

May we endure – 30/10/2016

“I considered my ways

And turned my feet to Your testimonies.

⁶⁰ I hastened and did not delay

To keep Your commandments.” (Psalm 119:59-60)

Beloved in the Lord,

Endurance is a vital element in many aspects of our lives. It is easy to begin something, but to see it through to the end, requires endurance. Sometimes that can be very tough. How often do we set out to do something, only to leave it after a while, because it has become too difficult? Around this time of year many people set out on a programme of diet and exercise hoping to shed those winter kilos. It all starts well, but many lack endurance and the programme is abandoned after a while. In order to succeed you must make a firm commitment to do it, and then endure. You must keep your eyes focused on the goal all the time.

Solomon wrote:

“Let your eyes look directly ahead

And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.

²⁶ Watch the path of your feet

And all your ways will be established.

²⁷ Do not turn to the right nor to the left;

Turn your foot from evil.” (Proverbs 4:25-27)

This is very good advice and it ties in nicely with our foundation text for today, where the Psalmist writes that he considers his ways. It is vitally important that we consider our ways, that we guard our faith. As Christians, we are God’s ambassadors in this world and our life is a living testimony to a living God.

As God’s children, we are also God’s soldiers. We are constantly at war with a world system that is fallen, whose ways and ideals are in rebellion against God and His Holy Word. Our duty as individuals and as a Congregation is to stand up for God and His Word. We are to be His light in an ever darkening world.

We have a very cunning and powerful enemy, Satan, who relentlessly strives to dim or to extinguish our light. He tries everything he can to mar our testimony and to make us weak and ineffectual. We must resist him and stand firm.

Today we celebrate the 499 anniversary of the Reformation. We commemorate the day that Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, on October 31st 1517. God used these Theses to spark a Reformation, which led countless numbers of people back to Him.

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Reformation was needed because deformation had occurred. The Church had lost its orientation and was drifting in error. It no longer trusted in God's Word alone and was no longer relying on the leading of The Holy Spirit, but was doing its own thing. The Church was drifting along with the times and had strayed from its foundations.

Beginning with Luther, God reformed the Church, and for a period of time things were quite good. But there was a lack of endurance and today the Church is once again so deformed that reformation is overdue. There are so few within the Church that adhere to Luther's creed of Sola Scriptura – God's Word alone. Today there are many who hardly even know what the Bible says. Many congregations and churches are basing their beliefs and practices on popular culture and not God's Word.

I thank God for you, my beloved congregation, because you have stood with me as we strive to hold to Sola Scriptura – God's Word Alone! I remind all of us that we need to endure. We are on the right path, but we must stay on the path. We cannot take our eyes off the ball for even a moment.

We really need to take note of what we read earlier:

***"Let your eyes look directly ahead
And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.
²⁶ Watch the path of your feet
And all your ways will be established.
²⁷ Do not turn to the right nor to the left;
Turn your foot from evil." (Proverbs 4:25-27)***

These words are very near and dear to me at present. I know only too well from past experience that it is so easy to stray off the path and the damage is great. I read last week about how during the second world war, General Montgomery used this passage as an order to his troops serving in the 8th division in Northern Africa. The British and Allied forces were advancing and the enemy was retreating westward away from Cairo. As they retreated they left booby traps in the form of hidden cans filled with explosives as well as exploding ball-point pens that would blow your hand off if you picked it up. The soldiers had to be very alert and very careful. Therefore General Montgomery wrote: "Keep your foot from evil, look right ahead; make level paths for your feet."

Our enemy Satan has planted booby traps all around us, there re land mines at every turn designed to hurt us and our testimony, and to wreck the Church. The most deceptive and most used one is whispering a doubt into our ears about the absolute authority of God's Word. He says to us something like: "Did God really say that? Does He really mean that? Surely that doesn't apply today. Nobody believes that stuff anymore do they? No one thinks like that anymore."

This is the very tactic that Satan used against Eve in the Garden of Eden and it worked. It was so effective that he uses it still. He has used doubt about the authority of God's Word to

weaken Churches throughout the ages. He sows this doubt in many areas. One of the most common is to get people to question Jesus words when He said:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
(Jn.14:6)

Satan plants the idea that there are many ways to God. It doesn't matter which one you use as long as you believe. As long as you are "spiritual." He tells you that it is too narrow minded to say that Jesus is the only way to Heaven. What about all the other great religions?

The fact of the matter is that Jesus is the only way because that is what the Bible teaches us. Yes, the way is narrow, but it is wide open for all who would come. Only the shed blood of Jesus can and has paid our sin debt in full. A person can only be saved by the Blood of The Lord Jesus Christ. It is of absolute importance that we understand this and stand firm on this truth. The pressure is increasing for us to accept other religions and to work together with them.

Another very real pressure that is steadily growing is the question of same sex marriage. There are far too many churches that have bowed to the will of culture and accept and practice this.

I could cite many other examples, but I think we understand. I do not want to dwell on the negative but want to highlight the positive. If you make a commitment to endure and to stand on God's Word Alone, God will help you.

Luther stood his ground. Even when threatened with death, he said: "Here I stand." God blessed his resolve, protected him and used him mightily. Luther stood on Christ Alone, on God's Word Alone and God blessed him. God will bless us if we do the same.

We return to our text:

The Psalmist writes: ***"I considered my ways***

And turned my feet to Your testimonies.

⁶⁰ I hastened and did not delay

To keep Your commandments." (Psalm 119:59-60)

Reformation day is a good day to take stock and to consider ways. We need to ask ourselves: Does my faith need reforming? Is there any area in my life where deformation has taken hold? Have I strayed from the path and bought into any of Satan's lies? Have I compromised my faith in any areas? Have I stepped back from God's Word as the absolute authority in my life? We need to ask the Holy Spirit to point out any areas which need reform.

If and when He does, then we need to repent of, confess our sin, and make amends, We need to not delay in keeping God's commandments. It is good for all of us to submit to God in this way. We live in a dirty fallen world and are easily tarnished.

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Jesus said: ***“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” (Jn.15:1-2)***

It is important to ask God to prune us so that we would bear more fruit. That is the will of God for us, that we would bear good fruit, that our witness would be strong.

Let us pray that God prunes us, cleans us up, takes away everything that does not honour Him, everything that is deformed, so that we may bear more fruit for His glory.

May we fully surrender all to Him and may we walk in the guidance of His Spirit. May we never take our eyes off His Word. May we endure and be blessed.

Jesus said: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev.2:10)

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***