2 Peter 1:14 (GR) 68103

Bible Treasury: Volume 13, Strength in Weakness (1:14)

The apostle is nearing the end of his journey, and knowing that shortly he must put off this his tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus had shown him (John 21:16-18), after He had so thoroughly probed his heart to see whether any self-confidence was still left there. Precious faith and true love to the Lord there had always been since the day that his brother sought him, and brought him to Jesus, when He gave him his name and place in view of the assembly not yet built. (John 1:42). “And he brought him to Jesus; and when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone.” “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God; and when he had spoken thus, he saith unto him, Follow me.”

There had been much else besides faith and love in the heart of Simon, son of Jonas, and that much undetected by him. Man admires his natural character, his ardor, boldness, and self-reliance. A will not yet judged is not subjection to grace, and what Christ values is not nature, but the Spirit of God by grace working, and shown out in patient dependence and long-suffering for His name's sake. All this, so largely treated of in his first epistle, as that which is suited for all Christians, he had yet to learn. The key-note he gives us in 1 Peter 4 “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind, for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” Christ did God's will, and suffered for it; so the believer arms himself with the same mind, that is, to walk in the path of suffering, and thus has done with sin. God's will guiding, the flesh does not act, and the lusts of men have no place. All this Peter had yet to learn when first called to follow the Lord.

Leaning on nature is ever the source of failure, and, if it does not lead to a thorough break-down, always leads to weakness and mistakes. To find out this was Simon's great lesson (as it is of all). The way he learned it may not be needed for all, nor always; nay, may we not say, that it was not absolutely needed for him? A low opinion of himself, dependence on God, and self-judgment, watchfulness and prayer, would have saved even Peter from his dreadful fall. But he must learn what he was as a natural man, and know the true source of strength for service, and for feeding the sheep of Christ; and, in Paul's words, have “the sentence of death in himself, not trust to in himself, but in God who raiseth the dead.” Here alone is strength for patient service and endurance in the conflict and sorrow, for Paul as well as Peter—yea, for all.

Satan is God's allowed instrument in Peter's case, and in passing through that fearful sifting of the adversary, there is much to get rid of. His practice failed lamentably, but Satan could not destroy that which the Lord had prayed might be preserved. “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” Beneath all the rubbish which seemed to bury that “precious faith,” from the first it had been deposited in Simon's heart, unseen by man, and unindicated outwardly, yea, belied by oaths and denial whilst in the hands of the adversary, yet at that moment proved to be there by the look of Him on whose heart this poor sifted disciple had been all the while. That look of the Lord broke down pride, self-will, and natural energy—deeper self-judgment following. “He went out, and wept bitterly.”

On the shore of the sea of Tiberias the Lord would make this work a thorough one in Peter's heart, testing the strength of his love. Was it love beyond the love of others? Peter had said, “If all forsake thee, yet will not I” —yea, though prison and death itself should be in the path. This was Simon's measure of his own love, compared with the love of others—too large a measure doubtless, when nature was there, and as the strength for executing it (though love there was too); for, when true love would use natural energy (and this is disallowed by the patient, lowly One, who was led as a Lamb to the slaughter) it suited nature to use the literal sword and fight for Christ, at all to suffer patiently, and endure in meekness. The weapons for the latter were not carnal. The wrath of man did not work the righteousness of God. Peter was warring after the flesh, and there needed a “casting down of his imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10)

When Peter hears these words, “Put up thy sword again into its sheath,” what else had he to fall back upon in nature? The path of self-sacrifice was not of nature. Thus is there a complete collapse in heart and service—not patient endurance—where natural energy had wrought, impelled doubtless by true love to Him for whom in this way be was proving it. Going to prison and death was out of the question now for him. He was even more scared and crest-fallen than Elijah, who fled to Horeb from the face of Jezebel when she threatened his life. Will was working when the servants of the high priest challenged him as a disciple of Jesus; and what is it worth before death or danger?

The Lord would know from Peter's own lips whether he had now curtailed the measure of his love to Him, by Himself using it in its original dimensions. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” This is thrice repeated too.

How deeply probed was that heart, which, whilst now discarding the measuring of its own love, yet could not but plead the truth that love was there, though none but the Omniscient could give him credit for it! “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.” Here then is one whose heart is fitted to feed the lambs and to feed the sheep; and that now, following in the path of patient suffering and self-sacrifice which the Good Shepherd Himself had trod, giving His life for the sheep.

Natural will and energy would at last be thoroughly dealt with, as expressed by the Lord's words immediately added. “When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God; and when he had spoken this, he said unto him, Follow me.”

Was it to end thus, and Peter to follow his Lord to death? Even so it was. What nature was not competent to do, grace would accomplish. He had become weak, and by it had gained divine strength. This then was Peter's own original measure of his love to Christ: was he to be privileged to do even as he had promised at the first? This was to be his privilege—self-emptied and passive, he would when old stretch forth his hands for another to gird him, and carry him whither he would not. It was contrary to nature and will, but these were displaced, and, when thus, the spirit of his Master enabled him to follow Him thus. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh,” in order to hinder us from doing the things that we would. Now this strife was over. The Spirit predominates, and the flesh is set aside. As another could say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Blessed state, and unfailing strength for every saint as well as Peter and Paul!—to be strong in weakness, to live daily dying, to make ninny rich though in poverty; to know how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things being instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Phil. 4) Who or what could disturb the repose of a heart in such a state of dependence and confidence in the Lord?

This, too, not only gives true rest and strength, but leaves the heart at leisure to be occupied with and for others. Having got rid of our own cares, we the more fully care for all saints; and, having judged our own will, we do God's will, or suffer for it. Thus Peter, knowing that shortly he must put off this his tabernacle as the Lord had shown him, with a true shepherd's heart and care thinks of the Lord's blood-bought sheep, and would now the more fully warn them, exhort them, put them in mind, that after he was gone they might have those things always in remembrance. Though they knew them, yet would he put them in mind, and press upon them what would sustain them, so leading them on in diligence, that they might have an abundant entrance administered unto them into the glory, and be kept from falling whilst here. Failure was not a necessity, though he had fallen; but they never would, did they but give diligence to do the things of which he speaks to them. G. R.

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