

OUR TEXT

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

"For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

In these final words of what we know as chapter 10, the author urges us to ENDURING CONFIDENCE. We will see that these two words, "endurance" and "confidence" are the heart of his message of encouragement to believers. I find the Message paraphrase of this passage particularly helpful in understanding its overall sense:

THE MESSAGE

Remember those early days after you first saw the light? Those were the hard times! Kicked around in public, targets of every kind of abuse—some days it was you, other days your friends. If some friends went to prison, you stuck by them. If some enemies broke in and seized your goods, you let them go with a smile, knowing they couldn't touch your real treasure. Nothing they did bothered you, nothing set you back. So don't throw it all away now. You were sure of yourselves then. It's still a sure thing! But you need to stick it out, staying with God's plan so you'll be there for the promised completion.

"It won't be long now, he's on the way; he'll show up most any minute. But anyone who is right with me thrives on loyal trust; if he cuts and runs, I won't be very happy."

But we're not quitters who lose out. Oh, no! We'll stay with it and survive, trusting all the way.

Truthfully, we who live here in comfortable Santa Barbara have seen little of persecution. Oh sure, we might have occasionally been derided for our faith, or rejected in some degree when discovered that we are a person of faith in Jesus. But we know little or nothing first hand about being beaten, tortured or thrown in prison for our faith. Yet this is the context of the passage, for the letter's recipients had known such abuse and suffering in plenty. And it could well be that such tribulation might be coming to us before the end of it all.

Getting physically beaten and losing my possessions because of my faith is not what I originally signed up for. How about you? Most of us signed up for the "prosperity plan" rather than the "persecution plan." If we encounter major difficulties and hardship we might start questioning God, "Why me?" rather than see the difficulty as part of God's overall purpose. The abundant life that Jesus promised ("I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." – John 10:10) is not about a trouble-free life, but about a Spirit-filled ability to endure through the troubles. And we often forget that. His challenge to follow Him ("If anyone would come after me, take up your cross daily and follow Me." - Luke 9:23) did not involve comfort, but a daily cross.

Today the author tells us that if we are going to endure with confidence, we must have a proper perspective on our past, present and future.

PASSAGE OUTLINE

- I. v. 32-34 Remember how God worked in your past
- II. v. 35-36 Know that God is working in your present
- III. v. 37-39 Believe that God will work in your future

(note: for this outline and much of what follows, I am indebted to the excellent commentary of pastor Steven J. Cole, pastor of Flagstaff Christian Fellowship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER FROM MY PAST (v. 32-24)

1. Fresh Enlightenment

"But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened ..."

You may or may not remember the before and after of your salvation, but either way God says you were once spiritually blind, and then miraculously could spiritually see. The Word of God came alive. Church made more sense. Many former questions became answered. You had a purpose in life you never had before. Remember – and rekindle!

2. Fresh Enthusiasm

Coming to Christ is much like falling in love. There is a passion to get to know Him. There is a passion to get to know those who know Him well. There is a joy in a new relationship. We love our faith and our new Heavenly friend.

"Accepted joyfully" stands out as a reminder of this fresh enthusiasm.

Remember that the Ephesian church was reprimanded by God for losing their first love. The key to a successful marriage – either between husband and wife or between God and believer is to fall in love again each and every day. Keep the love fresh!

3. Fresh Values

Coming to Christ was like becoming a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17) including a whole new focus on what life was really about. Here are some of the top 4 that stand out in this passage

- a. A change from valuing what others think of you to what God thinks of you
"being made a public spectacle" points to a change in value. These early Christians cared less about what the world thought of them and focused on what God thought of them.
- b. A change from putting self first to putting God and others first
Becoming *"sharers with those who were so treated"* and *"showed sympathy to the prisoners"* reveal a new shift from self-importance to "others-importance." Becoming a Christian brings an understanding of what Jesus called the two greatest commandments: "loving God" and "loving others as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-40). Love correctly placed is a precious value of Christ-followers.
- c. A change from demanding God "be fair" to submitting to God's will
These early believers *"accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property"* showing an acknowledgment that God was controlling even difficult circumstances. We must continually remember the same. Life may not treat you so well, but God always treats you well – despite what the temporary circumstances might indicate.
- d. A change from valuing the temporary to valuing the eternal
They knew that they had *"a better possession and a lasting one."* They had discovered that "treasures in heaven" were what was of true and lasting value and they sought after those things. They knew what we must remember: that *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matt. 6:20-21)

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT MY PRESENT (v. 35-36)

Two key aspects stand out:

1. **CONFIDENCE** - I must hang tight onto my inner confidence in Christ

Many people, even Christians, say: "You've got to believe in yourself." Yet that is a worldly idea, not a biblical one! Our confidence must be in God and God alone.

2 Corinthians 3:5 *Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.*

When I think of the King James version of verse 25 which says "*cast not away your confidence*" I remember a Sunday evening song that we used to sing in the little church in which I was saved: "I Believe the Answer's On It's Way." (by Merrill Dunlop).

*I believe the answer's on it's way; I believe the Lord has heard me pray
Cast not away your confidence, saith the Lord our God!
Now by faith in Him alone I stand, firmly held by His almighty hand
Fully trusting in His promise, praise the Lord!*

This is the fourth and last time the author uses the word "confidence." Previously we heard:

3:6 "hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end"

4:16 "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace"

10:19 "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus"

So this call to CONFIDENCE is a critical part of his challenge to us! And it comes with great reward (v. 25 and 26) for both this life and the next.

2. **ENDURANCE** - I must persevere in following God's will for me whatever comes

Under pressure of trials it is easier to justify moral compromise. Yet endurance refers to staying true to God's moral commandments and virtuous priorities as revealed in His Holy Word.

Remember that the Christian life is likened to a war between the Godly forces of good and the Satanic forces of evil. For every moral decision we make there is a tug from both sides. To endure is to ever yield to God's tug on our life, standing strong against the opposition, and resisting the devil that he might flee from us. (James 4:7). And just as with CONFIDENCE, there is great reward in ENDURANCE ("you may receive what is promised").

WHAT TO BELIEVE ABOUT MY FUTURE (v. 37-39)

Here the author paraphrases a quote from Habakuk 2:3-4 and then makes a final comment.

1. Get God's perspective on time and eternity

To God "a very little while" may be years or even millennia – anything after the time of Christ is considered to be a short time to God. The point is that waiting for Christ's return and enduring through the "stuff" of life is a very short time compared to the timeless eternity to come.

2. Live by faith – every day – to assure a bright present and future

This is the verse (Habakuk 2:4) that essentially began the Reformation of the Church under Martin Luther. He struggled and wrestled with the truth that there was no good deed that could redeem us, but all was by grace through faith. And this is the truth that will carry us through every trial of every day. We must not live by our feelings, as do so many, but we must LIVE BY FAITH – trusting God through every twist and turn of life.

The author's final comment encourages us believers that WE ARE NOT OF THOSE WHO SHRINK BACK, but ENDURE with CONFIDENCE. May it be. And let it be!