

Faith in the Parenthesis

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(For we walk by faith and not by sight.) II Corinthians 5:7

How far away is the mountain? How long is the railroad? How tall is the tree? Even our eyes cannot send enough information to our optic nerves to guarantee us the correct facts and figures. At some point, our depth of field perception fails us.

The same thing is true with communicating. Try as we might to speak and write clearly, sometimes it seems impossible to say what we want to say. That's why we use a little mechanism called parentheses to help convey our meaning. A parenthesis is a statement or expression that is beside the main point. Often, it is a key to understanding the point that has just been established.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul probes into the dark enigma of death. Death wreaks havoc, devastation and grief. When it happens to those of us who profess Christianity, it seems to explode our entire position on the superiority of our faith. This is a faulty impression, however, and it results from a forgetfulness about faith. The inspired writer makes a powerful and revealing point by using this parenthetical reference to faith.

We know much about faith. For example, we know that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1). What we find in II Corinthians 5 is not a theological problem about faith, but a tactical one on how to use it. This is not a matter of misunderstanding faith, but knowing when to apply faith to the circumstances of our lives.

Why, then, do people abandon their faith? Why do people give up in the middle of their spiritual journey? Why do people pay more and more attention to their circumstances? The Apostle Paul links this difficulty with faith to walking by sight. Let's analyze the following limitations of sight:

- Distance. The farther we are from an object, the fuzzier it becomes.
- Size. Small objects are more difficult to see.
- Light. Dimness or darkness make it harder to see.
- Time. The aging process affects our ability to identify people.
- Perception. Things look different in various surroundings.
- Perspective. People see things differently from different vantage points.
- Optical illusion. Our eyes lie to us.
- Visual barriers. Objects block our sight.
- Sleight of hand, trickery. Others can fool us.

In all of these instances, it is critical that we do not rely upon natural sight and human perception as our sole point of reference. Neither can we depend upon our human perception for spiritual success. Faith emerges as our only reliable tool for spiritual navigation.

Under what conditions must we walk by faith and not by sight?

- When we do not know where we are going. (Genesis 12:1-3).
- When we face extreme hostility. (Acts 7:57-59).
- When we are confronted by visible evidence contrary to our beliefs. (Acts 14:8-9; Romans 4:22).
- When it seems the establishment is against us. (Acts 14:22)
- When something happens which hurts us. (Ephesians 6:16; II Thessalonians 1:4).
- When we become disappointed or disillusioned. (I Thessalonians 3:5).
- When we are assailed by feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. (Hebrews 10:22-23).
- When the enemy triumphs over us in battle. (I Corinthians 16:13).

John F. Kennedy, Jr.'s tragic death in a plane crash has been officially ruled as pilot error. Investigators surmise that he flew his craft at a near perpendicular angle into the ocean. Kennedy, along with his new wife and her sister, crashed in a twilight fog, which made the horizon impossible to see. Some say he was not fully trained on navigating by instruments. Some wonder whether he bothered to look at the instruments. Whatever the reason, it is certain that he did not deliberately destroy himself and his passengers. What he saw must have differed dramatically from reality.

Sometimes, the view from the window of life looks dramatically different from our scriptural training. The visuals seem to contradict the needles and gauges. In these conditions, it is possible to be so overly confident in our visible assessment of the surroundings that we disregard the instrument readings. In spiritual matters, we cannot rely upon our natural eyesight. We need a power beyond carnal ability. Faith is the radar, the para-normal instrumentation, the only link we have to divine navigation. We must not only use it, we must protect it. Ignoring the parenthesis of the superiority of faith over sight may truly be a matter of life and death.

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