

DO NOT LOSE HEART

By: Bill Irby – Minister, West Hobbs Street Church of Christ, Athens, AL

The Apostle Paul's work and life included the possibility for discouragement. The same is true for us today. We are surely not apostles, we are not all preachers, but we are all Christians. The Christian life is a wonder and a blessing. It is not, however, always easy.

Paul did not become discouraged (2 Corinthians 4:8-10, 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Neither must we. 2 Corinthians 4:1-5, 8 is an explanation of Paul's ability to keep from losing heart. If we understand properly and will the things that encourage him, we too can be encouraged.

To assure that we do not lose heart we must be sure to *Renounce Negativity* (2 Corinthians 4:1-6). Negativity, whether doctrinal or attitudinal, result in not being able to see (that is, understand) the gospel. This leads to the ultimate tragedy of being lost. Negativity begins and grows in the culture of self. Encouragement begins and grows when we look outside ourselves to others. The passage describes the strength that comes from the truth. The world of negativity is dark; the world of truth is light (1 John 1:6-10).

In order that we might not lose heart, we must *understand that God is the source of our strength* (2 Corinthians 4:7-15). We are but of the earth. The best most of us will do is something just over three-score and ten. This truth, when known and remembered, makes us realize the need for God in our lives. The power that enables a man or a woman to live a successful life is of God. It is not in man that walks to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23).

Paul realized that he was doing all he did by the power of God. In other words, he did just what the Lord wanted him to do (Acts 27:25, Galatians 2:20). We must do the same if we want to keep from losing heart.

How might we accomplish this? It is not a mystery. We simply live, as Jesus would have us live. We are to have His mind (Philippians 2:5-11), so we must think as He would have us think. We have His example, so we follow that example by walking in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). We have His teachings (John 8:32), so we keep His commandments (John 14:15).

The realization that it is only God's strength that we make it through this life makes us able to do that very thing (see Ephesians 3:16-21). This strength is not some magical or mystical thing. It is not something better felt than told. It is the strength that comes from faith. Biblical faith is the absolute trust that God's Word is true. That trust is rooted in the evidence provided by the Word itself and the physical reality we inhabit. It is more than trust; it is trust joined with obedience (see Hebrews 11:1,6 and 5:8-9).

We must also *rely on spiritual renewal* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). The irreducible fact of life is that the physical self fails. The great blessing that offsets this reality is that spiritual self continues to grow. We will fade physically, but we can become brighter spiritually. The troubles of this life pass, the glory of the next just gets brighter.

When all else fails, we must remember to *look to the resurrection* (2 Corinthians 5:8). We will leave here one day and step into the presence of God. That prospect strengthens the spiritual heart.

Do you lose heart? Do you feel faint? You and I will do better if we renounce negativity, realize that our strength is in God and rely on spiritual renewal. Begin today to live a strong life. Obey the gospel. Be restored. Hold your head up and go forward.