

Stedfastness

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It must be conceded by every honest mind that we are living in a day marked in every sphere by vacillation. Irresolution, uncertainty, wavering of opinion and compromise seem to be the order of the moment. That these features have intruded into the circle of religion is only too sadly evident. The authority of the Word of God, with its voice of divine certainty, is neglected, and often absolutely refused in favour of the vague and contradictory teachings of men.

In such circumstances the believer is exhorted to "stedfastness", a word which signifies that not only are the eyes fixed in a definite direction, but that the *foot is resting on a firm base*.

Before considering further the principle of stedfastness in relation to the believer, it will be well for us to see this same feature expressed in divine Persons Themselves. It is an axiom of Christianity that the blessed God will never form any feature of the truth subjectively in the believer without first showing that truth in all its perfection in Christ Himself. In Daniel chapter 6 the faithfulness of God to His faithful servant Daniel is recorded in the latter's remarkable deliverance from the den of lions. The impression made upon Darius caused that Gentile monarch to exclaim, amongst other things, "The God of Daniel . . . He is the living God, and *stedfast for ever*". The Psalmist (Psalm 102) says of God "Thou art the SAME" — a Name which persists throughout Scripture. Paul writing to Timothy in days marked by compromise and unfaithfulness, calls attention to the fact that God "abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2- 13). James refers to God as the One "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning". (James 1: 17). We read too of our blessed Lord that "He stedfastly set His face resolutely in one **fixed direction**". We who love Him know something of the unutterable sorrow and yet the mighty triumph which that pathway involved!

It is recorded of God's earthly people (Psalm 78) that "they lied to Him with their *tongues*, for their *heart was not right with Him*, neither were they stedfast in His covenant". The terribleness of that indictment is seen in the fact that whilst they did *not* continue in His covenant, the force of the verbs used indicates that they *did* continue in their deceit and outward flattery. We do not wonder that it is later said of that people they "could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance". Let us ever remember that " these things . . . are written for our admonition ".

How delightful it is to see in that same Psalm the attitude of the "faithful" God to His unfaithful people. "He . . . chose . . . Mount Zion which He loved" — reminding us of the sovereignty of mercy which " endureth for ever"; "He chose David" - a man after *His own heart*, who " fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (cf. 2 Samuel 5: 2).

In our own dispensation — the Holy Spirit's day — we read of Stephen who "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up *stedfastly* into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7: 55). This view of heaven was for the peculiar joy and encouragement of Stephen himself — the present position of exaltation and power of Him who had "stedfastly" moved towards Calvary, and who "endured the cross, despising the shame". Stephen's *personal* portion was this view of Jesus in the glory of God, the consummation of His faithful pathway in Manhood here; Stephen's *testimony* was "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". The One rejected by that guilty nation was now crowned in highest glory! The words used imply that this exaltation was *permanent*.

It is not difficult to discover the secret of Stephen's steadfastness. He was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6: 5). He was also "full of grace and power" (verse 8, New Translation). The unseen filling of "faith and of the Holy Ghost" was abundantly witnessed to in the "power" of his testimony and the "grace" of his intercession.

In Acts 2: 42 we read of believers who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers". This was the result of the Spirit-empowered preaching of Peter and the other apostles who so definitely testified to the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would not this indicate the character of ministry which in our day might be effective in producing the feature of "steadfastness" in those that believe? The word "steadfast" in Acts 2 might be rendered as "giving diligent attention to *every detail*". An unbalanced apprehension of the truth will lead to wavering and uncertainty; if stability is to be evidenced we need to be maintained in "simplicity" (singleness of heart) in regard to the truth as it is manifested in Christ.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says "He that standeth steadfast in his heart . . . doeth well". Whilst this verse has what is special in view, the principle involved would, without question, cover every detail of the Christian pathway. Steadfastness is not the result of fleshly effort, it springs from the affections being right with God. We have seen from Psalm 78 that steadfastness was absent from God's earthly people because "their heart was *not* right with Him" (verse 37). Nothing is more calculated to regulate our affections than the wonderful expression of God's own love in the gospel — "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15: 3). As we read this most remarkable chapter we see the mighty results of Christ's holy movements *into* and *out* of death — the triumph of the resurrection; the establishment of the Kingdom and the ultimate glory of the "day of God". But the end of the chapter reveals that we are ourselves to be an integral part of this wonderful matter - "thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord".

Finally, we may refer to that most beautiful verse in Hebrews chapter 3 — "For we are made partakers (or companions) of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence (assurance) *steadfast* unto the end" (verse 14). In chapter 1 verse 9 we are shown our *privilege* as companions of God's Anointed, while He is ever supreme and pre-eminent, anointed "with the oil of gladness above His (Thy) fellows". As *steadfast* may we be increasingly marked in a *practical* way by those features of faithfulness and endurance so perfectly seen in Christ.