

Drawing Strength from The Courage of Others

How thankful we should be for wonderful examples of courage that spur us on to greater strength in the Lord's service.

Paul was just such an example: "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Phil. 1:14). These brethren, formerly timid and reticent, were drawing strength from the courage of Paul.

Other examples abound. Stephen's plea, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," surely had for its source of strength the forgiving spirit of the Lord (Acts 7:60). The Thessalonian church found a source of strength in the example of the churches in Judea (1 Thess. 2:14). The Philippian church, a model of courage and conviction, could no doubt trace much of its strength back to the wonderful example of patience and equanimity demonstrated by Paul and Silas while in their midst. The Hebrew Christians were admonished to "remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

Christians of this generation are similarly drawing strength from the courage of others. Young men who refuse to miss services of the church to play on a ball team; young women who refuse to be seen in public in scanty attire; businessmen who would lose their jobs rather than compromise their convictions; women who continue to adorn themselves in "meek and quiet spirits" whatever the sophisticated world thinks or says of them; sick people who bear their afflictions with patience and faith; elderly people who continue to attend worship when they are hardly able to go anywhere else; dying people who demonstrate how Christians ought to die; all are sources of strength and courage for others as they face similar circumstances. These all share a common spirit with the great characters of the Bible: they see in their temptations, trials, afflictions, and persecutions a special opportunity to be like Christ, to demonstrate their fidelity to Him, and to provide a source of strength for those who might be weak and wavering around them. They seize the opportunity and stand, and all of us are stronger because of them. Of these courageous people this world truly is not worthy.

Are we, however, to be always on the receiving end of the strength of others? As we draw strength from the courage of others, we must in turn become sources of strength and courage. Others look to us. Each of us has a "charge to keep," "God to glorify," and "a present age to serve."

- by Bill Hall

What Will You Do With Sin?

Man's greatest problem is sin. It wrecks lives, marriages, homes, relationships, etc. Worst yet, it separates from God. What shall we do with sin? There are 3 possibilities.

LIVE WITHOUT SIN

Can a man go several days without sinning? What about a month? Could he make it one year? Why even discuss it? In all of the history of man, only one man has lived without sin. He is our Savior Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:22). But as for the rest of us, the Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

The man who claims he has never sinned is called a liar by God. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." To make such a claim is to call God a liar because He says you have sinned. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:10).

To live without sin is surely the goal of every Christian as he awakens each day. But to make it to heaven on absolute sinlessness just isn't going to happen for us.

DIE TO SIN

This brings us to a second possibility. We can make the conscious decision to die to sin. This means that we strive at every moment to put sin to death in our lives. The process began at baptism when the old man of sin was crucified and buried. The Bible says that "our old man of sin

was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:6).

A man approached his friend and asked, "Are you still smoking." The friend replied, "No, I quit." When asked how he did it, he said, "I died to it." That's the idea!! It may be that we occasionally sin, but the rule of our life is that we are dead to sin. It no longer rules us (Rom. 6:11-12).

DIE IN SIN

The worst of all possibilities is to die in sin. There is no hope for such a man. The man who dies in sin experiences death's terrible sting (1 Cor. 15:55). Satan's venomous stinger poisons the man bringing him to the second death, separation from God for all eternity (Rev. 21:8).

What shall you do with sin? Will you live without it, die to it, or die in it?

- by Jeff May

Pray Without Ceasing

How often do you pray? How long do you pray when you do pray? Have you ever given much thought to these things?

As Christians we are commanded to be a praying people: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 1. 4: 6).

So, it is clear that we are to pray. But how often and for how long? "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God ... " (1 Thess. 5:16-18). "Without ceasing" must be understood to mean something less than every moment of every day. If that were the case there would be no time for other commanded things: teaching, singing, eating, working, etc.

But, "without ceasing" places a real challenge before us as we evaluate our personal practice in the matter of prayer. Test yourself: on any given day, count the number of times you pray; then add up the total number of minutes you spent that day in prayer. You may be shocked at how little time you give to prayer. Two or three prayers a day for a total of five or less minutes hardly seems to fulfill the command to "pray without ceasing"•

But here is a potential problem: If I am to pray more frequently and for longer periods of time, what will I pray for and about? Here are two suggestions: 1) Thank God for all your blessings, physical and spiritual (that will take a while!); 2) Pray for all your brethren (it might help to actually take the church directory and pray for each one listed). Just these two things should prove that when we pray as we should it takes time!

- by Greg Gwin