humility, any thought of loving oneself, which, in turn focuses all our love and attention on the One who loved us

and gave Himself for us, and the One who will ever sustain us in purity and holiness and bold witness during any difficult time. However, whenever one loves themselves, that love is misdirected away from God and away from the Faith.

For example, love of oneself is “selfish,” whereas “the Faith” teaches us that love should be “selfless,” as understood by the Three Persons of Blessed Trinity. Love of ourselves reinforces the idea that we can earn our salvation by good works, whereas “the Faith” teaches us that salvation is by grace through faith and not of “ourselves!” It is the gift of God. “Love of self” flatters and buttresses human pride, whereas “the Faith” humbles and nullifies human pride, pointing us to the need of a Saviour, teaching us there is none good, no not one (cf. Rom. 3:12). This is why the devil wishes to blind humanity to the dangers of self-love; it hinders mankind from realizing their need of a Saviour for eternal salvation, and hinders a Christian from realizing his or her need of a Saviour for the ongoing sanctification of their soul (Heb. 10:39; I Pet. 1:9).

But this is not all. I believe the Holy Spirit also emphasizes the importance of the Faith (through His warning about those who fall away from the Faith and those who love themselves) because such falling away also causes another falling away, a falling away from “faith,” the faith mentioned in Luke 18:8.

A departure from “the Faith,” either through adding, changing, or subtracting of those doctrines revealed in the Historic Christian Faith, must by definition grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19). Why is this so?—Because the Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26)—and the Faith is Truth (II Tim, 2:18; 3:8). And so, if one is grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit of God by a departure from the Faith or Truth, obviously such a one cannot then be filled to all the fullness of the Holy Spirit, as commanded by Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, since the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Truth (Eph. 5:18; also see Acts



4:31). And if one is not filled with the Spirit as commanded by Paul, one will find he or she will never be able to fully walk by faith, for we are told that faith is of the fruit of the Spirit who fills us (Gal. 5:22). And if one does not walk by faith, one will not be able to walk by the Spirit, and if one does not walk by the Spirit, one will end up walking according to the flesh (perhaps, religious self, but flesh nonetheless). And if one walks according to the flesh, one will then end up adopting worldly ways and worldly wisdom, and even, perhaps, the ways of carnal Christianity, in any time of difficulty.

So, rather than looking by faith to the Saviour when difficult times arrive, they look to human means to provide solutions to the various problems that inevitably will arise in such situations. This shows us how a departure from the Historic Christian Faith, coinciding with the love of oneself, also causes a falling away from “faith.” One’s “faith” becomes stultified by self, with self and human means taking the place of spiritual faith.

This is because “faith” is a function of the human spirit, not of the soul, (which Scripture identifies as the self—cf. Matt. 16: 24-26a with Luke 9:23-25). We can see this demonstrated in the story of the father and the child found in the Gospel of Mark, where the father cries out, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). He believed in his spirit, but he doubted in his soul. This is why Scripture says that believing in one’s “heart” is so important (Rom. 10:10; also cf. Heb. 3:12 & 10:22). A belief in the soul could simply be an intellectual grasp of the mind without any real trust.

You see, beloved, the heart or spirit is where we exercise faith (cf. Acts 11:24; II Cor. 4:13), but when one loves their self, the soul becomes so lifted up that their spirit is left in the background, slowly to become hardened to any walk of faith.

This is why our Lord calls us to deny our self, take up our cross and follow Him.

**Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. NKJV

In this way the Christian is freed from the love of self and the assertiveness of the soul, and so is able to serve God by his or her spirit, in faith, unto the glory of God (Rom. 1:9).

Oh, how important it is for the Faith to remain inviolate without any additions, subtractions, or changes. Every Christian should hold those doctrines dear with total assurance and understanding. This is why I believe the Holy Spirit ties together departure from the Faith with the love of self in difficult times. Without fidelity to the Faith we can never fully know the only One that can sustain us. But when we remain faithful to the Faith, we learn of Him, and in that learning, learn that He never did anything out of "himself," but simply walked by faith with a strong spirit (Luke 2:40 KJV) in total obedience to His Father in heaven.

And so, just like our Lord, we should ever look up to our Father in heaven, just as He did in His humanity (John 5:19). After all, are we not called to walk as He walked (I John 2:6)? May we never love our self, doing things out of our self, but rather apply ourselves to know the wonderful doctrines of the Faith so we can cry out like Paul in difficult times or persecution—"I know whom I have believed!" And in knowing Him, be able to walk as He walked. It will sustain us through many difficult times and will help sustain any one who might suffer persecution.

So now we can see why this so important to our topic at hand. A child of God, who wishes to remain faithful to the Lord, must understand the spiritual importance of "the Faith"

and “faith,” for it is that which will sustain us during any time of difficulty or persecution, bringing glory to God, and not to ourselves. In fact, Paul speaks of the importance of this faith amidst any persecution or difficult time in II Thess. 1:3-4—

**II Thessalonians 1:3** We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, **because your faith grows exceedingly**, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,<sup>4</sup> so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and **faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure**. NKJV

Moreover, in another place, Paul also declares that a child of God should “walk by faith and not by sight” (II Cor. 5:7). Walking by sight always looks at outward things, at difficult things, and then proposes outward solutions that can be seen; while walking by faith always looks at those same outward things, at those same difficult things, but then proposes a spiritual solution that others will not be able to see, nor will they be able to understand. Why?—Because faith will ever see and understand that the unseen things of God above will ever provide a much better and lasting solution than to any visible thing below that is proposed by those who walk by sight. As Hebrews 11:1 says—

**Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence of things not seen** KJV

The Faith and faith is so important in the walk of a believer. It brings comfort to our heart and surety to our walk, for we “know whom we have believed.” When others see difficult things which seem insurmountable, things that bring fear to faltering hearts, we see Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2)—Jesus, the very Son of God who never did anything out of “himself.” And when we see Him, we have the substance of everything we hope for, and we have

the evidence of everything that cannot be seen. It leads us to trust God in any given situation, in any difficult time. Where others might experience fear and dismay, we can, by His grace, through faith, experience hope and confidence in His power, in His presence and in His sovereignty. And this will now bring us to our next perspective of faith.

## **Faith and Governing Authorities**

Many times throughout history difficult times or persecution will arise because of governmental authorities. It was so in the early Church. And, it was so in the first few centuries of Church History. In fact, tradition records for us the story of an early Christian by the name of Polycarp. Christian tradition tells us that he intimately knew the apostle John, conversing with him frequently. He was born around 69 AD and died a martyr's death around 155 AD.

And, like the apostle, he too was taken by the governing authorities of his day, which, of course, would be those of the Roman Emperor. And, like John, he also stood firm in “the Faith,” professing his “faith” in Christ to lost souls, and never loving himself in that time of trial. But in this record, he also reveals to us another perspective that comes from a “walk of faith”—a Christian's attitude to governing authorities, even those governing authorities that might persecute us. Perhaps I will provide a short account of his final trial of faith in order to encourage our own hearts and help us understand what our attitudes should be in our own day toward difficult governing authorities.

“Finally, when he came up, the proconsul asked if he were Polycarp. And when he confessed that he was, he endeavored to persuade him to deny [the Lord] saying... ‘Swear by the genius of Caesar’... But Polycarp... said, **‘Fourscore and six years have I been serving him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can**

**I blaspheme my king who saved me?’** But when he again persisted, and said, ‘Swear by the genius of Caesar,’ Polycarp replied, ‘If thou vainly supposest that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as thou sayest, feigning to be ignorant who I am, hear plainly: **I am a Christian.** But if thou desirest to learn the doctrine of Christianity, assign a day and hear...**As for thee, I thought thee worthy of an explanation; for we have been taught to render to princes and authorities ordained by God the honor that is due, so long as it does not injure us...**But why dost thou delay? Do what thou wilt.’ Saying these and other words besides, he was filled with courage and joy, and his face was suffused with grace, so that not only was he not terrified and dismayed by the words that were spoken to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was amazed, and sent his herald to proclaim three times in the midst of the stadium: ‘Polycarp hath confessed that he is a Christian.’ Then they thought fit to cry out with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive...Forthwith then the materials prepared for the pile were placed about him; and as they were also about to nail him to the stake, he said, ‘Leave me thus; for he who hath given me strength to endure the fire, will also grant me strength to remain in the fire unmoved without being secured by you with nails.’ So they did not nail him, but bound him. And he, with his hands behind him, and bound like a noble ram taken from a great flock, an acceptable burnt-offering unto God omnipotent, said, ‘**Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of thee, the God of angels and of powers and of the whole creation and of the entire race of the righteous who live in thy presence,** I bless thee that thou hast deemed me worthy of this day and hour, that I might receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Christ, unto resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. Among these may I be received before thee this day, in a rich and acceptable sacrifice, **as thou, the faithful and true God, hast beforehand prepared and revealed, and hast fulfilled. Wherefore I praise thee also for everything; I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, through whom, with him, in the Holy Spirit, be glory unto thee, both now and for the ages to come, Amen.**’

When he had offered up his Amen and had finished his prayer, the firemen lighted the fire.”<sup>1</sup>

Notice his firm faith in Christ, and his earnest contending for the Faith. But also notice his honor for the very governing authorities who were persecuting him, which I am sure he learned from Scripture, if not from John himself. He was able to meet his difficult situation with great courage and grace. Why?—Because of his faith. He held no animosity to the persecuting authorities, but rather, showed respect and honor to them, even though they were his very enemies. Thus, he obeyed the Lord’s command to love one’s enemies and to pray for one’s who spitefully use us (Matt. 5:44).

**Matthew 5:44-45** "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.<sup>45</sup> "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. NKJV

By faith, Polycarp, like his teacher, the apostle John, was able to love his enemies, rather than trying to overcome them (i.e. the governing authorities) by human means and/or political machinations. This is difficult to do for one who does not see and walk by faith.

So now we begin to see another way how faith sustains us and gives us the proper perspective in difficult times. Faith sees things different than those who do not walk by faith. Faith, for example, as seen in the story of Polycarp, will look at a difficult governmental situation and will see behind the governmental situation and see that the hand of God that is still in control, and so be able to bear witness to the truth. The same thing should be true with us today. We should see behind any governmental situation and see God. A walk of sight will not and cannot, and so, is forced to resort to worldly political machinations in order to achieve its desired goals. A

walk of faith will never do this, believing that there is no authority except from God and so will ever trust in God to reach our desired goal and to sustain us through any course He orders for our lives. It is our faith that will allow us to do this.

I remember, when I was young man at Biola College, during America's war in Vietnam, one of my Bible teachers gave a true and false test with this question: "True or False—the North Vietnam government was ordained by God?" (It must be remembered, for those who might not know, that America was at war with North Vietnam at that time, and so was considered to be America's enemy.)

Now, if the student marked false, he or she was marked wrong. Why?—Simply because of the declaration of the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-2.

**Romans 13:1-2** Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. <sup>2</sup> Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. KJV

And in the New King James Version it reads—

**Romans 13:1-2** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. NKJV

This is a hard thing to accept apart from faith, but faith looks up to God and sees things not seen by others, and since that same heart trusts in God, for it walks by faith, it can rest in His providential ordering of governments. Let me provide another example of this biblical principle.

Peter in his first epistle says a remarkable thing, especially knowing the state of the governing authorities at that time and the state of the one to whom he referred. He says in I Pet. 2:17 this:

**I Peter 2:17** Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. **Honour the king.** KJV

Now we might wonder how in the world Peter could say to honour the king, for in all likelihood that king was none other than Nero, the emperor of Rome that so persecuted so many Christians! But Peter walked by faith. And by faith, he believed and understood what Paul also understood as revealed in the Word of God—that God is ever in control and has His reasons for all things.

Not only that, I am sure that as an Israelite, Peter must have also learned of another ruler who persecuted God's people, as seen in Dan. 4:30-33, but was honoured by a fellow Israelite, i.e. Daniel.

**Daniel 4:30** "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'<sup>31</sup> "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you,<sup>32</sup> and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you, **until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes.**'<sup>33</sup> "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*. NASB



And so, because Peter also believed by faith that the “Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes,” he was able to say to his fellow Christians who lived under a king or emperor who was just like the Nebuchadnezzar of old ( if not worse)—honour the king.

Beloved, we worry about governments because of our love for the lost and our desire to see the Gospel go forth to all. But one thing we must remember is that “God so loves the world” and He desires everyone to be saved (I Tim. 2:3-4). He is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). He wants the kingdom of His beloved Son to be filled with lost souls that have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness. He never diminishes that desire, for He says now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:2). Nevertheless, during this same time He allows governments to come to power that seemingly (to us) hinder that desire. But that can never be! Our God is all powerful and none can thwart His will!

So we need to realize the problem can never be a governing authority, for that governing authority has been ordained by God and allowed by Him to arise according to His wisdom. Sometimes this is difficult for us to understand, but we must walk by faith! By faith we must trust in His providential ordering and know that He will never do something that will interfere with His longing desire to save souls. By sight and by our *finite* wisdom it might seem so; but by faith and by His *infinite* wisdom, we know such can never be.

God will have the victory no matter what a government might do in its arrogance. A Christian walking by faith will know this and so will never resort to earthly ways to change something he perceives as detrimental to the cause of the Gospel. Rather, he or she trusts in God.

*We must realize that sometimes the governments we desire are not the governments God allows. But we must always walk by faith and trust in the unseen. To do otherwise is walking by sight, looking at things by our limited perspectives and wisdom.*

Because of this, in difficult times, the Christian must never speak out in evil against those who might govern (Jude 1:8 KJV). To do so would betray nothing but a carnality of the soul. It would betray a lack of faith in the power and authority of God to do as He pleases. It would be a presumptuous act, suggesting that God has somehow made a mistake in allowing a certain government to come to power, because, in our eyes, the government that God ordained is somehow keeping souls from being saved.

Dear Christian, if God did that; if God thwarted His own desire that all may be saved by raising up governments that hinder that desire, He would be fighting against Himself, a thing that is impossible. It was our Lord who said, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand (Mar 3:24 NKJV). This is what we must believe by faith and so, when such governments arise we must seek the Lord, obey His Word, walk in faith and be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:17). He will guide us in the way we should go (Ps. 32:8). We must trust Him in this and trust His wisdom.

Yet, we must also not forget, that as Christians we are called to be lights to the world and so we must ever be ready speak out against evil wherever it might be found. Christians can bear witness against evil that might be "in" government, but Christians should never speak out in evil "against" a government, for that would be disobeying the Holy Spirit who said, "... he that sets himself in opposition to the authority resists the ordinance of God; and they who thus resist shall bring sentence of guilt on themselves (Rom 13:2 Darby's Version).

The Church is not called to engage in such worldly and political machinations as found in earthly kingdoms. However, we should not forget that individual Christians may be called to serve in such worldly governments, or kingdoms, as shown by the example of Sergius Paulus in Scripture (Acts 13:7-12). And if an individual Christian is so called, he or she must act with truth, honesty and righteousness, but the Church is never called to get involved in such things.

Perhaps, the following example might help explain this distinction. The Church is never called to become a law firm, and so be engaged in the legal profession. But, most assuredly, an individual Christian may be called to do so, as can be seen by the example of Zenas, the lawyer in Scripture (Titus 3:13). Nor would it be right, just because he was a Christian lawyer, for him to come into the Church meeting and declare that it is the Church's duty to add its support to some legal case he was working on, even if it was a righteous case. That is not the Church's role. The Church is the Temple of God, not a law firm.

In the same way, the Church is not a government. It is not the Church's duty to get involved in making certain laws for the governing of the world. That is not the Church's role. In fact, Paul plainly declares that the Church should not get involved with judging those who are outside because during this dispensation that is God's domain.

**I Corinthians 5:11-13** But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one.<sup>12</sup> **For what have I to do with judging outsiders?** Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?<sup>13</sup> **But those who are outside, God judges.** Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. NASB

Most assuredly, one day the Church will be involved in such judging, when we rule and reign with Christ in the

Millennium (I Cor. 6:2), but that time is not now. The Church is called to a higher calling. And this brings us to another reason Peter could tell Christians to honor whatever government might be in power. He could confidently declare that Christians are to honor earthly kings, because he knew that the King of kings and Lord of lords declared the following—

**John 18:36** Jesus answered, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." NASB

This is why the Church is not called to be involved in earthly kingdoms. Our Lord said His kingdom was, and is not, of this world. He said this to the representative of the Roman government, Pontius Pilate. And, despite its ungodly character (for which the Lord knows they would be held accountable by God) the Lord showed respect to that government, once saying, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's (Mat 22:21).

Our Lord never feared the governing authorities of His day, for His Father was the Most High! Peter did not fear the governing authorities of his day, for His Master was the King of kings. And, dear brethren, we should not fear the governing authorities of our day, for our Master is the same as Peter's—the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the LORD Jesus Christ. (This does not mean we should not hope and pray that God will raise up governments that will always punish evil—Rom. 13:3—but in that hope and prayer we should never lose our trust in the providential ordering of God, when our desired government may not come.) But this requires faith! God determines who is in authority. It matters not to the Lord's kingdom, for His kingdom is not of this world, and so we are not called to fight that fight in this world, for He calls us, as I said before, to a higher calling where we wrestle, not against

flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces and rulers in heavenly places.

**Ephesians 6:12-19** For our struggle is **not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, **taking up the shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. NASB

And, in that wrestling, an integral part of our armour is faith, which Paul calls our “shield of faith.” Without faith we will not be able to extinguish the flaming missiles of the evil one, one of which is to drag us away from the Gospel and our spiritual warfare, and, instead, drag us down to fight against flesh and blood by getting the Church involved in the political machinations of governments (with the added flaming missile that makes us think such earthly warfare will ultimately help the Gospel—Beloved, it never does).

So dear brethren, may we all take up our shields of faith and join Paul who went before us to walk by faith, believing in the unseen providence of God in the governing authorities He allows, so we can be about the work of the Lord which is saving souls from an eternity in hell. The Gospel does not need a certain type of government to succeed; it needs those who walk by faith who will pray in the Spirit that doors might

be opened for the Gospel so that the heavenly kingdom of our Lord might have more and more souls transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into that kingdom, which is the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). If the Lord opens a door for the Gospel under the most difficult times, who can close it (I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12; Acts 14:27). And when such governments arise in opposition, we should pray all the more that God will open that door that no man, nor any government, can shut (Rev. 3:7-8). And, if, in our eyes, it seems that the Gospel will suffer, then let's devote ourselves to pray even more! He will guide us in how this is to be done in the most difficult of times, if we but believe!

**Revelation 3:7** "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, **He who opens and no one shuts**, and shuts and no one opens";<sup>8</sup> "I know your works. See, **I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it**; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. NKJV

Let me close with a story once related by Emily C. Judson, the widow of Adoniram Judson, the missionary to Burma. She tells of a story (which Adoniram Judson first heard from a fellow prisoner, named Lanciego, in prison in Ava) how the king of Burma decided to unify his kingdom with one religion, asking representatives of every religion to come to his palace and declare why their religion should become the religion of the land.

At the end of the story she records for us the following conversation between a listener and her husband Adoniram. The listener believed that if Adoniram had only been at the palace, then maybe the cause of Christ would have been helped, being aided by the government of the king. She relates the conversation as follows—

“‘Oh, if you could only, only have been there!’ was the exclamation of the listener to this tale. ‘Even a few words might have been sufficient.’ The narrator answered with a quiet, but expressive smile. ‘If you could only have known!’ ‘I felt as you do when Lanciego first told me the circumstance, when we were chained together in the death prison at Ava; **but God cares for the interests of his kingdom far better than the wisest and best of us know how to care. The religion of our Saviour, propagated by despotism, would be a curse, and not a blessing to a nation. And even the favoring smile of royalty is a thing I have long since ceased to pray for.** All we want of any government is bare toleration—that is, to be let alone. **It is contrary to the very spirit of Christianity to begin with those in power, and work downward; and when it does so begin, the vital spark is sure to escape in the process. Christ, our pattern, began low.** He did not turn away from Nicodemus, or the Roman centurion, or the nobleman; but he made no special effort for the benefit of those classes, with the view of gaining, through them, greater influence over the lower orders. **Missionaries, if they would be successful, must have more faith in God; and work in his own appointed way, *preaching the gospel to the poor.*** It is painful to think of the pitiable old king, groping so earnestly, in his darkness; but the Saviour has the good of Burmah infinitely nearer his heart than we have, and He was watching when my poor ‘eyes were holden.’ I thank Him for His care; and I stand ready to do His work, however lowly, and wait His time, however long.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

Beloved, may we so believe, so that no matter which earthly government our Lord might permit, the spiritual work of His kingdom will go on by those who see things aright by faith, as our brother Adoniram did before us. In the meantime, may we, as the apostle Paul commands, pray for our governing authorities, praying first and foremost for their salvation and then praying that we may lead a tranquil life in godliness, trusting all the time that God is ever in control.

**I Timothy 2:1-6** First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,<sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a

tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup> This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *borne* at the proper time. NASB

And so to recap so far—understanding the Faith will provide a solid foundation upon which we will be able to lead a walk of “faith” wherein we can develop a close walk with the Saviour of which no one can rob us and a walk which will ever sustain us through those difficult times that may come. With such faith we are called to honour and pray for whatever king (or government) God allows, for we are called to a heavenly kingdom and to a spiritual warfare, wherein the light of the gospel in the face of Christ might go forth and shine unto souls who dwell in dark places, those who desperately need His love and forgiveness.

**II Corinthians 4:1-18** Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, <sup>2</sup> but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> **For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.** <sup>6</sup> **For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> ***we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;*** <sup>9</sup> ***persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*** <sup>10</sup> ***always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*** <sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being



delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death works in us, but life in you. <sup>13</sup> **But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore also we speak;** <sup>14</sup> knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. <sup>15</sup> For all things *are* for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> **Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.** <sup>17</sup> **For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,** <sup>18</sup> **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.** NASB

When we see things, which may disturb and alarm us, may we calm our hearts by faith and look beyond those outward things to those things which are above (Col. 3:1-3), things which are not seen by men, nor even by some Christians who may have forgotten how to walk by faith. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. That is our dwelling place. That is the place where no harm can befall us. That is the place where we can find peace and tranquility and that is the place where we may find intimate fellowship with our Saviour. And that leads to our final thoughts regarding the importance of faith in the life of the believer—Faith in His Presence and Fellowship.

## **Faith in His Presence and Fellowship**

During Paul's missionary journeys many times he was confronted with difficult situations, and sometimes with outright persecution. One such time was when he came to Corinth. He confessed in his epistle that he was there in "weakness, in fear, and in much trembling; so if an apostle of

Christ was in such a state, it should not surprise us that we might sometimes find ourselves in such a state.

**I Corinthians 2:1-3** And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.<sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.<sup>3</sup> **I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.** NKJV

But, when those times come, dear Christian, do not be dismayed, for as the Lord sustained Paul in his fearful time, so the Lord has promised to sustain us in our fearful time. But we need to believe this and walk by faith with our Lord. Listen to how the Lord in His love and mercy sustained Paul during that time.

**Acts 18:9-10** Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; <sup>10</sup>for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." NKJV

Paul suffered, oh so much, for the Lord, but the Lord always sustained him. In another place he says this—

**II Timothy 4:17** But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. NKJV

The same is true for us, and, indeed, for every believer. I am not saying that He will speak with us, as He directly spoke with Paul, but I am saying He will speak to us in the same way He spoke to Paul through our reading and believing of the Word: "For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edge sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When we read those verses by faith, those

very words become as real to us as if the Lord was speaking directly to us as He did with Paul. How wonderful it is that the Lord has promised not only to stand by us with His presence but also to ever speak to us with His voice—but we can only experience it by faith. Listen to the following promises of God presence that are given to us all for any difficult time.

**Isaiah 41:10** Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' NKJV

**Matthew 28:20b** "... and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen." NKJV

**John 14:18-20** "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.  
<sup>19</sup> "After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you *will* behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. <sup>20</sup> "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.  
NASB

Do we believe this? Do we really believe He is with us, close to us, dwelling in the very depth of our beings? Also, listen to the following promises of the Lord speaking to us in fellowship.

**Revelation 3:20** "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. NKJV

**I John 1:3** that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. NKJV

**I Cor. 1:9** God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. NKJV

Do we believe this? Do we believe we can hear His voice? The Christian life is meant to be a life of fellowship between a

disciple and His Master. It is not meant to be a silent fellowship, but a living relationship, where He speaks and we hear! The Lord is near. The Lord is in our heart! The Lord is ever speaking. He is the eternal Word of God! Do we believe this? Are we walking by faith? Oh, may we believe in His presence and in His living fellowship with us, for it is given to us to sustain us in any situation.

So how do we begin this walk of fellowship and faith, ever listening to His voice? The first step is to follow the Lord. The Lord Himself tells us in Luke 9:23, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” This involves a *resolution*, a *discipline* and a *trust*. If one wants to fellowship with the Lord in fullness, one must resolve to deny oneself, the opposite of loving oneself. This bespeaks a consecration of your spirit, soul, and body (I Thess. 5:23).

And so, a *resolution* must be made to allow one’s being to be humbled under the mighty hand of God (I Peter 5:6). God dwells with one who is of a broken and contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18; Isa. 57:15). One must be willing to renounce the things of the world, not conforming one’s soul to all that the world has to offer (Rom. 12:2), but learning to love not the world or the things in the world (I John 2:15-16). Indeed, if one would deny oneself, as we already said, one must learn never to love oneself (II Tim. 3:2). And finally, one must be willing to present his or her body as a living and holy sacrifice to the Lord (Rom. 12:1), setting one’s mind on the things above, not on the things of the earth (Col. 3:1-11).

Next, a Christian must learn to take up his or her cross daily. This requires a *discipline*. Paul says it this way:

**II Cor. 1: 9** “indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” NASB

**II Cor. 4:10** “always carrying about in the body the dying of the

Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” NKJV

When we take up our cross daily, it is to die, to become helpless, and to be weak. Our Lord desires this so that we would learn to trust in Him and not in ourselves (II Cor. 1:9). We must never believe or trust in ourselves, but in God. We must never have confidence in our own natural abilities or talents, but in the God who raises the dead. Soulical Christianity teaches you to “love yourself,” to “esteem yourself,” to “pamper yourself.” It teaches you to believe in yourself and to be self-confident. But Spiritual Christianity will teach oneself to do the opposite. Taking up one’s cross is given to us by the Lord to free us from self through death. O the blessedness of the cross, “through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 6:14).

And finally, we must follow the Lord as our Rabbi and Master. This involves a *trust*. We must be willing to say, “...not my will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). We must go where He leads. It is by following Him that we can remain in fellowship with Him and be disciplined by Him. It is realizing that He has our lives ordered, (Ps. 139: 16-17) and that all things work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). It is learning to walk by faith, trusting in His presence every moment of the day.

*Resolution, discipline and trust*—this is the first step—if we deny our self-life, take up our cross daily, and follow only Him, we will grow in our Christian lives, and His life and presence will sustain us through any difficult time that may come in our lives.

Next, we must learn to spiritually hear the voice of the Saviour, first in our heart, secondly in the providential ordering of our circumstances, and, finally, in our study of Scriptures. This is a part of our wonderful life of fellowship with Him.

The Lord still speaks to His disciples, just as surely as He spoke to His apostles on the dusty roads of Judea. But we must have spiritual ears, not physical ears to hear. How can we minister within the Church if we do not believe the Lord still speaks to our heart? How can the Holy Spirit lead our worship, if we do not listen for His leading? The Lord still disciplines His children by speaking to their spirits. As the Saviour says in Scripture, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know me...My sheep **hear My voice**, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10: 14, 27).

Part of the reason, I’m afraid, man-made discipleship programs have become so popular is because we cannot hear the voice of the Shepherd. We have not learned to cultivate our heart to discern His voice. So much of Christianity today has become mechanical and rational. Why?—Because we serve Him in our souls with all our natural abilities and wisdom, rather than serving Him in our spirits (Rom 1:9). Many Christians do not even know the difference between their soul and spirit (Heb. 4:12). But if we would hear the Lord in our spirit we must exercise our hearts to have a strong spirit (Luke 1:80; 2:40 KJV) capable of discerning His still small voice in order that we might be fully disciplined by Him, to be in full fellowship with Him (I Kings 19:11-12; Mk. 2:8; Acts 16:6; 19:21; 20:22; Rom. 8:16; Rev. 3:22).

In addition, if we as Christians have been called to this life of fellowship with the Master (I Cor. 1: 9) we must ask ourselves, “How can we have fellowship with Him if we never talk to Him?” He is with us every moment of every day and desires to share in all that we do or say. He talks with us, and we should talk with Him. How can we fellowship with Him if we only talk to Him once or twice a day?

If a friend decided to spend a day with us, would we only speak to him or her in the morning and ignore them the rest of the day? Yet the Lord is closer to us than a friend. He desires

to spend every day with us. Do we only speak to Him in the morning, and then ignore Him the rest of the day, or do we constantly talk to Him throughout the day?

The early Christians talked to the Master so often that they became characterized as those who are continually calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 9:21). We should be praying, talking and fellowshiping with the Lord all through the day, asking Him this question or that question, or asking Him for wisdom on this issue or that issue.

Let's consider David, for example; he talked to the Lord at least seven times a day, praising His name (Ps. 119:164). That was his practice, but let me ask, "How often do we praise Him?" (Test yourself one day and count how many times throughout the day you take a pause from the things you are doing and give praise to the Lord Jesus). Could we not decide to at least match the practice of this Old Testament saint and talk to the Lord Jesus at least seven times a day?

Look at Peter. He, apparently, continued that Old Testament practice of Daniel by praying and fellowshiping with the Lord at three set times a day (Acts 3:1; 10:9; cf. Dan. 6:10; Ps. 55:12). How often do we? (And this was not just saying grace at our meals, but was a time set apart for prayer, thanksgiving, and fellowship). Should we not, at the minimum, decide to at least match the practice of that Old Testament saint, that is, whenever we can, and so allow ourselves time to come to Him in sweet fellowship?

But, dear brethren, if we would be honest (as disciples of the Lord), we should not be content just with three times or seven times a day, but we should be in constant communication with our Master. We should be in such fellowship with Him that every day we begin and end our day with Him, ever praising and communing with Him in between.

**Ps. 113:3** "From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the

LORD is to be praised.” NASB

We should be in such fellowship with Him that after having begun our day in praise, every word and deed that we do throughout the day should be done with a prayer of thanksgiving on our lips.

**Col. 3:17** “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” NASB

Indeed, we should be in such constant fellowship with our Master that we are continually giving praise to His name (Heb. 13:15).

**Heb. 13:15** “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” KJV

Moreover, if we live our lives in constant communication with our Master, we have a special promise that He will always be near us (Ps. 145:18), and if He is near us we know He will disciple us and fellowship with us unto the end of the age sustaining us in all things (Matt. 28:20)

Beloved, do you hear the voice of our Master in fellowship throughout the day? Let’s make a commitment to speak to our Saviour every hour of every day, fellowshiping with Him about every aspect of our life, and seeking His love and guidance in all that we say or do. It does not require a vocal conversation or prayer of our lips. Sometimes that is not possible. But He is able hear the silent prayers and conversations of our heart. It may take much diligence to begin this habit of constant conversation with the Master, but once such a habit is formed it will lead to a precious life of fellowship with the Lord and a precious walk before God. It may, indeed, take much discipline of spirit, but, remember, His grace will ever assist us in such a commitment and His



precious voice ever lead us in the way we should go (Jn. 10: 2-4).

Secondly, we must also hear the voice of our Master in the providential ordering of our lives. As we said before, the Lord orders our days (Ps. 139:16-17 NASB). He orders our circumstances in order to wean ourselves from ourselves, so that He might form Himself in our own selves. We must realize that all things, when accepted by faith as being from His hand, will strengthen us and make us like Him (James 1:2-3). This is what will sustain us in our hour of need. The reason many Christians are overcome by difficulty is because they do not understand this principle. They resist the providential ordering of God. Instead of hearing the voice of the Lord in their circumstances, they see nothing but dismay and heartache. They murmur about the things that cause discomfort and pain – (much like the children of Israel of old, I Cor. 10:10-11) – not realizing that all circumstances have been ordered by God for our good. When we trust in His goodness and sovereign will (see Gen. 50:20) we are then able to walk as Paul walked.

It may not be easy, but once we understand this truth, we will look for the hand of the Lord in all our circumstances, and so be comforted in times of uncertainty. Paul learned this in Acts 16: 6-8:

**Acts 16: 6-8** “And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.” NASB

Paul, knowing the Lord did not want them to travel to Asia, perceived that the Lord wanted them to proceed to Bithynia, but while trying to thus proceed, something hindered them. Perhaps, it might have been a swollen river that was impossible to cross, but whatever it was, Paul

realized the Spirit of Jesus was speaking to them and telling them, “My children, do not go that way.” How precious it is to hear the voice of the Saviour in His providential ordering. May we all attune our hearts to hear His voice. When we realize that nothing happens to us except by His sovereign will, we will grow in our fellowship and in our discipleship with Him because we will know that He lovingly orders our ways.

Many spiritual lessons can be learned if we just learn to hear the Lord speaking to us through our circumstances. When we open up our hearts to His penetrating eyes, He will remove all the dross that hinders our faith. We will recognize that the Lord allows certain things to happen to us, because something might need to be corrected or given up in our lives.

George Muller understood this aspect of our walk of faith with the Lord. He understood that all things that happened in his life were ordered by the loving hand of his Master. He understood that the Lord allowed certain things to happen in his life in order to strengthen his faith, whether it was sickness (for long periods he was sick), extreme poverty (many times they were straitened in the daily necessities of life – they would live from day to day in dependence on God’s loving care), or in some cases rumor and false reports (their life of faith was maligned by other brethren). In it all he grew in his fellowship with the Lord. He understood this lesson so well, that he called his narratives of these experiences –*The Lord’s Dealings with George Muller*. In this narrative he says the following.

“If we, indeed, desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and, therefore, through the trial, be strengthened. In our natural state we dislike dealing with God alone. Through our natural alienation from God we shrink from Him, and from eternal realities. This cleaves to us more or less, even after our regeneration. Hence it is, that, more or less, even as believers, we have the same shrinking from standing

with God alone, – from depending upon Him alone, – from looking to Him alone: – and yet this is the very position in which we ought to be, if we wish our faith to be strengthened. The more I am in a position to be tried in faith with reference to my body, my family, my service for the Lord, my business, etc., the more shall I have opportunity of seeing God’s help and deliverance; and every fresh instance, in which He helps and delivers me, will tend towards the increase of my faith. On this account, therefore, the believer should not shrink from situations, positions, circumstances, in which his faith may be tried; but should cheerfully embrace them as opportunities where he may see the hand of God stretched out on his behalf, to help and deliver him, and whereby he may thus have his faith strengthened...”

“...The last important point for the strengthening of our faith is, that we let God work for us, when the hour of the trial of our faith comes, and do not work a deliverance of our own. Wherever God has given faith, it is given, among other reasons, for the very purpose of being tried. Yea, however weak our faith may be, God will try it; only with this restriction, that as, in every way, He leads on gently, gradually, patiently, so also with reference to the trial of our faith. At first our faith will be tried very little in comparison with what it may be afterwards; for God never lays more upon us than He is willing to enable us to bear. Now when the trial of faith comes, we are naturally inclined to distrust God, and to trust rather in ourselves, or in our friends, or in circumstances. We will rather work a deliverance of our own somehow or other, than simply look to God and wait for His help. But if we do not patiently wait for God’s help, if we work a deliverance of our own, then at the next trial of our faith it will be thus again, we shall be again inclined to deliver ourselves; and thus with every fresh instance of that kind, our faith will decrease; whilst, on the contrary, were we to stand still in order to see the salvation of God, to see His hand stretched out on our behalf, trusting in Him alone, then our faith would be increased, and with every fresh case in which the hand of God is stretched out on our behalf in the hour of the trial of our faith, our faith would be increased yet more. Would the believer, therefore, have his faith strengthened, he must especially, give time to God, who tries his faith in order to prove to His child, in the end, how willing He is to help and deliver him, the moment it is good for him.”<sup>3</sup>

Our loving Master leads us in the same way. He orders our circumstances in order to wean us from all that is harmful in our daily living. He deals with us, His disciples, through the providential ordering of our lives in order to increase our faith; and, when we walk with Him in this life of discipleship, when we learn to deal with Him, hearing His voice in every circumstance of our life, we grow in our faith and become more like our Master, our Discipled, our Lord.

Last of all, we must hear His voice in our study of God's Word. Study of Scripture is so important, especially in regard to the Faith, but our study must never become a mere intellectual exercise. We must be diligent to never study Scripture as a mere intellectual exercise apart from a faith exercised from the heart. It is possible, beloved, to know all doctrines, and still not be a spiritual Christian (I Cor. 13:2)! Our Lord desires us to grow spiritually in faith through our study of Scripture, not just intellectually. Knowledge alone never guarantees spirituality. Even attending a Bible College or even the most prestigious Seminary in the world will not, necessarily, guarantee spirituality.

Oh, how the Lord desires us to study Scripture. He wishes to open our eyes to see wondrous things in His Word, but He also wishes us to see our self in the light of His Word. However, in order for this to occur, for us to hear His voice in such a way, we must approach our study of Scripture with a prayerful humbling spirit that cries out to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ps. 139:23-24 KJV).

We must realize that the primary purpose of Scripture is not simply to give us knowledge. It is that, but it is also to correct us, reprove us, and train us (II Tim. 3:16).

**II Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. NASB

Many times we just focus on the teaching or doctrine intellectually, not realizing that there is much in our lives that needs to be corrected spiritually. As was once said by a wise Christian, “Love is blind, and self-love, being the strongest and most subtle, is blinder still.” So many times we forget that doctrine is only one of four things we are told that Scripture is profitable for. We forget the other three—reproof and correction and training—which, if we do forget, becomes a detriment to our spiritual lives.

We should come to God’s Word humbly realizing that we may be blind to our own defects, all the while knowing that He will speak to us about those defects, if we just listen for His voice. We need to hear the voice of our Master speaking to us in the Word, so that His life may be imparted to us as He corrects that which is wanting in our lives. Only then will we learn the doctrines of the Faith and all the doctrines of the Word in strength and great power.

A.T. Pierson, in his biography of George Muller, tells us of George Muller’s example in such an approach to God’s Word. He had much knowledge of the Word of God, yet listen to the wisdom given to him.

“...He now began himself to read the Word of God upon his knees, and often found...great blessing in such meditation and prayer over a single psalm or chapter... [such a] habit [was] a constant reminder and recognition of the need of spiritual teaching ... [and a] self-searching... comparison of [his] actual life with the example and pattern shown in the Word...” [Such a habit] “... mould[s] the character into the image of God...The prayer habit, on the knees, with the Word open before the disciple, has thus an advantage which it is difficult to put words: It provides a sacred channel of approach to God. The inspired Scriptures form the vehicle of the Spirit in

communicating to us the knowledge of the will of God...It therefore becomes a channel of God's approach to us, a channel prepared by the Spirit...and unspeakably sacred as such."<sup>4</sup>

And he states the following in his own words:

"Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was, to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning early in the morning...searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul...When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation."<sup>5</sup>

This type of study or meditation of the Word is equally important. There is a time for deep study of the Word and George Muller was not deficient in so doing, but He also understood the inspired Word of God was inspired in such a way to mould us and bring us into the image of Christ, correcting and reprovng our open heart. In this way he heard the voice of the Saviour in sweet communion every morning. This type of fellowship, dear brethren, entered into by faith, will also sustain us in difficult times.

So, may we all believe by faith that the Lord is with us. Our Master is ever by our side, ready to disciple the willing heart, ready to be in constant fellowship with such that are willing to listen, ever speaking to us with great love—in our hearts, in our circumstances, and in His Word. May we be

careful to hear that still small voice, ever trusting in His presence and ever trusting in that special fellowship of our Lord Jesus, no matter where we might find ourselves.

May we also ever cling to the Faith, knowing it in the very depths of our beings, and not simply by the intellectual prowess of our minds. The Faith will ever lead to a walk of faith, which, in turn, will lead to a life of faith in close and intimate fellowship with our Lord, which will most certainly sustain us in these trying and difficult times of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I pray dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that this poor attempt of encouragement might bless your heart as we all seek to honour and encourage each other, and all the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10:25). Amen.

BPH

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series, Volume I* (Christian Literature Company, New York, 1890) pgs.190-191

<sup>2</sup> Emily Judson, *The Kathayan Slave: And Other Papers Connected with Missionary Life* (Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, Boston, 1853) pg. 149-150

<sup>3</sup> George Muller, *A Narrative of some of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller* (J. Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 455-56

<sup>4</sup> Arthur T. Pierson, *George Muller of Bristol*, (James Nisbet & Co., Limited London) 1902, pg. 130-141

<sup>5</sup> George Muller, *A Narrative of some of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller* (J. Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 405