**WE LIVE BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT**

January 4, 2015

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Key Verse 5:7 “For we live by faith, not by sight.”

Happy New Year! 2015 will be a year of faith. Faith is an important word in the Bible. The expressions “by faith” and “through faith” are repeated 65 times in the Bible. When we become Christians, we are saved by faith in Christ alone, and we must continue to live by faith. Romans 1:17 says, “a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” Faith is indispensable in the Christian life. This is why Bible says “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6) Hence faith is vitally important in the life of the Christian. It is by faith that we are saved; we are justified; cleansed, and look forward to the second coming of Jesus. Faith is where we please God, admit our dependence upon him, and continually seek to rely upon him and his grace. Consider the following Bible references to comprehend the significance of faith in Christian life.

A. Ephesians 2:8-9, we are saved by faith.
B. Romans 1:17, we live by faith.
C. Romans 4:13, we receive righteousness by faith.
D. Romans 5:1, we are justified in Christ by faith
E. Romans 5:2, we have access to God's grace by faith.
F. 2 Corinthians 1:24, we stand firm by faith.
G. Galatians 3:14, we receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.
H. 1Timothy 1:4, we do God’s work by faith.
I. Galatians 5:5, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

The single most important thing in a person’s life is faith in God. Our God is a God of faith, and “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3) So it takes faith to please God. Abraham Lincoln said, “Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.”

Hudson Taylor sailed to his mission in China. Very close to the shore of cannibal islands, the ship lost wind, and it was slowly drifting shoreward unable to go about. The savages were eagerly anticipating a feast. The captain came to Mr. Taylor and asked him to pray for the help of God. “I will,” said Taylor, “provided you set your sails to catch the breeze.” The captain refused in order not to make himself a laughing stock by preparing the sails in a dead calm. Taylor said, “I will not undertake to pray for the vessel unless you prepare the sails.” And it was done. While engaged in prayer, there was a knock at the door of his room. “Who is there?” The captain’s voice responded, “Are you still praying for wind?” “Yes.” “Well,” said the captain, “you’d better stop praying, for we have more wind than we can manage.” This example explains what faith is. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Heb 11:1) If we will just act on hope just the slightest bit, God is able and, many times, willing to respond. Let’s think about what it means to live by faith.

**First**, by faith, we look forward to the redemption of our bodies. Look at verse 1. “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” Here, Paul compares our body to an earthly tent and the resurrection bodies to a building, an eternal house. Tents were familiar to Paul because he was a tentmaker. There are many similarities between a tent and our bodies. Tents are temporary, flimsy and shabby. People usually use tents for camping. It is refreshing to be in the great outdoors for a little while. However, nobody lives in tents permanently except refugees or nomads. Like tents, our bodies are temporary. During our time on earth we suffer from disease, disasters, accidents, and so on. Moses said in Psalm 90:10: “The length of our days is seventy years-or eighty if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.” If our body is destroyed, is it the end of everything? No. Though our bodies will be destroyed, we have this glorious hope that we will have the glorious resurrection bodies. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says, “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” So we do not lose heart. Instead we live a powerful life full of the Spirit.

Look at verse 2. “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.” We groan because of the limitation of our earthly body. Though we want to live a holy life, the weakness of our mortal body limits us, and we despair. But this leads us to long for our heavenly dwelling. We long to be clothed with spiritual bodies when Jesus comes again, which are imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual bodies. Paul longed for this: He said in Romans 8:23, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Our coworkers have been groaning under the weight of pressure of future security, one to one Bible studies, and raising disciples. We groan when students whom we have been serving wholeheartedly quit Bible study. We groan due to our nagging sinful desire. We groan like St. Paul, “What a wretched man I am!” From time to time, our groaning is unbearable and doubt comes in: Am I really a holy child of God? Is there a future hope?” How can we really be sure of this hope of glorious resurrection body?

Look at verse 5. “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing this. The Spirit enables us to call God, “Abba, Father.” He convinces us that we are God’s holy children. As God’s children, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ who inherit his kingdom (Ro 8:15-17). The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. When we have this assurance, we can go through hardships in this world. So Paul said, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.” (2 Cor 4:8). We need faith that the Spirit is interceding for us. Martin Luther said, “Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible. Then, it accepts the impossible, does without the indispensable and bears the intolerable.”

Look at verse 7. “We live by faith, not by sight.” In many translations, verse 7 is translated as “We walk by faith.” The word walk in the Bible often symbolizes the way we live, the way we act, and the way we conduct ourselves in a certain way. And it has reference to the fact that life is a journey, life is a pilgrimage and that the Christian is a person who is traveling to another country. And so to walk by faith is to live in the confident expectation of things that are to come. The people of this world are influenced by the things that are seen. They live for wealth, power, and possessions; for the things, which this world can give. But the Christian looks beyond this world with a conviction that believes there is a better place. Ignorance of faith is ignorance of God.

Living by faith, not by sight has serious implication in our lives. Universities today have 40% male and 60% female students. This has dramatically changed social relationships and interactions among students. One female student described the new relationship between the sexes like this: “Out of that 40% male population, there are maybe 20% we would consider dating, and out of those 20%, 10 have girlfriends, so all the girls are fighting over that other 10%.” This situation changes behavior of those who live by sight. Many girls do not want to get left out in the cold, and they believe that they may die alone, so they compete for men on men’s terms. This results in more casual hook-ups that are dead-end encounters with no future and no real romantic relationships. They should live by faith that God will provide suitable husbands in his time.

We see many advertisements for lottery. They show people smile ear to ear winning 10 million dollars. It gives the impression that if we play diligently, we will win jackpot. So many gullible people play lottery, hoping that they would win someday. But if we sit down and calculate the chances of winning, it is 1 in 15 million. By contrast, the chance of being killed by a lightning is 1 in 56,000. The chance of being killed in a terrorist attack while travelling is 1 in 650,000. This mentality makes many young people chasing rainbows instead of working hard in their homework.

When Abraham looked at his life without faith in God, everything looked dark and hopeless. After 10 years of following God, God still did not give him a son. He was very fearful of living among hostile Canaanites. He was sitting inside a dark tent, sorrowing over his life. Then God took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be.” (Gen 15:5) With the eyes of faith, Abraham could see his descendants as numerous as stars in the sky. God helped Abraham to live by faith, not by sight.

Therefore to walk by faith is to trust God more than man; to trust God in every circumstance; and to believe God rewards those who seek Him, regardless of who says otherwise. Walking by faith means living life in light of eternal realities and consequences, it is living by the promises of God. To walk by faith requires that we tune our hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit and the truth of his word. (John 16:13) When we base our lives on the truth of God’s Word, rather than on the popular philosophy of our day, we are going against our natural inclinations. We choose to live according to what God reveals to us, rather than trust our own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5–6) So living by faith means to trust him that he will lead us in the best way like our shepherd. David said, “The Lord is my shepherd…even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” By faith in God, we can find peace in any circumstances.

George Mueller said, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” The Lord does not disappoint those who seek his will. When the storms of life tear your world apart, only God can put the pieces back together again and he will give you a vision of the grand pattern of wholeness he has designed for your life. When one door closes, there is another about to open with something better behind it. By faith in God, we can find strength for weary bodies, peace for anxious minds, and comfort for grieving hearts.

Look at verses 8-9. “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.” Paul wanted to leave this world and go to be with Jesus as soon as possible. He was homesick. We call this “heavenly homesickness.” However, whether he lived in this world or went to be with the Lord, his life goal was the same. It was to please God. Romans 14:8 says, “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” This is why we make it our life goal to please God in whatever we do. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Verse 10 explains the reason why we should please the Lord. It says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” From the context, it is clear that Paul is talking about Christians being judged. Unbelievers will be judged at the “great white throne,” and they will be punished according to what they have done. But believers will be also judged to give an account of their lives to Christ. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross 2000 years ago and all of our sins are forgiven, and we will never be condemned for them. We should not look at the judgment seat of Christ as God judging our sins, but rather as God rewarding us for our lives of faith. At the judgment seat of Christ, believers are rewarded based on how faithfully they served Christ. Some of the things we might be judged on are how well we obeyed the Great Commission, how well we obeyed Jesus’ command, “Love one another as I have loved you,” how victorious we were over sin, and how well we controlled our tongues. Even though we are not judged for our sins, we should not be ashamed to stand before Jesus. The Bible speaks of believers receiving crowns for different things based on how faithfully they served Christ. James 1:12 is a good summary of how we should think about the judgment seat of Christ: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

In this world, we live “in the realm of faith.” But when Jesus comes again, faith will become reality, and we will live “by sight.” Then, as one hymn writer puts it, our “faith shall be sight.”

“And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.”

As we start a new year, may God give you a sense of victory which comes from faith. May God bless you to live the most fruitful and blessed life this year and beyond until Jesus comes again.