

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Walking By Faith

"For we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7.) Not many verses in the Bible have been more generally misused than this verse. It is too often assumed that faith ends where sight begins, and this verse is appealed to as proof. "When faith is lost in sight" has been a favorite clause, and yet before our eyes is the statement of Jesus to Thomas: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believed." (John 20:29.) In this case faith began with sight - or, rather, faith was revived by sight. It certainly was not lost in sight. There is no reason for singling out Thomas and calling him "doubting Thomas," for the faith of the others had suffered an eclipse till they saw Jesus after He arose. If their faith was not produced by sight, it certainly was not lost in sight; it was revived by sight. The same Paul who wrote 2 Corinthians 5:7 also wrote in the first letter (9:1): "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" He also said: "I know him whom I have believed." Paul saw the Lord, and yet who had greater faith than he? The truth is that faith in a person may exist where there is the most intimate association and the clearest knowledge, for faith in a person means much more than a belief that he exists. It is to have confidence in his power, wisdom, honesty, and goodness - to trust him unreservedly. And the more you see of some people the more faith you have in them. No, faith is not, and will not, be lost in sight. I cannot think my faith in the Lord will ever end - not even when I stand in glory and am permitted to see the face of my Redeemer. Perhaps we shall not be able to know to what heights and depths faith may attain till we see our Lord face to face.

But someone may say: "Does not the Bible say that faith will end when we are saved in heaven?" I recall no such statement, though 1 Peter 1:9 is sometimes used as if it said that very thing. It says: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." It does not say that we shall receive salvation at the end of our faith, nor that faith ends when we receive salvation. "Receiving" is present participle. They were rejoicing in that they were receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls. The word end does not mean the termination, the limit at which a thing ceases. It frequently means the purpose, the result, or the issue. "Jehovah hath made everything for its own end." (Proverbs 16:4.) He created everything to serve His own purpose, not that it might ease

to be. "But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned." (1 Timothy 1:5.) "Love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned" is the purpose or aim of the charge, not its termination, not the limit of its existence. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful" (James 5:11.) Certainly no one has seen the end of the Lord's existence, the time when He ceased to be! But they had seen the purpose and the results of His dealings with Job. "The end of the Lord" - "the end of your faith." Salvation is the purpose and the result of faith. Without faith there would be no such result. Without faith there would be no such result as the salvation of our souls. The passage shows that there is no such thing as unconditional salvation.

But what does all this have to do with 2 Corinthians 5:7? It shows that faith does not end with possession, or with sight. Notice the marginal reading in the American Standard Version. For some purpose the American Standard translators followed the King James Version, though they tell us in the margin that the Greek word means "appearance." The Greek word which is here translated sight is defined by Thayer as follows. "The external appearance. form, figure, shape." He then gives this note on 2 Corinthians 5:7: "Commonly explained, by sight - that is, by beholding; but no example has been adduced from any Greek writing in which eidōs is used actively, like Latin species, of vision." Paul does not, therefore, say that we walk by faith, not by seeing. "We walk by faith, not by appearance." We walk by faith, not by the way things seem to us, or by the way things appear to be. People are controlled too much by appearance. "Man looketh on the outward appearance." The devil baits his trap with appearance, and he catches every man that walks by appearance rather than by faith. The devil could never sidetrack so many Christians into various schemes if it did not appear that good could be accomplished by such schemes. Often you hear religious people defend a certain course by saying, "It appears to me," or "It seems to me." The end of the way that seems right unto man is death. Jesus said: "Judge not according to appearance." (John 7:24.) Certain brethren at Corinth gloried in appearance. (2 Corinthians 5:12.) Anyone should know that things are not always what they seem. Any well-informed Christian knows that one ceases to walk by faith when he begins to be guided by appearance.

The passage gains in force and beauty when it is properly understood. We walk by faith, not by the appearance of things. Even men may appear to be righteous, but inwardly be "full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matthew 23:28.) When life, or happiness, or health is at stake, we cannot afford to depend on appearance. I stood by a bold spring of cold water, clear as crystal, gushing forth at the foot of a mountain. It appeared to be just the kind of water that would be food for a thirsty man, but I did not drink. Laboratory tests had proved it to be laden with typhoid germs. Faith in that report, not the appearance of the water, guided my actions. Human organizations and humanly-devised forms of worship may

appear to be attractive and effective, but they contain the deadly germs of human wisdom. We pass them by; for we walk by faith, not by appearance. But if faith leads you in a certain way, follow it, even if that way appears to be ruinous. "We walk by faith, not by appearance."

- Robertson L. Whiteside, via Doctrinal Discourses, 222-225.

Do We Have the Right Kind and Amount?

The command to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, being such a vital part of our spiritual growth and maturation, provides us with occasions to sharpen our effectiveness in such self-reviews. Checklists are helpful.

3. Do we have the love that will move us to be unselfish?

Selfishness is a plague of human existence. It has a companion: "conceit," which the apostle describes as "empty" (Philippians 2:3). Selfishness is caused by pride, which causes people to push for their own way. The selfish person is motivated by excessive self-love, prompting him to seek advantage over others, erasing proper love and benevolent consideration for them. The selfish can become so wrapped up in themselves that their lives have no real place for a heavenly Father. When the selfish flock together in the local congregation, there will be strife and factionalism, there will be rivalry and partisanship, which degenerates into a spirit of competition for power and prominence. These "my way or the highway" advocates will work to obtain their self-serving agendas over others by some real or imagined superiority, strength of numbers, accumulations of wealth, angry passions, or dark schemes formed by the works of the flesh straight from the devil's tool box. This unrighteousness is all wrong! The selfish will not be deterred by quoting Scripture to them or reminding them of the hazards of working for the devil in view of eternal judgment. Personal aims and ambitions dominate their affections. Their salvation can only be secured by a genuine change of heart. Repentance is the avenue to be right with Christ and one another.

The Master that God's true people follow never once acted from a selfish motive, and never should Christians allow the devil to influence us in such a shameful way. Genuine love for God is vitally connected to a genuine love for others (Mark 12:30-31). The two are inseparable! The Christian's walk is in humility:

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus," (Philippians 2:3-5).

The righteous love as God loves (cf. John 3:16), sacrificially. The proof of one's confession of being in God's family is possessing and acting out of the genuine love that is characteristic of Him (cf. 1 John 4:7-14). Is God's love perfected in you?

In 1 Corinthians 13 one description of this genuine love is that it is always unselfish. This love "does not seek its own," (v.5), "does not insist on its own way" (ESV), "is not selfish" (ICB). What will the real Christian do in view of what his Master did? — "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). Christ gave Himself for us! What is our response? Love cares for the things of others. Do we have the love that will move us to be unselfish?

- Gary Smalley

- * "The church is full of willing people - a few are willing to work and the rest are willing to let them!"
 - * "Most people know how to say nothing, but only a few know when!"
 - * "Gossipers are like vacuum cleaners - always picking up dirt!"
 - * "The emptier the pot, the quicker it boils; so watch your temper!"
 - * "When the Bible is closed the fountain of faith is cut off!" (See Romans 10:17.)
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)