

THE DAILY RENEWAL OF THE INWARD MAN

GOLDEN TEXT

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

USEFUL PRACTICE

Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the saved experience inward renewal when faced with outward adversity.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Corinthians 4:11-18

11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,

14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

I) To reflect on the adversity faced by the inward man;

II) To understand that these difficulties in life are not worth comparing with the future glory held in store for Christians;

III) To awaken the students to seek spiritual renewal and the strengthening of the inward man.

INTRODUCTION

Outward adversity is an indisputable reality (Rom. 8:22, 23). Despite this, through the Spirit, the saved experience spiritual renewal in their lives (2 Cor. 4:16). Nevertheless, during our existence, the mortal body will remain subject to the adversity of life (2 Cor. 5:2, 4). In this lesson, we will look at the suffering of the outward man, the strengthening of the inward man, and current challenges as external forces try to crush our spiritual life. The purpose is to show that the spiritually renewed believer can withstand any onslaught of darkness.

I – OUTWARD SUFFERING

1. Paul's experience. The apostle Paul is an example of a man who suffered external adversity, but did not lose the strength of spiritual life. His epistles tell about tribulations beyond his strength, to the point that he lost hope of preserving his own life (2 Cor. 1:8). We can still read the apostle's mentions of prisons, lashes, stoning, persecutions, fatigue, hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness (2 Cor. 11:23-27). In this way, Paul summarizes the adversity of our journey of faith as follows: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Therefore,

the biblical text says that the treasure of the Gospel is kept in jars of clay (2 Cor. 4:6, 7). This is a declaration that we are made of dust, that is, we are mortal, and therefore, as human beings, we are fragile (2 Cor. 7:5). In this respect, the outward man suffers and is under attack because of the cross (2 Tim. 2:9, 10).

2. The example set by the Apostle. Even in the face of suffering, the apostle does not retreat nor deny his faith (2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 10:39). His trials produced trust in God in his life and ministry (2 Cor. 1:9, 10; Phil. 4:12, 13). He recognizes that his weaknesses are instruments of divine power (2 Cor. 2:4; 4:11; 12:9, 10). His life is at the service of the Master, in favor of the chosen ones and for the glory of God (2 Cor. 1:12-14; 4:11, 12, 15). Aware of his calling, the apostle declares, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing [...]” (2 Cor. 4:16a/NKJV). In this respect, the legacy of the apostle is one of perseverance. Although the outward man is consumed by tribulations, the saved one does not become discouraged or back down. Christ assured us of this: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

3. The believer's hope. In Scripture, the contrast between the afflictions of man and the power of God is thus represented:

- a) “Hard pressed on every side, but not crushed” (2 Cor. 4:8a) means that, even when pressed, the believer is not crushed;
- b) “Perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Cor. 4:8b), it indicates that, even confused, the believer does not despair;
- c) “Persecuted, but not abandoned” (2 Cor. 4:9a), it signals that, even threatened, the believer is not abandoned;
- d) “Struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:9b), it shows that even struck down, the believer is not knocked out. The text teaches that although our bodies are subject to sin and suffering, God always provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Our Lord was successful over death, and so we have hope of victory and eternal life (2 Corinthians 4:14). Therefore, as Christians, we cannot fail to wait for the blessed hope in Christ (Titus 2:13).

II – THE INWARD RENEWAL

1. Daily strengthening. The Bible emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is the agent who enables the Christian to stand firm in adversity (John 14:16, 17). This power of the Spirit works in the inward man and enables the believer to persevere and to live away from sin (1 Cor. 2:12-16). Thus, despite outward weakness and suffering, “inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16b). This is the working of the Spirit, which qualifies

the saved not to lose heart. From the point of view of practical spiritual disciplines, this renewal occurs through personal sanctification, faithfulness, reverence, prayer, fasting and fear of God (1 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 5:18; Heb. 12:14, 28). Therefore, we cannot allow affliction to discourage us, but we must renew our commitment to serve Christ and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us day by day (1 Cor. 16:13).

2. The eternal weight of glory. The apostle Paul declares the following: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). Here he draws a contrast between present suffering and the glorious future. The apostle teaches that, compared to the weight of glory, which is eternal, tribulation is light and momentary. In this sense, adversity serves as an encouraging instrument of the inward man, impelling him to proceed (Phil 3:13, 14) and that faith is renewed as the believer is able to withstand tribulations (Job 42:5; Ps. 119:67). Therefore, it is necessary to be wise in the face of tribulation, avoiding murmuring and recognizing that struggles, according to God's criteria, are inevitable. However, the Scriptures ratify that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

3. The vision of eternity. Strengthened in God, being fully aware of the life to come, the Christian is exhorted not to fix our eyes not “on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Contrasting the visible with the invisible, the temporary with the eternal, the apostle Paul appeals to the exercise of biblical faith as an important motivation for the believer not to faint/lose heart in tribulations (cf. Heb. 11:1). In this case, in addition to daily renewal, the believer must live from the perspective of eternity. It is not by chance that the apostle Paul wrote: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” (Col. 3:2).

III – TODAY'S CHALLENGES

1. Secularist culture. The “spirit of Babylon”, through the secularist culture, seeks to crush the spiritual life of believers (Rev. 17:5). It is a materialistic system, as we have studied so far, which denies spiritual reality, the existence of God, biblical truth and the entire set of values derived from the Word of God. In the face of this attack, the Most High continues to seek people who are renewed from within, resist external attacks and take a stand against the advent of evil (Ez. 22:30).

2. Doctrinal Relativism. Another attack that seeks to kill our spiritual life is the process of deconstructing the foundations of faith. We cannot tolerate doctrinal relativism. Now, relativizing biblical doctrine is weakening the inward man. There is no way to renew our spiritual life without having a high regard for the Word of God. A selective rereading of the Bible cannot be done to add to the Church those who do not accept sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3). Relativism, allied to the secularist ideology, imposes that which should supposedly be considered as ideal. Thus, sin is accepted and tolerated. However, the renewed believer must react against this reversal of values, resist the “spirit of Babylon” and “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 1:3).

3. Spiritual warfare. Every saved person fights a spiritual battle in this world. Scripture says that Satan is the “god of this age” and that the world lies in the evil one (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19). Therefore, our Statement of Fundamental Truths stresses that it was by deceiving that he began his activities against man (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3). And it is with this weapon that the Devil and his agents still seduce people in this world (Rev. 12:9).

Furthermore, evil spirits have the ability to influence those who live in disobedience, manipulating, imprisoning and pitting people against God (Eph. 2:2). Therefore, the Bible warns that our fight is not against man, but against demons (Eph. 6:12). Indeed, the renewed believer, in possession of the armor of God, must take a stand against the wiles of the Devil, “praying in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18).

CONCLUSION

During the existence of the mortal body, our outward man will be subject to the tribulations of this life (2 Cor. 4:11). Despite suffering and afflictions, our inward man should not fail, but be renewed through the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:16). Thus, the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (2 Cor. 4:17). Therefore, in the present time of attacks and deconstruction of the Christian faith, we need to renew our inward man, day by day, to face the power of sin and evil.