

Epistle 401

by George Fox

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Christ and the word of life, wisdom, and patience, and warns against the consequences of erring from the spirit of God.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:19, Revelation 3:8

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Suffering for Righteousness"

Description

George Fox emphasizes the steadfastness of Christ as the foundation of the church, urging believers to remain faithful and patient amidst trials and temptations. He warns against those who separate from the church, likening them to historical figures who rebelled against God's chosen leaders, and highlights the importance of suffering for righteousness' sake. Fox encourages the faithful to follow the example of Christ, who suffered without sin, and to maintain a good conscience in the face of false accusations. He reassures believers that enduring trials will lead to spiritual growth and ultimate victory in Christ. The sermon concludes with a call to remain united in love and wisdom, despite the challenges posed by false brethren.

Transcript

Dear friends and brethren, in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is your holy, heavenly rock and foundation of God, that standeth sure [2 Tim 2:19], who was the foundation and the rock of his church in the apostles' days, and is now. You may see how Christ sent John to encourage his church, and saith in Rev. iii. 8. 'I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. [Rev 3:8] Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of satan, (which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie,) behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. [Rev 3:9] Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the face of the earth [Rev 3:10]'

And all such as went out from the church of Christ, in the apostles' days, which were not of them; and Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, that went out from the Jews, &c. [Num 16] and all they that separated themselves [Jude 1:19] in the apostles' days, from the church of Christ, and all they that separated themselves now, &c. and are gone out from the church of Christ, have manifested they were not of them. They that went out from the church of Christ, in the apostles' days, and separated themselves from them; and all they that go from the church of Christ now, and separate themselves from them, have erred from

the word of patience, and have not kept that; but such are gone into temptations of the world, and are become as the synagogue of satan, and like raging waves of the sea [Jude 1:13], satan's fruits and works they do manifest. So that by their fruits it is known [Mat 7:16,20] of what synagogue they are, and have and do sufficiently discover it in all ages, how that patience is worn out, and weareth out, and that they have not kept the word of patience [Rev 3:10]; and none such are like to preach the word of God, and the word of life [1 Jn 1:1], and the word of patience, and the word of wisdom [1 Cor 12:8], that liveth, and abideth, and endureth for ever [1 Pet 1:23], that keep not the word of patience; But now they do manifest themselves to be out of the gentle wisdom of God, and out of the word of patience, in a rash, hasty, furious, envious, malicious, hateful, lying, defaming, slandering, gainsaying, and envious spirit of Cain, Corah [Jude 1:11], and Ham; and the fruits of this spirit are manifest sufficiently now, as in other ages, to them that live in the word of life, wisdom, and patience; by which word all God's children are born again of the immortal seed [1 Pet 1:23], and feeds upon the milk of the word [1 Pet 2:2]; by which word all things were made and created [John 1:3]; by which word all God's people are reconciled to God [2 Cor 5:19]; which word liveth, and abideth, and endureth for ever.

Now, as there is a growth and adding to faith, and virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and godliness, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity [2 Pet 1:5-7], as God's children are led by the spirit of God [Rom 8:14], in it they have unity, and it is the bond of their peace [Eph 4:3]. So as there is an erring from the spirit [Isa 29:24] of God, there is a degenerating from virtue, kindness, and true knowledge, and godliness, and temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity; this we have seen both now in this age, as in the days of the apostles. . . .

Dear friends, be ye followers of that which is good [1 Pet 3:13]; and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye [1 Pet 3:14]. For it is better (if the will of God be so) that ye suffer for well doing, and not for evil doing [1 Pet 3:17], because 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps [1 Pet 2:21]. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously [1 Pet 2:23].' 'If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled [1 Pet 3:14], having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ [1Pet 3:16]. And if ye are reproached for the name of Christ Jesus, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or as a busy body in other men's matters.' But if any man suffer as a christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God upon this behalf [1 Pet 4:14-16], that he suffereth as a christian, not as a murderer, thief, evil doer, or a busy body in other men's matters, for that is not a suffering for Christ, who hath suffered for you; and they that will reign with him, must suffer with him. 'The God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory, by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle you [1 Pet 5:10];' this is through the sufferings for Christ Jesus, the captain of our salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings [1 Pet 2:10], and is able to succour all his followers, in their temptations and sufferings.

And the apostle saith to the church of Christ, the Philippians, 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; being made conformable unto his death [Phil 3:8-10];' which every true christian should be of the same mind, as this holy apostle was. So here you may see the apostle exhorts people to suffer with Christ, and for him, but not as murderers, thieves, evil doers, and

busy bodies in other men's matters. And as David saith, 'Depart from the evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it [Psa 34:14]; keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile [Psa 34:13]: for the wicked have set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongues walk through the earth [Psa 73:9]: but be not as the horse and mule, whose mouth must be held with the bit and the bridle [Psa 32:9].' And David saith, 'I will take heed unto my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bit, while the wicked is before me [Psa 39:1].' And this is good advice, that God's people be not ensnared by the wicked's snare [Psa 119:110]: and therefore it is good for all God's people to be careful and wise, that none do suffer as busy bodies in other men's matters, or as evil doers, &c. but let their sufferings be for righteousness' sake [1 Pet 3:14], and with Christ, that they may reign with him [2 Tim 2:12]. And keep out the Athenians' spirit, spending their time in hearing and telling of news [Acts 17:21], which the world is full of, in whom your trouble is; 'but in me ye have peace [John 16:33],' saith Christ. And therefore as every one hath received Christ, so walk in him [Col 2:6], and let your conversations be in him. Amen.

And blessed are they who suffer for righteousness' sake [Mat 5:10], and in whose hearts there is no enmity: and blessed are they that dwell in the love of God [1 Jn 2:16], that can bear all things [1 Cor 13:7], and are in the wisdom of God, which is pure and peaceable [Jas 3:17]. For troubles, afflictions, sufferings, imprisonments, spoiling of goods, and many perils do attend God's people, by the world that lieth in wickedness [1 Jn 5:19]: and therefore it is good for all God's people to keep in Christ their sanctuary, in whom they have eternal rest and peace.

And also God's people are exercised now (as in days past) with trials and perils by false brethren, as the church of Christ was in the apostles' day, such as went from the church, in Cain's, Corah's, and Balaam's ways [Jude 1:11], as the apostle saith, 'fierce despisers, false accusers of those that are good [2 Tim 3:3].' And you may read in 2 Pet. ii. throughout, of such as forsook the right way, and of many following their 'pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth was evil spoken of [2 Pet 2:2]:' and so it is now, as it was in the apostles' days. And the apostle saith to the church, 'You have heard say, that antichrists should come; even now are there many antichrists: they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out from us, that they might be manifest they were not of us [1 Jn 2:18f].' 1 John ii. 18, 19. Christ did forewarn his disciples of these antichrists and false prophets, that they should be inwardly ravening wolves, and by the fruits of their trees they should be known [Mat 7:15f] to be of the nature of the wolf, and not of the lamb: such as these went from the church (in the apostles' days) into the world; and such as these are gone from the church of Christ now, into the spirit of the world; their evil spirits are tried [1 Jn 4:1]; as in 1 John iv.

And the sufferings and perils by false brethren, have been more grief many times to the church of Christ, than open persecution; for they cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of; that turn from the way of righteousness, like the dog to the vomit, or the sow to the mire [2 Pet 2:22]. And in the way of righteousness, Christ Jesus, God preserve all his people from all the biting devouring dogs, and greedy swine [Mat 7:6?].

And you read how righteous Abel [Mat 23:25] suffered by his false brother Cain [Gen 4:8]; and did not Ishmael persecute his brother Isaac [Gen 21:9]? And would not Esau have destroyed his brother Jacob? [Gen 27:41] but God prevented him. And was not Ishmael and Esau in an outward profession of the circumcision? And how often did the Jews (that were brought out of Egypt by the power of the Lord) turn against Moses and Aaron, and other elders, and so turned against the power and spirit of God, that brought them out of Egypt, whom the Lord destroyed in the wilderness, and they never came to see the land of promise [Num 14]? And how often did the Jews turn against the holy prophets of God, after they

came into the land of Canaan, and what was their end, when they had rebelled against the good spirit that God gave them to instruct them [Neh 9:20,26]? And were not these holy prophets the Jews' brethren, whom they killed, and imprisoned, and persecuted? And was not Joseph sold into Egypt, and persecuted by his brethren; but God was with him, and preserved him [Gen 37:28, Acts 7:9f]: and so he will his faithful people? And did not Moses say unto the children of Israel, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up of your brethren, him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you [Deut 18:15, Acts 3:22]?' Deut. xviii. 15. Acts iii. 22. and vii. 37.

Now when God had raised up this prophet, Christ Jesus, you see many of the Jews would not receive him, nor believe him, nor many would hardly hear him, though they were called brethren, but they mocked him, and persecuted him, and blasphemed him; and the chief priest gave money to Judas (one of his disciples) to betray him [Mat 26:14-16]: and what became of all the Jews, and of Judas, that betrayed and persecuted Christ and the prophets? And what became of all those false apostles [2 Cor 11:13] and antichrists that went in Cain's, Corah's, Balaam's and Jezabel's way? And will not all of the same spirit in our age, that have gone and go in the same way, or path, have the same end? yea, their latter end will be worse than their beginning [2 Pet 2:20], and to be as the synagogue of satan [Rev 3:9], who maketh them to accuse, slander, and revile God's righteous people, from whom Christ will save and deliver his people, who bruises the head of the serpent [Gen 3:15]; and against such synagogues of satan the wrath of the Lamb [Rev 6:16] is turned: and in Christ, the Lamb of God, the saints have their rest and peace, and can sing hallelujah.

G. F.

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