

## INDEPENDENT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

- A. Introduction: For several months I've encouraged you to become a regular systematic reader of the Bible, especially the New Testament. To read regularly and systematically means to read the New Testament from beginning to end in as short a time as possible. Then, do it over and over until you become familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
1. The Bible is a supernatural book because it is a book from God. Every word is God breathed or given by inspiration of God. Through His Word, God works in us and changes us. II Tim 3:16; I Thess 2:13
    - a. One of the most important things the Bible will do for you is change your perspective or the way you see things. The Bible gives you an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective recognizes that there is more to life than just this present life and that the greater and better part of life is ahead of us, after we leave this world.
    - b. Perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other (*Webster's Dictionary*). When you learn to see the troubles and hardships of life in relation to eternity (the life after this life), it lights the load of life's trials. In comparison to forever, even a life time of suffering is small.
      1. We aren't minimizing the very real hardship, pain, and loss of this life. We are talking about learning to keep it in perspective—in proper relationship with the entirety of your existence.
      2. No matter what you see or feel now, no matter what you are experiencing now, the life to come far outweighs it. Rom 8:18—In my opinion whatever we have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us (J.B. Phillips)
  2. In the last few lessons, we've focused on the fact that the Bible also gives us more information about our situation than what we can see and feel in the moment. We have more to say tonight.
    - a. If you can learn to look past your circumstances to the way they really are according to God's Word, it will make life easier to handle. Regular systematic Bible reading will help you do this.
    - b. Ps 119:105—God's Word is a light and a lamp to our path. When our situation is dark, His Word gives us light by showing us the way things really are and what is really going on behind the scenes.
- B. Our key verse for this part of our study is something Paul the apostle said: II Cor 4:17-18—For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (NIV).
1. Paul assessed his life in terms of eternity. He recognized that in comparison to the life after this life even a lifetime of hardship pales in comparison. This perspective enabled him to view his troubles as momentary and light. Note, Paul wrote that he fixed his eyes on what he could not see.
    - a. The Greek word translated to fix his eyes means to take aim at and implies mental consideration. It comes from a word that means goal or the mark at the end of a race, especially an object in the distance at which one looks and aims.
    - b. In the context of Paul's statement, the goal or the end game that we are to consider, the object at which we aim, is the life to come. No one ceases to exist when they die. At death, the outward man (the body) and the inward man (the immaterial part of our makeup) separate. II Cor 4:7; 4:16
      1. The body goes into the grave and returns to dust. The inward man enters another dimension—either Heaven or Hell, depending on how one responds to the revelation of Jesus given to them in their generation. Luke 16:19-31; II Cor 5:6
      2. Separation from the body is a temporary condition. It occurs because of Adam's sin (Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19). In connection with the second coming of Jesus all who are in Heaven will return to earth with Him and reunite with their body raised from the dead, to live on earth again.
    - c. Remember the big picture or the overall plan of God. Almighty God created human beings to

become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. However, both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; etc.

1. Neither this life nor this world is the way it's supposed to be because of sin. It's filled with toil and trouble—not from God, but because that's life in a sin damaged world. But it won't always be this way—For this world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
2. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God. He will come again to restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
3. The Lord will cleanse the world of all corruption and death and renew and renew the earth to its pre-sin Eden-like condition, and we will live here with God our Father forever.
  - A. Job 19:25-26—I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God (NIV).
  - B. Rom 8:19-21—For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day...when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay (NLT).
  - C. Acts 3:21—For (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets (NLT).
  - D. II Pet 3:13—There are coming heavens new in quality, and an earth new in quality, where righteousness will be fully at home (TPT).
2. Knowledge of what is ahead lightens the load of this life. But that doesn't mean there is no help now. Paul said fixed his eyes on things he could not see. There are two kinds of unseen things—those that are future (not here yet) and those that are here now, but invisible to us (Almighty God with us and for us).
  - a. Recently, we've looked at accounts in the Old Testament of real people who faced real trouble and got real help from God. These accounts were written to give us encouragement and hope. Rom 15:4
    1. These records encourage us because they show us the end of the story. They give us hope because they show us how God uses the harsh realities of life in a fallen world and causes them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family.
    2. These accounts show us that in the hands of Almighty God even impossible circumstances have solutions and that He is able to bring genuine good out of genuine bad. They assure us that God never abandons His people, and He gets them through until He gets them out. Gen 50:20 They show us that even when it looks as though nothing was happening, God was at work.
  - b. In every situation and circumstance are always two sources of information available to us—what we see and what God says about things we cannot see yet. God's Word helps us see what we can't see.
    1. In Hebrews chapter 11 Paul referred to a number of Old Testament men and women who were delivered from danger, escaped violent death, made strong, and received what God promised.
    2. When we read their stories we find that the one thing they all have in common is that they put what God said above what they could see and feel and acted accordingly. Heb 11:4-31
3. One of the Old Testament heroes Paul referred to was Israel's great king, David (Heb 11:32). Consider these examples from David's life of the relationship between the seen and unseen, emotions and faith.
  - a. David faced many dangerous, challenging, and painful circumstances during his lifetime. At one point he was pursued for a number of years by men who, in addition to lying about him, were intent on killing him. David was cut off from friends and family, and from Jerusalem and the Tabernacle.
  - b. I Sam 21-26:6—David spent much time hiding out in the Judean wilderness. This region, located east of Jerusalem and running to the Dead Sea, is a rugged dry terrain. The elevation descends 4,300 feet over only a ten mile horizontal stretch of land. The region is dry (less than eight inches of rainfall per year), and is marked by limestone cliffs and caves.
  - c. While David was on the run, he wrote a number of psalms which reveal his perspective (how he

viewed his circumstances) and how he dealt with his emotions. Note these statements.

1. Ps 56:3-4—David wrote that when he was afraid, he put his trust in God. I will praise His Word. David made a conscious decision to look to God through His Word. God promised David that he'd sit on the throne of Israel, which meant he wasn't going to die in the wilderness.
2. Ps 57:1—When David wrote this psalm he was hiding from his enemies in a cave. Notice his view of reality. He saw himself taking refuge in God, even though all he could see was a cave.
  - A. David had the written record of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses (the Old Testament).
  - B. Through the Bible, David could “see” how God was with them and for them, protecting, guiding, and providing for them. David was persuaded God would do the same for him.
3. Ps 63:6—When he kept guard at night in the wilderness, remembered and meditated on God.
  - A. The word remember indicates a process of mentioning or recalling. Meditate literally means to murmur and by implication means to ponder or meditate.
  - B. David mentally considered things he could not see in his present circumstance—God with him right then helping him—and in his future—deliverance and promises fulfilled.
4. Human beings are made in such a way that what we see stimulates our emotions. There's nothing wrong with this—that's how God made us. The problem is that, in our fallen state, we all have a tendency to let sight and emotions dominate us in the moment.
  - a. Although this is natural, we must remember that sight and emotions don't have all the facts. We must exercise our will and chose to put our focus on the way things really are according to God.
  - b. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize that there are more facts in our situation than what we see and feel in the moment. We remind ourselves that everything we see is temporary and subject to change by the power of God either in this life or the life to come.
    1. Heb 12:1-2—In the context of the Old Testament men and women Paul listed in Hebrews 11, he exhorted Christians to live their lives looking unto Jesus. The Greek word translated looking mean to consider attentively. It literally means to look away from one thing to see another.
    2. Looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith (v2, Amp). Jesus, the Living Word, reveals Himself through the written Word. John 5:39
- C. Paul made a well known statement in Phil 4:13—I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. This verse gives us insight into the importance of learning to view our circumstances the way they really are according to Almighty God. Let's get the context.
  1. Paul was in the custody of the Roman government on account of proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection. He was under house arrest in the city of Rome and awaiting a hearing before Caesar.
    - a. Christians from the city of Philippi in northern Greece sent Paul a financial gift to help him while he was in custody. Paul wrote this epistle in part to thank them for their gift. In doing so he made the point that he had learned how to get along no matter what his circumstances were. Phil 4:10-14
    - b. The King James says that Paul learned to be content no matter no matter his situation (v11) and that he knew how to deal with plenty or lack, much or little, having nothing or everything (v12).
      1. The Greek word that is translated content means sufficient in one's self, self sufficient, needing no assistance—to be sufficient; to be possessed of sufficient strength. The phrase “I have been instructed” has the idea “I have learned the secret of living in every situation (v12, NLT).
      2. Then Paul made the statement that he can do all things through Christ. Paul had learned that any situation he found himself in was no match for God Who was with Him and for Him.
        - A. Phil 4:11-13—For, however I am placed, I at least, have learned to be independent of circumstances...nothing is beyond my power in the strength of him who makes me strong (20<sup>th</sup> Cent).
        - B. Phil 4:11-13— For I have learned how to be content (satisfied to the point where I am not

disturbed or disquieted) in whatever state I am...I have learned in any and all circumstances, the secret of facing every situation...I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me—I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me, [that is, I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency (Amp)].

- c. Notice Paul wrote that he learned how to be content, how to be independent of circumstances. This doesn't come naturally to us. We must learn the secret through the Word of God, the Bible.
  1. When we encounter trouble and hardship, it stimulates our emotions. We have a tendency to let emotions dominate us and affect our view of reality. And our confidence in God vanishes.
    - A. Paul also experienced negative emotions in times of trouble (II Cor 11:27-29; II Cor 6:10; etc.). He had to learn how to look past his circumstances to reality as it truly is.
    - B. Paul in the one who wrote that "I have come through a process of persuasion to the settled conclusion" that nothing can separate me from God who loves me (Rom 8:38-39; Wuest).
  2. Notice also that Paul's emphasis in this passage is not on what he had to do to survive, but on Christ's sufficiency. Paul got this perspective by looking at unseen realities. Regular reading of the Bible will help you gain self-control in this area, just as it did for Paul.
2. We've referred to Paul's letter to the Hebrews several times in this series. He wrote it to Christians who were facing increasing pressure to abandon Jesus. The purpose of his epistle was to encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus. As part of his strategy he urged them to keep their focus on unseen realities.
  - a. Paul reminded them that when they were previously exposed to public ridicule and beatings because of their faith, and "when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity" (Heb 10:34-35, NLT).
    1. Paul also reminded them of the Old Testament men and women who did exploits in this life by looking at what they could not see. He noted that they had an eternal perspective: All these faithful ones...were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland (Heb 11:13-16, NLT).
    2. Paul reminded his readers that Moses kept right on going (endured) "because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible" (Heb 11:27, NLT). The Greek word translated kept his eyes on means to stare at or discern clearly (physically or mentally). The word implies attend to and emphasizes perception (how you see) rather than the physical act of seeing.
  - b. Heb 13:5-6—As Paul was concluding his letter to the Hebrew Christians, he urged them to be content with what they have. The Greek word translated content is a form of the word used in Phil 4:11. It means to be sufficient; to be possessed of sufficient strength.
    1. The idea is not learn to "do without". The idea is that when God is with you, you have what you need for whatever comes your way. Paul cited a passage in Deut 31:6-8. When Israel was about to cross into Canaan where formidable obstacles awaited them, God told His people that they did not need to fear because He is with them and would not fail them or forsake them.
    2. Note that Paul wrote that God has said some things (I will never leave you) so that we may say some things (I will not fear). Notice that what we say is not a word for word quote of God's Word. This is an example of a person who has pondered God's Word and it has changed his view of reality. Therefore, he can be independent of his circumstances.
- D. Conclusion: We haven't said all that we need to say, but consider these points as we close. How can you learn to be independent of circumstances—satisfied to the point where you are not disturbed or disquieted?
  1. You can do it if you know that more is going on than what you see and feel in the moment. You can do it if you know that this life isn't the end of your story. You can do it if you know that the best is yet to come—some in this life, but the majority in the life to come.
  2. God's Word will persuade you of these realities—if you become a regular reader of the New Testament.