

Walking By Faith, The Regulatory Principle of the Christian's Life

“for we walk by faith, not by sight”

2 Corinthians 5:7 NASB

Before us is a short verse but we must be careful not to let what we see in its length diminish from what it possess in power for this verse taps the very core of the Christian's existence on the one hand and on the other, the heart of God.

In the general context of 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 the apostle Paul is speaking of himself and his ministry as an apostle. Through the use of the pronoun “we” he includes all of the other apostles and may also use it to include those believers who are faithfully ministering with him. However, what the apostle writes in the context regarding faith is unquestionably applicable to all believers of all time.

In the immediate context Paul is speaking of the pressures in this life consequent to his earthly ministry in and for the name of Jesus,

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...”

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 NASB

Furthermore, he is aware of the fact that his ministry as an apostle is likely to result in death (Also see 1 Cor. 4:9),

“...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.”

2 Corinthians 4:10-12 NASB

Nevertheless, because he and those like him have faith they continue to speak (2 Cor. 4:13), knowing that when their earthly bodies do die, He Who raised Jesus will also raise them (v. 14). Paul is aware that such a message and life are instrumental to the spreading of grace to more and more people and that the grace spread causes thanksgiving in the lives of its recipients to abound to the glory of God (v. 15).

Therefore, in the light of the fact that such a ministry abounds to the glory of God they do not lose heart,

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NASB

Chapter 5:1-6 addresses with certainty (“For we know” v. 1) the fact that when this earthly body dies the believer will be in the immediate presence of the Lord. Then in 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul condenses the statements of 4:16-18 and states explicitly the reason for such overwhelming confidence in the midst of what otherwise would be overpowering circumstances,

“for we walk by faith, not by sight”

In essence, Paul communicated to the believers at Corinth in this short but powerful verse that it was a life of faith that kept him **confident** (2 Cor. 4:1, 14, 16; 5:1,6) **courageous** (5:6, 8) and **compelled** (2 Cor. 4:13; 5:8, 9).

Paul knew he would eventually stand before the very judgment seat of Him Whose name he proclaimed (2 Cor. 5:10 with 4: 5, 13) and therefore he was compelled to be found pleasing to Him (2 Cor. 5:9). Unless he was certain that he could be found pleasing to Christ he could be neither confident nor courageous. Therefore, the apostle, knowing that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6) walked by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). A life lived by any other way or any part of a life not lived by faith would not be pleasing in Christ’s presence (2 Cor. 5:9-10) and would at His judgment seat receive the just recompense. Therefore, Paul made it clear to the believers at Corinth that He walked by faith, not by sight.

Dear Christians, this is to be our lives as well. We are to walk by faith and not by sight. If we are to remain confident courageous and live compelled to please God while present in the midst of a crooked and perverted world we too must walk by faith. Walking by faith is the characteristic of God’s people. God states this explicitly in both the Old Testament and the New. Consider the following verses,

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.”

Habakkuk 2:4 NASB

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

Romans 1:17 NASB

“Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, " The righteous man shall live by faith.”

Galatians 3:11 NASB

“But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

Hebrews 10:38 NASB

So clear and emphatic is the Word of God in communicating that the just live by faith, that the Word of God makes it equally clear to do otherwise is sin,

“... whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Romans 14:23 NASB

for we walk

When the Bible uses the word *walk* to describe one's life as it does here in 2 Corinthians 5:7 it is addressing the general conduct or behavior of the believer. Therefore, the word *walk* is not to be understood as merely referring to specific events, although specific events are certainly encompassed by the word as they depict faith's presence. More so, the use of the word *walk* pertains to the believer's entire life subsequent to the new birth. Thus, faith was not only operative in the believer in its logical order following the new birth, as it was at that time the instrumental means of justification (Rom. 5:1). Faith continues as the chief principle in the life of the believer. Thus, the believer (the just one) lives by faith. His or her entire life can be summed up by the two word phrase “by faith.” No wonder after Hebrews 10:38 states the “righteous one will live by faith” Hebrews 11:2 says “by it (faith) the people of old received their commendation” (ESV). Then in the remaining verses of the chapter the phrase “by faith” is used 19 times to describe specific instances in the lives of Old Testament saints which depicted their overall lives of faith. They were commended because of their lives lived ***by faith*** (Hb. 12:2, 39). The commendation was given because faith pleases God (Hb. 11:6).

by faith

It is interesting to note that the writer of Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith(11:1) and then spends the rest of the chapter exemplifying faith with many Old Testament saints—people who took God at His Word and walked in obedience to Him. Thus, the writer of Hebrews uses the examples in 11:2-40 as a means of explaining the definition given in Hebrews 11:1. In his second letter to the church at Corinth Paul reverses this order. In 2 Corinthians 4-5 he first sets before the reader the example of his life of obedience to God in spite of the conditions and then in verse 7 of chapter 5 calls such living walking by faith.

Note 2 Corinthians 5:7 says “for we walk by faith...” but there is no immediate definition in the verse that tells us what faith is. However, the context exemplifies faith at work and in this we are able to obtain a sound definition. In the 18th verse of the preceding chapter Paul wrote,

“... while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:18 NASB

In this verse the apostle demonstrated the activity of faith in his life. He made an interesting statement when he said he looked “*at the things which are not seen.*” This raises a couple of questions, “What was it that he saw that is not seen?” and “How does one see what is not seen?” In answer to the first, that which he saw which is not seen refers to those things of eternity. Notice the verse describes them as just that, “*but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” The verse sets these eternal things in contrast to the temporal things seen in the world. Now the temporal things referred to in the immediate context were the experiences of suffering the apostle

and others were enduring (4:7-10), including the loss of physical life (4:11-12, 16-17). These sufferings are among the things perceived by natural experiences in its various forms. **On the other hand, the eternal things which Paul saw were those things God promised in His Word.** How do we know the eternal things Paul saw were those things God revealed in His Word? The answer is in the first six verses of the fifth chapter. To sum these verses up, the apostle knew that when his life in this world ended he would be in the presence of the Lord in heaven. This was the specific eternal truth he saw (see the first verse of Ch. 5). There is no way he or anyone for that matter could be justifiably confident of such a condition had God not revealed it in His Word (In chapter 4:14 Paul alluded to the doctrine of the resurrection which was established in the Old Testament).

Therefore, in spite of such intense physical trial, they looked beyond the temporal and saw the un-seeable. This brings us to the second part of the question, “How does one look and see what is not seen?” The answer is by faith. By faith the believer sees what cannot be seen with the physical eye and is actually, by faith, more certain of those things understood by faith than of those things understood by sight. The reason for this is because faith rests on the unchanging, unbreakable, eternal Word of God. Faith is a precious gift from God (1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8-9) by which a person believes God. So intense, so real is the gift of faith in the life of the believer that its presence is demonstrated by obedience to God’s Word (James 2:14-26).

In the context of our verse (2 Cor. 5:7), Paul believed therefore he spoke, knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus would also raise him with Jesus (4:13-14). By faith the apostle was so certain of this that he perceived his intense trials (4:7-10) and death (4:11-12) as being light and momentary as compared to that which awaited him according to God’s promise (2 Cor. 4:17). But not only did faith bring Paul to see his trials as light and momentary compared to eternity, it enabled him to understand God’s purpose in those trials. He said the momentary, light afflictions actually produced for him an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comprehension, while he looked not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen (2 Cor. 4:17). As a summary of such a manner of living he wrote, “...for we walk by faith, not by sight...”

not by sight

By the statement “not by sight” the apostle presents a contrast to the phrase which immediately preceded it—“by faith.” So we are to understand that walking by faith or living out the Christian life by faith is a contrast to walking by sight. Note that the apostle made the contrast clear by saying ***not by sight*** as opposed to saying ***and, as well as, or in addition to sight***. His statement set in the context of a contrast communicates clearly that walking by faith is not walking by sight and vice versa. Walking by sight is therefore averse to walking by faith just as walking by faith is averse to walking by sight.

The reason for the contrast between faith and sight is derived from verse 6 which says, “... while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.” Thus, while we are here and not in the immediate presence of our Lord we walk by faith knowing, according to Christ’s Word, that one day we will be in His immediate presence where we shall see Him face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 1:1 Jn. 3:2; Rv. 22:4). Until that day arrives we live by faith according to His Word.

Essentially, when God's Word communicates that His people walk by faith not by sight, it conveys the truth that the people of God live by faith in what God has spoken in His written Word as opposed to life's experiences. Faith transcends the experience as Paul already exemplified (2 Cor. 4:7-12). He even communicated that the outward man was decaying (4:16). *Decaying* was likely a reference to the fact he stated earlier of being delivered over to death and death working in him (4:11-12). These are some of the temporal experiences he saw with the physical eye (4:18a, b) but the things which are not seen with the natural or physical eye are those things which are eternal (4:18c). It was through faith in God's Word regarding eternity that the apostle was able to see the things which are not seen with the physical eye. While Paul's physical eye could see no further than the temporal things occurring in his experience, by faith Paul reached beyond the temporal and grasped the eternal truth of God. He lived by faith as all Christians are to do.

In the light of the clear Scriptural statements we have just examined that the just live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Rm. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) and that contrast also stated explicitly in 2 Cor. 5:7 that walking by faith is not walking by sight, it is astoundingly sad to find among so many who claim to be of the faith practices and doctrines contrary to walking by faith. Consider a couple.

Walking pragmatically

In summary, a life lived under the philosophy of pragmatism maintains that the end justifies the means. A pragmatic life assumes that if things work out well then it was God's will, if there are difficulties or negative results then it must not have been God's will. With such a life success becomes the barometer of determining God's will. Motivation for such living is not the eternal but the temporal. A pragmatic life opposes taking God at His Word and obeying it regardless of the outcome. Pragmatism is a walk by sight not by faith. A study of the ministry of Paul in the book of Acts clearly reveals he did not live pragmatically as his preaching often resulted in riots but he persisted. Even a quick read of Hebrews 11 should slay this worldly philosophy seeing that the walk of faith often resulted in great difficulties for God's people, even death in some cases. However, pragmatic living prevails among many who claim to be of the faith.

Walking by feelings and or emotions

Walking by feelings or emotions can also be pragmatic. For instance, those influenced by this philosophy conduct their lives in such a manner so as to result in feeling good. One might say something like, "If it will make me feel good or better then I'll do it." In this case the result is internal as opposed to external. However, walking by feelings or emotions may not always be pragmatic. For instance one might say something like, "I am going to do such and such because I feel good about doing it." Or, "I am not going to do such and such because I don't feel good about doing it." Either way, motivation for such living is not the eternal word of God but the temporal. Such a life is also in opposition to taking God at His Word and obeying it regardless of the way one feels. This too is a walk by sight (experience) not by faith. A study of the context of 2 Cor. 4:12-5:10 reveals that Paul experienced multiple kinds of feelings/emotions but he did not walk for these or by these. He walked by faith in God's Word.

This second characteristic of walking by feelings/emotions is perhaps the most common practice among those professing faith and perhaps the most dangerous because it is so deceptive at moving one away from faith because it elevates feelings/emotions to a level equivalent to

faith. At which point a shift occurs where the person begins to listen to feelings/emotions when he or she ought to be listening by faith to the Word of God and walking in obedience to it regardless.

Between these two philosophies (pragmatism and feelings/emotions) the regulatory principle of a person's life is either results or feelings/emotions or in some cases both. Either way it is not faith. And if it is not faith it is sin (Rm. 14:23). When either of these two philosophies or both operate as the regulatory principle of life then it is merely an earthen vessel on display to the world. Thus, the excellence and the glory is to the man. But when the supernatural gift of faith is the regulatory principle in an earthen vessel, the surpassing greatness of the power is of God and not us and thus God is directly glorified (See 2 Cor. 4:7 and context).

Faith, as the regulatory principle in the life of the Christian neither negates nor condemns absolutely all results and/or feelings/emotions, although it may negate and condemn some. However, neither does faith rely on them or consult them even though a life of faith from time to time may result in the byproducts of raised temporal feelings and/or good results. Instead, Faith acts in the light of the Word of God as it is the Word of God which is faith's foundation so that in the end God is honored and pleased by faith (Heb. 11:6).

Beloved of the Lord, before faith we walked pragmatically and according to feelings/emotions. However now, let's obey God's Word,

“... for we walk by faith, not by sight...”

2 Corinthians 5:7

Pastor David Martin