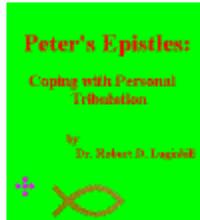


Peter's Epistles #23

Seeing with the Eyes of Faith

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Translation of 1st Peter 1:8-9:

[. . . at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.] Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

Introduction: Our last study covered the inevitability and the necessity of the believer's testing in this life, as well as Peter's encouragement to us – that we might successfully negotiate all of the difficult trials which test our faith (vv.6-7). In the next two verses (translated above), we find that Peter has saved his two strongest arguments for last. The two final points in his introductory discussion of testing should be sufficient to drain all the remorse and self-pity out of every objective believer, no matter how dejected he/she may be by the relentless pounding of life. We may paraphrase Peter's two-pronged message in vv.8-9 above as follows: 1) "no matter what your experience here in the devil's unfair, unfriendly world, your life is really all about Christ"; 2) "maintaining your faith under severe testing is no small issue, but concerns your very salvation."

Making the Most of "This Present Time": Life is hectic. Life is busy. Sometimes it seems as if our responsibilities and the demands on our time and energy are increasing daily beyond our capacity. There can't possibly be time and energy for ministry! Nevertheless, it is important to remind ourselves every now and then that the "game clock" is ticking, and that the amount of time any one of us has for accomplishing what God has put us here to accomplish is finite, diminishing moment by moment. As Paul puts it, "our time of deliverance is closer to us now than it was when we first became believers" (Rom.13:11). The ever-dwindling nature of that most precious resource, time, is a reality to which all believers must give serious heed. This is true no matter whether we think we have an absolutely clear vision of our purpose in this life, or whether we find ourselves groping toward a more distinct understanding of God's marching orders to us as individuals. Indeed, it is this very shortness of the time which demands that we

throw aside all that hinders us and intensify our spiritual growth and production (based upon our individual spiritual gifts). The "time which has already past" should be sufficient for us to have sampled the vanities the world has to offer (1Pet.4:3-4). Now is the time for us to claim those precious moments we have left, since continued growth and ministry for the growth of others are the truly worthwhile pursuits of this life, and the only ones with eternal rewards attached to them. We who have been redeemed by Christ must strive to "redeem", to buy back for Christ, the time with which we have been entrusted (Eph.5:16; cf. Col.4:5). As the popular hymn puts it: "only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." As believers, our life is all about Jesus Christ. "For you have died," as Paul says, "and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, appears, then shall you also appear with Him in glory" (Col.3:3; cf. Gal.2:20).

Seeing Christ with the Eyes of Faith: Christianity is a relationship – a relationship with God based upon personal faith in His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. In verses 8-9 of chapter one, Peter affirms our love for our Savior who has delivered us from death and blessed us with life eternal through His sacrifice: we love Him, love Him with all our hearts (cf. Matt.22:37; Rom.5:8; 1Jn.4:19), even though we have never actually met Him face to face; and we therefore eagerly anticipate being united with Him in the glorious eternity to which we aspire.

In heaven, our relationship with God and Christ will be a perfect one, but here on earth, all relationships, even spiritual ones, require effort and commitment to build up and to maintain. This is obvious from every relationship we ever have had with any another person: they all have their ups and downs. One thing of which we can be sure, however, is that any bumps in our relationship with God are unquestionably *our* fault, for in this case we are dealing with a perfect partner who has perfectly provided for us. To better our relationship with the Lord, what we need to do is to stop worrying about Him fulfilling His end of things and focus instead upon improving our response to Him. We need to learn to follow His lead, and not insist upon making our own way. This takes vision, vision of the invisible, an ability to see the unseen.

But how is such a thing possible? Our physical eyes are not capable of seeing God and allowing us thereby to relate to Him as we would to a human being. We must instead learn to see Him with the eyes of our heart, *with the eyes of faith*. Once we learn to do this, we can march with confidence along the unseen path that God has chosen for each of us.

Developing the spiritual ability to focus our faith on our Lord Jesus Christ is key to our continued progress along the *path of righteousness* (Prov.12:28; 15:19 & 24; 16:9). In Psalm 16:8, David says "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." Now the Lord never appeared to David, but David was a man who was passionate in his faith. Through a life-time of struggle (which included his share of spiritual turbulence), David persevered in his relationship with the Lord, investing the time, the effort and the humility necessary for that relationship to continue to grow. So persistent was he, that he had no difficulty envisioning the Lord's presence – "always", he tells us – and then relying, one might even say leaning on the Lord in all the difficulties of life. We are not talking about an abstract principal here. David is speaking of the Lord as a real person who is there with him "at all times" – the awesome and powerful presence of the Son of God Himself! "The Lord is the One shepherding me" he tells us in Psalm 23:1, and it is surely this ability to visualize his Master, to call to his mind's eye his Lord and deliverer that form a very large part of David's spiritual success.

Like David, we too believe that He is here with us – and even in us (Jn.17:23; Rom.8:10; Gal.2:20; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27). But to remember this fact in the hubbub of life, practice it, get to the point of using it as a shield against the devil's arrows, and employing it as a buttress to our faith is not an automatic thing. The apostle Thomas, after all, was not satisfied until he saw Jesus face-to-face in resurrection, but we should remember the Lord's words to him: "blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed (Jn.20:29).

It takes faith to see the true power and glory of God. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Moses "persevered, as one who kept seeing the invisible One (Heb.11:27)." Though the Lord was invisible to his eyes, Moses never flinched. His determination to keep seeing the Lord through the eyes of faith was the basis of his spiritual growth, and tremendous spiritual strength. In like manner, the writer of Hebrews continues, we too should make a practice of "fixing our gaze on Jesus, the beginner and finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:2). As the leader and completer of all in which we believe, Christ should shine out to us like a beacon in the dark, the Morning Star who will one day rise over this dark world should even now illuminate our hearts and become the star by which we guide our journey through this life (2 Pet.1:19-20).

Even though we do not see our Lord and Savior now, Peter tells us in this verse, we love Him none the less, and the verb Peter uses to express this love is the usual New Testament word for love, *agapao* (cf. *agape*). While much ink has been spilled in the exegesis of this word, it may nevertheless be of some profit to note that the first century Jewish historian Josephus uses the word to express the idea of doing something repeatedly, or being devoted to an activity (using the same verb at 1.64 of the *Antiquities* to tell us that Jobel, son of Ada "devoted himself" to a pastoral life). The analogy is an apt one, for it helps to explain what is meant by the injunction of scripture to "love the Lord with all our might" (Mk.12:30). Though we haven't actually seen Him, we should *devote ourselves* to Him, that is, make our relationship with Jesus Christ something that we cherish, something that we nurture, something that we actively work on day by day. We would do no less for an earthly relationship that meant something special to us. How much more then ought we to make a conscious effort to devote a portion of our thinking and our energy to Christ – to thinking about Him and His sacrifice for us, as well as to a dedicated and persistent manner of life designed to be pleasing to Him.

Conclusion: Our life is all about Christ. If once we see things with the spiritual clarity of the apostle Paul, then we shall be able to say in all confidence, "for me, living is Christ, and dying nought but gain," (Phil.1:21). With such an attitude, the maintenance of our faith, the very "prize of salvation" of verse nine above, will follow as a matter of course. It is this issue – the perseverance of the believer's faith amidst the trials of life – which shall command attention in our next study.

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