

THE UPWARD WALK

The apostle Peter began his first epistle with these words: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the “sojourners” scattered ...” (1 Peter 1:1). The Greek word translated “sojourners” carries with it the idea of “aliens” and “pilgrims” - people who are on a long journey. Elsewhere, the Bible makes reference to the narrow way and the straight path.

Sometimes a traveler loses perspective along the way. He finds that he has hard choices to make, he struggles with weariness, and he forgets some important things he should remember. Therefore, it seems wise to consider again some of the facts the Bible gives us about our Christian journey.

THE BEGINNING

The gateway to the Christian walk opens with a decision - the choice to receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior. No matter how good one's life may be, he is not walking the pilgrim walk until the new life from above is born within him. The moment a person opens his heart to Christ, he embarks upon the pilgrim journey.

Now, this doesn't mean that bells start to ring and skyrocket explode when a person is saved, although some will show the excitement. Rather, it means that the new Christian's life is totally changed. Before he was of his “father, the devil,” walking in darkness (John 8:44). But now the light of God dwells within, cleansing every shadow of sin and making him a citizen of heaven. His journey on earth, therefore, is a pilgrim journey through hostile territory. On the front of his passport is emblazoned the words, “Kingdom of Heaven.”

AN UPWARD WALK

The pilgrim journey is always upward. The destination is conformity to the One who purchased our redemption and blazed the original trail - the Lord Jesus Christ. Because His was a walk in perfect obedience to the will of the Father, we cannot ever fully attain it in this life. But it's our worthy goal. The apostle Paul said in a letter he wrote to the believers at Philippi, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13.14).

Yes, the Christian walk is always upward. It's a continual striving to match our lives with the pattern set by the Lord Jesus. It's a process; not a finished product. It's precisely at this point that some believers have their greatest difficulty. They somehow cannot accept their repeated failures. They demand of themselves a perfection now that is promised for them later. Consequently, they always feel bad about themselves. They become depressed. And they are a discouraging factor for others on the pathway with them. But if they will acknowledge the limitations of their humanity, and if they will daily claim the promise of 1 John 1:9, they will find the journey easier.

The apostle Paul was locked in the same conflict between the ideal and the actual. He expressed his frustration in the concluding verses of Romans 7. Yet at the end of his life he could write, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). This doesn't mean that he achieved perfection in this life; rather, it says that he learned to accept the hills and valleys, to keep his eye on the goal, and to accept God's forgiveness along the way.

THROUGH ALIEN TERRITORY

As the Christian progresses on his journey to heaven, he'll become increasingly aware that he is in enemy land. He's a foreigner, an alien in the kingdom of this world. He's passing through territory ruled by the prince of darkness. Every step of the way he'll face the temptation to adopt its lifestyle, to downgrade his standards to the lowest level.

The apostle Paul warned us about this tendency. He knew how weak the flesh is and how alluring the bright lights of carnal living can be. So he advised us, "... be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Two elements are vitally important in the Christian walk through alien territory. First, we must not conform to the world. We cannot take its value system nor its shortsighted, self-serving goals as our own. Second, we must think like a citizen of heaven. With renewed minds, we must look at the pagan landscape through the eyes of faith. This will enable us to withstand the siren song of fleshly temptation.

BEWARE OF THE LION

The more a Christian matures, the more he becomes aware that he's not only involved in a struggle with the world and the flesh but also with the devil. Peter warned us, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Because of the reality of satanic opposition, we need the help of God. We're in a supernatural struggle. But we are not defenseless. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer to teach us the truth and to strengthen us for the battle. And we are given spiritual armor to protect us from the foe and give us weaponry for the conflict (see Ephesians 6:12-18). Furthermore, we have the advantage of direct communication with our Commander-in-chief, for we are to be "praying always."

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and prayer - these are the sources of our strength and protection in the supernatural struggle in which we are involved. Let us call upon all of them increasingly as we continue on the pilgrim journey.

A SONG OF JOY

Finally, as the Christian continues onward, he can experience deep joy and genuine happiness. Isaiah wrote, "Therefore, with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). And Psalm 1 describes the happy man as one who delights in the "way of the Lord."

Truly, the old song "Singing I Go Along Life's Road" applies to us. We have no valid reason for unhappiness as we travel on. Ahead lie the parapets of heaven. The flags of glory wave majestically before us. The King awaits our coming. Let us not become discouraged on the way. Let us not allow our failures to defeat us. Rather, with eyes fastened on our goal let us joyfully continue on the upward walk!

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