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If We Believed What They Believed

Gary Kerr

One of the reference works I usually keep close at hand when studying any part of the New Testament is the paraphrase translation of J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament In Modern English*. I don't agree with all of Phillips' suggested wording, but I often find his efforts helpful in clarifying some particular passage or point. The translation was originally produced in sections, with the first, *Letters To Young Churches* (Romans through Colossians), being published in London during World War II (it included a preface and recommendation written by C.S. Lewis).

In his introduction to that book, Phillips writes the following about the New Testament epistles and their authors and recipients:

"Without going into wearisome historical details, we need to remember that these letters were written, and the lives they indicate were led, against a background of paganism ... Slavery, sexual immorality, cruelty, callousness to human suffering, and a low standard of public opinion, were universal; travelling and communications were chancy and perilous; most people were illiterate. Many Christians today talk about the 'difficulties of our times' as though we should have to wait for better ones before the Christian religion can take root. It is heartening to remember that this faith took root and flourished amazingly in conditions that would have killed anything less vital in a matter of weeks. These early Christians were on fire with the conviction that they had become, through Christ, literally sons of God - they were pioneers of a new humanity, founders of a new Kingdom. They still speak to us across the centuries. Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved."

Within a generation of the establishment of the church, the apostle Paul could write of those who carried the gospel message that "their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world" (Romans 10:18). Paul wrote about the gospel that it had been preached "in all the world" and that it had been "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1:6, 23). This is an incredible achievement -- to begin with a few comparatively unknown and uneducated people (cf. Acts 4:13), and to have a message did not appeal to the "wise", the "mighty," or the "noble" according to the flesh (1 Corinthians 1:26). But they had strong faith and a zeal born of that faith, that caused them to launch out boldly and sacrificially, to the point of being willing to give up their lives for the cause they had taken up. And God gave them amazing success. They were "on fire" for the kingdom, for the gospel, and for the souls of their fellow human beings, believing with all their hearts in the sacrifice and promises of Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of men. Being a Christian and going to heaven meant everything to them, and they wanted "all creation under heaven" to share with them in these blessings.

Do not be deceived into thinking that their achievements were easily accomplished. Right from the start they were opposed and persecuted. When the first of their number was martyred, such a widespread persecution developed that all except the apostles were driven from their homes and scattered abroad (cf. Acts 8:1). But this did not slow them down or dampen their enthusiasm. Wherever they went, they were found "preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). They preached it as they had opportunity, not depending on others (i.e., preachers, elders, etc.) to do the work for them. Each Christian considered him/herself both privileged and responsible to win souls for Christ. Their cause was new -- they were pioneers.

I fear that today we do not appreciate our "spiritual blessings" as they did. It is not our life as it was theirs. We are not spending and being spent for it as they were. To some degree, at least, perhaps we do not "believe what they believed."

"Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved." If we did, I am convinced that God would give us success, too. *Eastside Bowling Green, KY*

First Steps

Shawn Bain

I doubt anyone remembers their first steps as a child, but we do remember our children's first steps. That great event is recorded on paper or a video clip. "He took his first step!", we told our parents in our excitement. What a wonderful experience. Is it really such a major announcement? Most people can walk. Why is this such a big deal? The reality is not everyone will walk. Some will never experience such an achievement, and there will be a set of parents who will never be able to make such an exciting phone call.

A walk in Christ for the first time is a rejoicing moment. It was for the eunuch (**Acts 8:39**). Those first steps he had as a Christian had to be an experience he would always treasure. As a child of God, everything about his life had changed (**Ephesians 4:20-24**). The zeal, love, and belief he had to be something others noticed. His family and associates would have seen the difference in his attitude and behavior. You cannot help but rejoice with this man at his "new birth" and first steps...

Those first steps as a Christian brings truth to the words "children of God". Embarking upon a relationship with God as His children is one we will never regret nor should we fail to appreciate. **Romans 8:17** says, "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ..." Being adopted as a child of God has privileges no parent could ever give their child in a lifetime. The blessings are rich, abundant, and constant. They never fail in sustaining us against temptations and trials. This is what makes taking those first steps in Christ so important...

Every one of our steps is under the careful eye of God. He is watching us take each step with gladness as a parent watches their child take the first of many steps. In **2 Peter 1:5-11**, the exhortation is "add to your faith". Taking "steps" in Christ is wonderful. God expects every step forward to be a sign of spiritual growth. As **Ephesians 4:14** says, "that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error..." God rejoices in our walk, but more than that, we want us to walk toward Him. "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise" (**Ephesians 5:15**).

One thing about a baby's first steps is they are most often taken holding on to the hand of a parent. As a Christian our first steps are holding to the hand of God guided by His word. Never let go of His hand. Always be guided by His word in this present world. Live in holiness, righteousness, and godliness. Walk in the footsteps of Jesus (**1 Peter 2:21**). www.vpchurchofchrist.org