

**ADVENTURES**

**IN**

**BIBLICAL**

**FAITH!**

(Understanding The Ways Of Faith)

By

Ron Christian

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**TO THE FOLLOWING BELOVED  
FREE METHODIST CONFERENCE SUPERINTENDENTS**

**Men Whose Names Are On The Honor Roll Of Faith**

PRESTON HARMON (Leader during my childhood)

DAN I. PERCELL (Leader during my teen years)

GLEN WILLIAMSON (Leader when I began to preach)

TED CROWN (Leader during my early pastoral ministry)

JACK DELAMARTER (Leader during my later pastoral ministry)



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## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps I will never forget that period of time in my pastoral ministry when I purposed to preach a long series of messages on the great 'Faith Chapter' of the Bible - Hebrews 11. I prepared long and hard and believed that - as the weeks came and went - my congregation of attentive listeners was growing by 'leaps and bounds' spiritually in its 'Faith' - partly because of my 'great sermons' on Biblical Faith.

As I finished the last message in that long series, I returned to my home after the Late Morning Worship Service, exuberant though weary as a result of preaching in both morning services. The telephone rang, and one of my parishioners - distraught and angry and accusing - was on the 'other end of the line'. He said something like this to me: "My family and I are leaving your church!" I was dumb-founded! Here was a parishioner who (with his wife) became a believer as a result of a 'Home Bible Study' which I had conducted in his home a few years before! Grabbing for words, I finally was able to respond to his declaration. I said, "Why, what is wrong?" He said, "We're leaving the Church because you don't preach 'Faith'! I wasn't present at the Service this morning, but my wife told me that you declared in your message on Faith that it is not always God's will to heal a person! I believe that if one has enough 'Faith', God will always heal a believer. It is never God's will for one of His children to be sick! The only reason why Christians are sick is because they haven't exercised enough 'Faith', or because they have unconfessed sin in their lives, or because they haven't been taught to 'bind Satan'. We can no longer be a member of a Church that doesn't practice 'Faith'!"

No amount of reasoning on my part, and no quotation of Scriptures (especially Hebrews 11:35b-40 and II Corinthians 12:7-10) could convince my angry friend that it is not always God's will to physically heal Christians. I pled with him not to leave our local church. I reminded him that he had not even heard my sermon on 'Faith' earlier that day, and that he was reacting to information that was reported to him 'secondhand' by his wife. I told him my family felt 'close' to him and his family, and that I felt God led him into my life (after all, was it not I who took time 'to lead him and his wife to Christ'?) I reminded him that some of the greatest 'saints' throughout history - men of abounding 'faith' - were persons whom God had not willed to heal physically. Was not even the great apostle Paul - 'a giant' in the Faith - inflicted with a 'thorn in the flesh'? When I mentioned Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', my now-estranged

`friend' launched into a `verbal battle' with me, as he tried hard to convince me that the `thorn in the flesh' was definitely not `physical'.

That conversation took place several years ago. Yes, I learned that a `charismatic' friend, with whom he had been daily `car-pooling' to work, shared with him a lot of tapes on `Faith' - tapes with a strong emphasis on the `Name It-Claim It' brand of Faith. Yes, that friend and his family left our Church and will probably never return, for they apparently are still attending a large, independent, `charismatic' church where `faith is preached', `prosperity is claimed', and `wonderful miracles regularly happen'. Yes, I occasionally see that friend. How does that `friend' respond to me, and how do I respond to him when we see one another in our community? We hold no bitterness towards each other, so it is easy to talk to one another and to express `Christian love' to each other. `We agree to disagree agreeably'.

Why write a Book on Faith? Perhaps there are several reasons. Probably (in light of what I have just related) because I want to `defend' my position on `Faith' in the midst of a malestorm of views on `Faith' which to me seem rather `weird' or `extreme' or `unBiblical'. `Defense' is not the best reason to write a book! Perhaps it is because (subconsciously) I feel that I am a `person of little faith' and feel a need to educate myself on the `basics of faith' - with the hope that God will strengthen my own faith if I think `hard enough' and `long enough' on this difficult topic!

Perhaps an author chooses to write on those themes that express the greatest lacks in his own life. Jesus said on one occasion: "O ye, of little faith"! I confess that I am `a man of little faith'. But, while I openly acknowledge that my faith is `small', I am glad boldly to proclaim that the One in whom I have personally placed my faith is not small! Someone rightly said, "The object of your faith determines the value of your faith." Christ is the Object of my faith, so, while my faith may lack greatly, the Savior in whom I have personally placed my trust does not lack at all! Christ is all-sufficient! Placing even a small amount of faith in a great Savior produces great results in one's life!

I believe in Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of the Living God through whom alone sinful persons can be forgiven, cleansed, empowered, and perfected in character.

`Adventures in Biblical Faith' - how best should we approach our quest? I believe the best way to approach `Faith' is the same way the writer to the Hebrews approached the topic of `Faith'. Not an abstract, theoretical or deeply theological approach, but a

practical, 'earthy' approach - namely, biographical sketches of Biblical characters. Quickly scan Chapter 11 of Hebrews and note the number of personalities which appear in this great 'Faith Chapter'.

The chapters in this book are homeletical in style, biographical in approach, practical in content. Because the book is divided into thirty five chapters, the layout of the book is designed in such a way that there are more than enough chapters to be used for a six-month-long adult Sunday School course (i.e., over a period of two 'Quarters'). The individual chapters contain enough content, and yet are short enough in length, that they could also well serve as material for small midweek study groups within a local church. Because of the homeletical style of the chapters (i.e., because of the carefully outlined divisions), 'fellow pastors' and teachers may find this material helpful in preaching. When used in a classroom setting, the thought-provoking questions listed at the end of each chapter will provide class participants an opportunity to review and to discuss the main content of each chapter.

Because 'Biblical Faith' is multi-dimensional, it is important not to draw premature conclusions regarding one's own faith or that of another 'fellow struggler'. As believers, we are at best only "Christians-in-the-making" (as E. Stanley Jones liked often to remind us).

As we continue to 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ', the capacity for greater faith is almost 'limitless'. The 'adventuresome' spirit is the spirit which is never satisfied with the 'status quo'!

"I'm pressing on the upward way, New heights  
I'm gaining ev'ry day;  
Still praying as I'm onward bound, 'Lord,  
plant my feet on higher ground.'

My heart has no desire to stay where doubts  
arise and fears dismay;  
Tho' some may dwell where these abound, My  
prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

"I want to live above the world, Tho' Satan's  
darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound. The  
song of saints on higher ground.

Chorus:

Lord, lift me up and let me stand, By faith,  
on Heaven's table-land,  
A higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant  
my feet on higher ground.

It is my wish and prayer, that, as a result of your  
'Adventures In Biblical Faith', you will find that you  
are standing on 'HIGHER GROUND'!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a mighty host of saints throughout the world today - saints whose faith in God is strong and whose faithful service to a hurting world is most encouraging! Many whose faith has been so pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6), have also been uplifting to me personally. I have found myself imitating their faith. I have found it easy to "look up" to those persons, younger and older alike, whose great faith in God has inspired me to "climb higher" in my quest for God. The five men whose names appear on the dedication page of this book are men who, at one time or another, have served as superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the Free Methodist Church. Each, at different stages of my life since childhood, has left his 'indelible mark' of godly influence on my life. For many reasons, I am deeply indebted to them.

I am also deeply indebted to my elderly mother, whose faithful walk with God has given me a great example to follow. My dear wife, Venita, has been a faithful companion to me since my early twenties, and her faith has stimulated mine as well as that of our two daughters, on countless occasions.

The childlike faith of hundreds of parishioners, in the church where I have served for over two decades, has helped me better to understand the Biblical Ways of Faith. The messages contained in this book were first 'delivered' to them.

Words cannot adequately express my debt of gratitude to my friend, Shirley Ruiz, who has freely given countless hours to typing the contents of this book! She has a faithful and a persevering and a joyous spirit that is most exemplary.

Most of all, I am indebted to our Faithful God, whose patience and long suffering and grace are infinite. Regarding the work of sanctification in the life of the sincere believer (the subject of the last chapter of this book), the apostle Paul declares, "*The one (God) who calls you is faithful and he will do it (sanctify you entirely).*" (I Thessalonians 5:24)



**CHAPTER 1**

**FAITH**

**THE CHARACTERICS OF FAITH**

## FAITH

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION: The way of faith is the way to God, for Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God."*

PROPOSITION: Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action regardless of the present circumstances.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. RESPONSE OF FAITH - Confident Action
- II. RESISTANCE AGAINST FAITH - Doubt of Unbelievers
- III. RELIABILITY OF FAITH - Promises of God
- IV. RESULTS FROM FAITH - Knowledge of God

CONCLUSION: Faith responds to life and to life's unknown future with confidence. Confident present-tense faith action usually will soon meet certain resistances. Faith is realistic because faith is founded upon the promises of God, not on the unfounded promises of society or on the wishful thinking of mere dreamers. Faith involves anticipating positive results -assurance from God, access to God!

## FAITH

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION: The way of faith is the way to God, for Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God." But what is faith? Hebrews 11:1,2 in the Living Bible reads, "Faith is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead."

PROPOSITION: Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action regardless of the present circumstances.

In this definition of faith can be seen certain characteristics of faith.

"Present-tense confidence issuing forth in confident action" speaks of the RESPONSE of Faith.

"Regardless of the present circumstances" hints of the RESISTANCE against Faith.

"Based upon God's sure promises" speaks of the RELIABILITY of Faith.

"Future Blessings" speaks of the REWARDS of Faith.

In seeking better to understand this definition of faith, we must look at these four characteristics or features of faith: (1) Response of Faith - confident action; (2) Resistance against Faith - doubt of unbelievers; (3) Reliability of faith - promises of God; (4) Rewards of Faith - knowledge of God.

#### I. RESPONSE OF FAITH - Confident Action

"Now faith is" describes the present-tense aspect of faith. I either have faith in the present tense - now - or I don't have faith. I can't depend on the experience of faith of yesterday or the faith that I anticipate I will have tomorrow. Faith is a daily, moment-by-moment reality. I must believe God's promises today, in order to receive them tomorrow. I must have an active, present tense faith. A present-tense faith changes all things - now!

My faith today determines my motivation for what I will do tomorrow. We respond today according to what we think will happen tomorrow!

When Christians don't equip themselves today, it is a sign that they have no faith that God is going to do anything for them tomorrow.

A present-tense faith is what keeps us alert and alive for God. Faith is preparing today and acting today in such a way that indicates that we believe that God is going to do a great thing for us tomorrow. When a believer is no longer working today for the Lord, it is a sign that he does not believe that God is going to do anything for him tomorrow.

If Noah would have discontinued to build on the ark, it would have been an indication that he did not believe God was going to do something special for him in the future.

If Joshua would have discontinued to march around the walls of Jericho, it would have been an indication that he did not believe God was going to do something special for him and for Israel on the seventh day.

If Moses had not continued to march ahead into the wilderness and would have instead gone back to Egypt, it would have indicated that he did not believe God was going to do something special in the future, namely, to give the children of Israel the promised land of Canaan.

Our present-day actions indicate what we believe God is going to do for us in the future.

Faith is an active, present-tense trust in God, an indication that we believe God's promises which will be fulfilled in the future.

If I no longer daily read my Bible, this would be an indication of a loss of faith, an indication that I no longer believed that God was going to do something great for me in the future through the Word.

If I no longer sought to witness to my unsaved friends, it would be an indication that I had lost faith that God would reward my attempts at witnessing with the salvation of precious souls.

If I no longer tithed my money to my local church, it would indicate a loss of faith in my church's future. My present actions - positive or negative - indicate my faith or lack of faith in God's power to do miracles in the future.

I am making or unmaking my future, dependent upon my present actions.

*"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead."* (Hebrews 11:1,2; Living Bible)

The 'When' and the 'How' of what we want in the future is in God's hands. The promise may be granted soon or late, as God sees best. The method by which the promise is fulfilled is also in God's hands. The confidence that the promise will be fulfilled in God's own time and way is the essence of faith. Faith is present confidence that what God has promised, God will fulfill in His own time and way in the future. Present confidence is translated into present confident action.

Noah acted confidently in the present day-by-day building of the Ark, for he knew that God's promise to him would someday be fulfilled! Abraham acted confidently in his present day-by-day journeys into an unknown land, for he knew that God would someday fulfill His promise to him! Moses acted confidently in his present day-by-day leadership in the wilderness of a rebellious people, for he knew that God's promise to give Israel the land of Canaan would someday be fulfilled!

Faith is simply putting our trust in God's trustworthy character, believing that God will fulfill His promises to us in His own good time and way!

When I witness to Christ's person and power, I am putting trust in a God who promises to draw all men to Christ when Christ is lifted up.

When I spread the Word of God through Bible or tract distribution, I am putting my faith in a God who has promised that His Word will not return unto Him void, but that it will accomplish that for which it was sent forth, namely, the salvation of sinners and the encouragement of saints.

(Illustration of Hailey who travelled from South Africa to Central Africa to establish Free Methodist missions, even selling his insurance policies to get enough money for the project because it was a time when, during the depression, the denomination was not attempting new projects. His present-tense active faith, issuing forth in confident actions, was an indication that he believed that God would honor his faith, for today, some fifty years later, there are over 100,000 Black African Free Methodists in Central Africa!)

Faith is present-tense confidence in God, issuing forth in present, confident action - action that indicates that the man of faith believes God is going to do great things in the future for him.

When I tithe my income to my local church, I am engaging in a positive, confident, present-tense action of faith, indicating that I believe in God's promises to bless me personally and in God's promises to bless my church corporately!

Faith is putting your trust in a God whom you believe will fulfill His promises in the future, and confidently acting on that belief in the present-tense moment!

## II. RESISTANCE AGAINST FAITH - Doubt of Unbelievers

Having present-tense confidence in God whom you believe will fulfill his promises in the future does not always mean that the present confident action (which is a result of present confident trust) will always be easy. Quite to the contrary many times!

Noah had day-by-day confidence in God's promises, demonstrated by his day-by-day confident actions in building the ark, but his confident actions were often threatened by the mockery and sneers of his surrounding neighbors who thought Noah was insane to build a huge boat on dry ground!

Abraham's confident actions of faith, demonstrated by his leaving his hometown to go to an unknown country, were challenged by his kinsfolk who thought him insane to leave the security of his hometown to follow his new God into an unknown country.

Moses' confident actions of faith, demonstrated by his leading the children of Israel across the wilderness for forty years in the Promised Land, were challenged severely when discontented Israelites turned in rebellion against Moses' leadership! Moses continued to demonstrate the confident action of faith even when circumstances in the wilderness were very adverse. Faith is continuing to act confidently even when circumstances are unfavorable. Faith is waiting patiently for God to act to fulfill His promises in His own good time and way - and while waiting patiently upon God, to continue to act positively and confidently in the present-tense moment!

## III. RELIABILITY OF FAITH - Promises of God

The present-tense confidence of faith (issuing forth in confident action) is not an illusion. Our confidence has substance. In other words, the confidence of faith is different than the dreams of wishful thinking. Some have 'illusions of grandeur'- seeing themselves as becoming something great in the future. But such a vision does not have any substance or foundation; it is the mere product of

wishful thinking. Many a small boy talks about the day in the future when he will be the President of the United States, but such a vision is without substance.

What is the substance or foundation of faith which gives authenticity to the present-tense confidence? The substance of faith is the promise of God.

God's promises give us a firm footing to our lives. Faith in the faithfulness of God's trustworthy character gives us assurance and confidence, regardless of the darkness of present circumstances which would threaten our faith.

Because Noah and Abraham and Moses and others knew that God had spoken to them and had promised certain things to them, these men of faith could maintain their confidence and their confident actions even when circumstances were against them.

Present-tense confidence and confident actions are based on the conviction that there is an unseen God who stands behind the seen universe, and a God who both made the visible universe out of nothing and who controls the universe which He has made. *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."* (Hebrews 11:3)

"If we can grip the fact that this is God's world, that God is responsible for it, then two things follow. First, we will use it as such. We will remember that everything in it is God's and we will try to use it as God would have us use it. Second, we will remember that, even when it does not look like it, somehow God is in control. If we believe that this is God's world then there comes the faith and the hope which enable us to do the most difficult thing in the world - to accept what we cannot understand. If we believe that this is God's world, then into life there comes a new sense of responsibility and into life there comes a new power of acceptance, for everything belongs to God, and all is in the hands of God." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 147,148)

#### IV. RESULTS FROM FAITH - Knowledge of God

What are the results of faith? Briefly stated, the results of faith are realized in the fulfilled promises of God. God always rewards faith - partially on earth and fully in heaven.

Noah's faith was rewarded - he and his household were saved from death by the terrible flood.

Abraham's faith was rewarded - he was given a promised son from whom an entire nation was born (the nation of Israel), and he became the father of the greatest Son of all - Jesus Christ!

Joseph's faith was honored eventually, as seen by the fact that God elevated him to great leadership in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh in power, and used Joseph to save alive thousands of people during a terrible famine.

Moses' faith in leaving Egypt was honored in Moses becoming the great leader of Israel who received the Ten Commandments from God and in Moses leading the children of Israel to the promised land of Canaan.

Rahab's faith was demonstrated by her welcoming the Israelite spies, and her faith was rewarded when God spared her life and the lives of her family when the walls of Jericho fell.

*Faith is always rewarded, partially on earth and completely in heaven. "And these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."* (Hebrews 11:13,39,40)

There are four results of faith given to us in Hebrews 11:2-5.

- (1) Faith gives us approval from God (Verse 2).
- (2) Faith gives us answers in God. (Verse 3)
- (3) Faith gives us assurance from God. (Verse 4)
- (4) Faith gives us access to God. (Verse 5)

**CONCLUSION:** What are the characteristics of faith?

(1) Faith involves right Responses to life. Faith responds to life and to life's unknown future with confidence. Faith is "the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead." (verse 1,2; Living Bible) A faith response to life is a confident response, issuing forth in confident present-tense actions.

(2) Faith involves facing certain Resistances. Confident present-tense faith action usually will soon meet certain resistances. The actions of the man of faith may be looked upon as actions of foolhardiness (as in Noah's case), or as actions of shortsightedness (as in Abraham's case), or as actions of presumptuous domineering leadership (as in the case of Moses). Doubt, and sometimes active persecution, challenge the life of faith. The positive man of faith is often encountered by the negative man of skepticism.

(3) Faith involves resting one's self upon the Reliable promises of God. Faith is realistic because faith is founded upon the promises of God, not on the unfounded promises of society or on the wishful thinking of mere dreamers. Faith is not taking a 'blind leap into the dark'. Faith has a reliable foundation or substance - the sure promises of God and the trustworthy character of the unseen God who created the universe and who maintains control of all things in His world. Thus, faith believes that God has all things in control, regardless of present circumstances which defy reason. The God who made all things (verse 3) is the God who controls all things, and to put faith in such a God is to put faith in one who is able positively to control ones personal destiny.

(4) Faith involves anticipating positive Results! What is the outcome of persevering faith - a faith that acts confidently in spite of various perplexities, problems, or persecutions? Faith gives approval from God (verse 2), answers in God (verse 3), assurance from God (verse 4), access to God (verse 5).

Taking the way of faith is taking the way to God!

## FAITH

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. From a Biblical understanding of "faith", (note Hebrews 11:1), tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith is present-tense confidence in God, based upon God's sure promises of future blessings, issuing forth in confident action, regardless of the present circumstances."
2. Tell what is meant by the statement: "Faith is a daily, moment-by-moment reality". Do you agree with the following statement? "Faith is preparing today and acting today in such a way that indicates that we believe that God is going to do a great thing for us tomorrow."
3. From Scripture and from your own personal and devotional life, illustrate the truth of the following Scripture: "My present actions - positive or negative - indicate my faith or lack of faith in God's power to do miracles in the future."
4. From your personal life or from your observations of others or from the lives of Biblical characters, illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith is a present-tense confidence in God, issuing forth in present, confident actions - actions that indicate that the man of faith believes God is going to do great things in the future for him."
5. What factors in one's external environment constitute resistance or challenges to the sincere believer who is attempting to exercise true faith in God? Does the fact that there are strong adverse factors - resistances - in the believer's environment, give the believer opportunity to develop a stronger and more enduring faith? Can one have a "strong faith" in God without having, at the same time, strong perseverance in his character? Do you agree with the following statement: "Faith is continuing to act confidently even when circumstances are unfavorable."
6. What is the substance or the foundation of faith which gives authenticity to the believer's present-tense confidence? Do you agree with the following statement? "Faith in the faithfulness of God's trustworthy character gives us assurance and confidence, regardless of the darkness of present circumstances which would threaten our faith." Illustrate the truth of this statement from the lives of the following Biblical characters of faith: Noah, Abraham, Moses.

7. Why does believing that this present world is God's world result in enabling one to have "a new sense of responsibility" and "a new power of acceptance"?
8. In what ways is faith in God always rewarded, partially on earth and completely in heaven?
9. According to Hebrews 11:2-5, list four results of having faith in God.
10. Share from your own life some of the rich rewards that have come to you, as a result of your persevering faith in God.



**CHAPTER 2**

**FAITH**

**NOAH - ENDURING FAITH**

## FAITH

### NOAH - ENDURING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:7

**INTRODUCTION:** Noah's faith was a working way to live, a faith that was strong in the midst of a corrupt generation.

**PROPOSITION:** As Noah conquered through faith, so may we too conquer through faith. Why was Noah's faith a working way to live? Because his faith was fixed on God at a time when everyone around him had forgotten or denied God.

- I. CARING FAITH (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions)
- II. CAUTIOUS FAITH (Not Hardhearted To God's Warnings)
- III. CONSTANT FAITH (Not Impatient To God's Timing)
- IV. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Not Cowardly In God's Testings)
- V. CONDEMNING FAITH (Not Neutral To God's Standards)
- VI. CONQUERING FAITH (Not Fruitless Of God's Rewards)

**CONCLUSION:** The faith that conquers is the faith that is fixed on the living God. Such a faith is exemplified in the life of Noah who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? Then give yourself daily, routinely, and persistently to the pursuit of God. *".....anyone who comes to him (God) must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6b) Earnestly seek God through faith! Experience the Faith of Noah!

## FAITH

### NOAH ENDURING FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:7

**INTRODUCTION:** Noah's faith was a working way to live, a faith that was strong in the midst of a corrupt generation.

**PROPOSITION:** As Noah conquered through faith, so may we too conquer through faith. Why was Noah's faith a working way to live? Because his faith was fixed on God at a time when everyone around him had forgotten or denied God. Let us note the various features of Noah's faith and seek to practice the faith of Noah.

I. **CARING FAITH** (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions)  
Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah built an ark "to save his family." Noah's faith was a caring faith. He was not indifferent to God's specific instructions. "So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood, make rooms in it and cast it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks.'" (Genesis 6:13-16; NIV) I admire Noah's faith and obedience. If I had been Noah, I probably would have questioned the Lord. I probably would not have been as quick to obey. While faith is not unreasonable, faith does go beyond reason, and, therefore, sometimes reason gets in the way of faith. I probably would have reasoned something like this: "But God, it has never rained before. You are telling me to build an ark on dry ground, far from any large body of water? The earth and vegetation has been watered with streams up until this time (Genesis 2:6), and now you tell me that some day the entire earth will be covered with so much water that every living creature will die! Water out of the sky, Lord? EVERY living creature die, Lord? That seems impossible! By the time I get this hugh boat built (it will take over a hundred years to build it!), the people will repent of their sins and there will be no need for a flood and for a large boat. All my labor will be for naught! And, Lord, the ark has no mast, no rudder, no sail, no steering! How will it float? And because the boat is so hugh, where will it land safely after the flood is over? (the deck area of the ark was 20 times the size of a standard basketball court!) And, Lord, how can I

collect so many animals, so many different species? And who will take care of so many animals, feeding them and cleaning up after them?" (Quotation from John Maxwell)

Noah's faith was a caring faith, for he knew that God was a caring God. Noah knew that God had waited patiently for mankind to repent of its wickedness, and that God was only sending judgment upon the world because the world of Noah's day had spurned the mercy of God. I Peter 3:20 says that "*God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.*"

God never sends judgment without first providing opportunity for mankind to repent of its wickedness. "*He is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" (II Peter 3:9) "*God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*" (I Timothy 2:3,4)

God is a caring God; therefore, like Noah, our faith must be a caring faith. We must exercise care to obey God's explicit instructions to us, as Noah was careful to obey God's explicit instructions regarding the building of the ark.

God instructed Noah to prepare an ark for the saving of Noah's household from the destruction of the flood. Noah was to persuade men to repent of their sins and to enter the ark, to be saved from death.

God, as it were, has built an ark for the saving of all mankind from the final destruction of the great judgment. That ark can be seen as God's great plan of salvation. It is the responsibility of believers to persuade sinners to enter into God's 'ark of safety', in order to be saved from the destruction of eternal death. We believers, like Noah the preacher of righteousness, are to witness with our lives and with our lips. We are to exercise caring faith. It is not only our own family but the entire family of mankind that we are to seek to save! We are to declare that there is no other way to be saved from the coming flood of judgment than the way of Christ. Christ and His salvation is the only 'ark of safety' against the storms of eternal death.

It is interesting that God told Noah to coat the ark with 'pitch' inside and out (Genesis 6:14). The 'pitch' sealed the ark, not allowing any water to seep into the ark. The word 'pitch' is the same Hebrew word for 'atonement' in the Old Testament. Just as 'pitch' was indispensable for the salvation of Noah's household in the ark, so the 'atoning blood' of Jesus Christ is indispensable for the salvation of

mankind in God's 'ark of safety'. Our salvation is through the shed blood of Christ. "Without the shedding of the blood, there is no remission of sins."

Jesus shed his blood for the salvation of all mankind. His atonement is unlimited, available for everyone.

None need perish, for Jesus' blood, like the pitch on the ark, is the saving power of God to all who believe, i.e., to all who enter the 'ark of safety'.

The man of true faith responds obediently to God's instructions because, like Noah, he knows that God is a saving God who wishes to save all mankind in the 'ark of safety' (through Jesus Christ).

## II. CAUTIOUS FAITH (Not Hardhearted To God's Warnings)

Noah's faith was a caring faith, for he knew God was a caring and a compassionate God. That is, Noah was not indifferent to God's instructions.

Noah's faith was also a cautious faith for he knew that God is not only a God of love who wishes to save sinners, but that God is also a God of wrath who must punish and destroy unrepentant sinners! That is, Noah was not hardhearted or unheeding regarding God's warnings of judgment!

*"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family." (Hebrews 11:7a)*

Said God to Noah, *"I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish." (Genesis 6:17)*

Why such unusual judgment? Because *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5)*

If God loves all sinners and waits patiently to save them, appealing to all sinners to repent (which is the basis for a 'caring faith'), then God also hates all sin and promises to punish all sinners who refuse to repent of their wicked ways (the basis for a 'cautious faith').

If God is a God of mercy and salvation, God is also a God of judgment and destruction! "So the Lord said, 'I will wipe

mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the grounds, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them." (Genesis 6:7)

It was not easy for Noah to preach and to live righteousness in the midst of a perverted and wicked generation. When men around him were mocking Noah, Noah remained true to his call. When the hearts of men around him became calloused to the things of God, Noah's heart remained tender and responsive. When people around Noah closed their ears to the warnings of judgment, Noah kept his ears attuned to the voice of the living God. When others mocked the message of God, Noah heeded the message of God. When others made fun of God, Noah continued to fear his God. When others grew careless, Noah remained cautious.

The Bible says that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". A true faith is a faith characterized by holy reverence and godly fear. Noah took God's warnings seriously, and so will every man of true faith today.

*Says the Scriptures, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?.....let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 13:25,28,29)*

Faith means believing that what God says, He means! God says that unrepentant sinners will suffer the destruction of eternal death. *"He (Jesus) will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed." (II Thessalonians 1:8-10)*

Noah took God's warnings regarding judgment most seriously, and so will we if we are men of true faith. Noah did not succumb to the pressure of mocking people. He retained his fear of the Lord. And so must we - even in the midst of mockery and sneers. We must not allow our hearts to grow calloused and indifferent. We must personally heed God's warnings to flee the 'wrath to come', and we must warn sinners of the 'errors of their ways' and seek to turn sinners to the Savior! We must be cautious that we do not grow hardened in our hearts or unheeding to the warnings of Scriptures.

Every preacher of the Gospel and every Christian must guard himself against insensitivity to God's voice which warns against sin. Every person of faith must take great caution to remain tender in his heart, fervent in his spirit, and obedient in his will! Even the great apostle Paul feared that, after preaching the Gospel to others, he might become a castaway himself! Said Paul, *"For my part, I run with a clear goal before me; I am like a boxer who does not beat the air;*

*I bruise my own body and make it know its master, for fear that after preaching to others I should find myself rejected."* (I Corinthians 9:26,27; NEB)

Noah did not become soft or indulgent or hardhearted; he remained sensitive, obedient, and disciplined, taking seriously God's warnings as seen in the fact that he continued faithfully to build the ark.

A cautious faith is a faith that exercises great caution to heed the warnings of God's Word!

### III. CONSTANT FAITH (Not Impatient To God's Timing)

Noah was told to "build an ark". What an assignment! It took over 100 years to build that ark! Most of us would have become discouraged and given up the project! In fact, many Christians today lack 'staying power' in their faith. Recently, a friend said to me, "I have never understood why so many Christians have not been able to 'weather the storm'. Noah's faith stood the test of time and the test of persecution! His was a persevering faith! A strong faith is a constant faith, a faith that continues to work day after day, year after year, for the Lord - even when, as in the case of Noah, there is passive indifference or even active hostility to our message! What kept Noah working on the boat, year after year, even when many must have mocked him and called him a great fool? It was Noah's steadfast faith in God! What keeps some Christians today working year after year, faithfully and joyfully, in a local church - even when others 'jump ship'? It is their steadfast faith in God and their love of the brethren.

There is the faith that gives immediate and tangible results, and thank God for such a faith. But there is also the faith that endures year-in-and-year-out without results, and that is also a great faith (perhaps greater than the former faith)! It is the faith that works without immediate results, knowing that God will eventually and ultimately reward, if not on earth, then surely in heaven! It is the faith that witnesses

to unbelievers, even when none respond to the Gospel! Think of how great Noah's faith had to be to keep working for a hundred years without it ever raining, and to keep preaching for decades without converts! Most preachers would have given up in despair!

Noah's faith was most mature because it was a constant faith. His faith was a tough, enduring type. Constant, enduring faith "is that determination, unshaking and unrelenting, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on, and which refuses to be deflected. Obstacles will not daunt it; delays will not depress it; discouragements will not take its hope away. It will halt neither for discouragement from within nor for opposition from without. It is the steadfast endurance which will carry on until in the end it gets there." (Barclay's Hebrews; pages 196,197)

The Bible says, "*Don't grow weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye do not faint.*" (Galatians 6:9)

Noah's faith is remarkable because it was constant, enduring, steadfast. This is not to say that he never questioned, or never became discouraged or depressed. But it is to say that, regardless of his emotional ups and downs, he never gave up his work for God. He continued to build the ark until the day it was completed. He was not a 'Quitter'! He did not 'throw in the towel' when he got discouraged! He kept 'keeping on' until the task was finished. His internal convictions to be faithful in labor were stronger than the pressures of his external environment which told him to quit! He didn't succumb to the world's pressures to conform; rather he submitted his will to conform to God's will for his life!

It is hard to be constant in your faith when you don't see forthcoming results from your labors!

Men of truly great faith are those who are faithful to God and to their work for God, regardless of the results. There have been many missionaries who have labored many years without converts, but in God's sight they were nevertheless fruitful because of their obedience. In a result-oriented society, Noah would have been considered a failure, but in God's sight he was a great success. "*Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*" (Genesis 6:8) And many modern-day Christians are finding favor with the Lord because of their faithfulness to God's call, even when obedience to that call has not resulted in visible fruits.

God desires to give us visible results from our labors, but, regardless of people's response to our message, we are successful in God's sight if we have been, like Noah, obedient to our call. Remember, if we are communicating the Word of God in love, we can rest assured that God's Word will accomplish its purpose. God wishes to save all mankind through the instrumentality of His Word, but if the Word does not accomplish its saving purpose through positive response in its listeners, then the Word of God will affect its purpose of judgment in the lives of those listeners who reject its saving message. This was the case in Noah's listeners. They rejected the invitation to salvation, so they reaped the consequences of judgment in the flood. The Word is a comfort to those who accept it, and a condemnation to those who reject it!

#### IV. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Not Cowardly In God's Testings)

The faith of Noah was a courageous faith, and so is the faith of all mature believers. "In an age when men forgot and disregarded God, God for Noah was the supreme reality in the world. He was the one lonely man who stood for God in a day when all men were abandoning Him." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 161)

It takes a courageous faith to stand up for Jesus against the sneers of the cynical crowd. When I was a child, I was told to stand against the negative peer pressure around me. Said one to me, "Ron, any dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim upstream." "If God is for you, who can be against you!" It takes courage to go against the popular currents of worldliness - to say 'No thank you, I don't drink' when everyone else is drinking; to say 'I choose not to destroy my body with drugs' when teens around you think it is 'smart' to have a drug 'trip'; to be kind and loving when others around you are hateful; to remain pure in mind and body when others are playing around with sex; to be honest when others are using dishonest methods to advance their selfish causes; to give of your time in service to others when those around you are pursuing their own selfish interests; to be a positive person in the midst of a negative, critical, judgmental crowd.

'Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone,  
Dare to have a purpose firm,  
Dare to make it known.'

Noah was not deterred by the mockery of those around him. He was a man of strong convictions, a man who did not compromise his standards of righteousness and holiness. He did not succumb to the worldly peer pressures all around him. Noah believed in the unseen world of spiritual reality more than in the seen world of physical reality. He set his hope on the future promises of God rather than on the present circumstances of his everyday life. He was willing to wait upon God for his rewards rather than to seek for immediate gratification from his environment. He was willing to work hard now (building the ark) and to wait to receive his rewards later. A courageous faith is a faith that is able to wait upon God, and, while waiting, to work hard for God. Deferred gratifications! Noah received his reward after waiting and working for decades. When the flood came, he enjoyed the fruits of his labors, while Noah's mockers, who lived their lives for immediate gratification, were pounding on the closed door of the ark!

Noah's faith was a courageous faith because he listened to the voice of God instead of to the voice of men. The counsel of men may have seemed more 'sensible' than the voice of God, while Noah was building a huge boat on dry ground, but listening to the voice of God proved to be the epitome of

wisdom when Noah was resting secure in the floating ark while the world outside was drowning!

Noah's courageous faith enabled him to suffer persecution now and to wait for honor in the future. Noah was wise because, while others around him were carelessly indulging their flesh, Noah was carefully cultivating his spirit.

So, a courageous faith is a faith that is able, if necessary, to stand up alone for God in the midst of a crowd of worldly people.

Noah's faith was severely tested, but his faith was perfected through his courageous obedience. Our faith, too, will be often tested. Let us, like Noah, be courageous, not cowardly, during those tests.

#### V. CONDEMNING FAITH (Not Neutral To God's Standards)

*"By his faith he (Noah) condemned the world."* (Hebrews 11:7b)

Noah's purity amidst impurity, his honesty amidst dishonesty, his hard work amidst laziness, his discipline amidst indulgence, his godliness amidst wickedness - in short, Noah's

righteous character in the midst of an unrighteous society stood as a continuous condemnation to those around him.

"Noah's faith was a judgment on others. That is why, at least in one sense, it is dangerous to be a Christian. It is not that the Christian is self-righteous; it is not that the Christian is censorious; it is not that the Christian goes about finding fault with other people; it is not that the Christian says: 'I told you so.' It often happens that the Christian simply by being himself is passing judgment on other people." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 160)

The Christlike character of the true believer often stands as a silent condemnation to unrepentant sinners.

#### VI. CONQUERING FAITH (Not Fruitless Of God's Rewards)

*"By his faith he (Noah)....became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."* (Hebrews 11:7b)

Faith always conquers! Faith brings victory! Faith is never fruitless of God's rewards!

Faith saved Noah and his family from the destruction of the terrible flood. Noah was declared righteous in God's sight because of his faith. *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."* (Genesis 6:8)

Without faith it is impossible to please God! Faith is the way to God, and to God's honors, and to God's heaven. Faith is the way to an abundant life. Faith saves one from a life of sterility and saves one for a life of creativity and productivity.

The way of faith is the way of holiness, and happiness, and health.

**CONCLUSION:** The faith that conquers is the faith that is fixed on the living God. Such a faith is exemplified in the life of Noah who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? What are the characteristics of an Enduring Faith? (1) Caring Faith - (Not Indifferent To God's Instructions) - Obedience. (2) Cautious Faith - (Not hardhearted to God's Warnings) - Reverence. (3) Constant Faith - (Not impatient to God's Timing) - Perseverance. (4) Courageous Faith - (Not Cowardly in God's Testings) -

Courageous. (5) Condemning Faith - (Not Neutral to God's Standards) - Exemplary Character. (6) Conquering Faith - (Not Fruitless of God's Rewards ) - Victorious.

Do you want to be, like Noah, a person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord? Then give yourself daily, routinely, and persistently to the pursuit of God.

## FAITH

### NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Does "reason" sometimes stand in the way of a person exercising the obedience to God which faith demands? Do you think that, when God told Noah to build an ark, Noah initially had a difficult time accepting such "unreasonable" instructions from God? Do you agree with the following statement: "While faith is not unreasonable, faith does go beyond reason, and, therefore, sometimes reason gets in the way of faith"?
2. Give scriptural support to document the truth of the following statement: "God never sends judgment without first providing opportunity for mankind to repent of its wickedness."
3. How would you describe the "ark" which God has prepared for the saving of lost mankind, and what can sincere believers do to motivate persons who are facing impending judgment to enter God's "Ark"?
4. What, from a spiritual point of view, is the counterpart of the physical ingredient of "pitch" in God's spiritual "Ark of Safety"?
5. Why, according to Hebrews 11:7, was Noah not hardhearted or unheeding regarding God's command to build an ark? (Note Genesis 6:17) Why, according to Genesis 6:5, was God so severe in his judgement on ancient mankind? Do you agree with the following statement: "If unrepentant sinners continue to spurn God's mercy, they will surely and eventually reap God's judgment"! (Note Genesis 6:7 and II Peter 3:3-7)
6. Considering the life of Noah, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A true faith is a faith characterized by holy reverence and godly fear." (Note Hebrews 13:25,28,29)
7. Do you agree with the following statement? "Every person of faith must take caution to remain tender in his heart, fervent in his spirit, and obedient in his will". (According to I Corinthians 9:26,27, what was one of Paul's great concerns?)

8. What kept Noah working on the ark, year after year, even when many must have mocked him and called him a great fool? (What keeps some Christians today working year after year, faithfully and joyfully, in a local church -- even when others "jump ship"?)
9. Does great faith in God always produce immediate or visible results?
10. How would you define and describe a "constant, enduring faith", as exemplified in the life of Noah?
11. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "In a result-oriented society, Noah would have been considered a failure."
12. What is your response or reaction to the following statement: "God wishes to save all mankind through the instrumentality of His Word, but if the Word does not accomplish its saving purpose through positive response in its listeners, then the Word of God will affect its purpose of judgment in the lives of those listeners who reject its saving message."
13. How did Noah demonstrate courage in his faith, in the context of the ancient world? Give examples of ways in which a modern-day person of faith can demonstrate moral courage in the midst of a society where compromise is common. How does believing in the unseen world of spiritual reality help motivate a person of faith to maintain his strong convictions in the midst of strong negative peer pressure?
14. Explain what is meant by the following statement: "It often happens that the Christian simply by being himself is passing judgement on other people."
15. In what ways was Noah's faith in God and his faithfulness in obeying God's commands richly rewarded? Name ways in which your faith or the faith of those whom you personally know, has been richly rewarded.

**CHAPTER 3**

**FAITH**

**ABRAHAM - VENTURESOME FAITH**

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - VENTURESOME FAITH

#### OUTLINE:

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:1-5

TEXT: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

INTRODUCTION: A brief survey of the life of Abraham teaches one the true and simple meaning of faith. "Faith is simply believing what God has said, what God has promised; it is the knowledge that what he has said he will do. Faith is not a series of propositions which are either believed or not believed. It is instead that trust in God which leads one to follow him in whatever situation one may find himself, a trust which waits on the Lord even in times when one is fearful for his life.....Faith is primarily a relationship word which involves our commitment to the faithful One. A man can keep a great number of rules regarding right behavior and still not be a man of faith." (G. Ernest Wright and Reginald Fuller)

PROPOSITION: The life of Abraham shows us, step by step, the way of faith. Abraham is called the friend of God. Because he believed God and obeyed His instruction, he was reckoned righteous. It is important to understand and follow the way of faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. GOD'S FIRST WORD - A COMMAND (12:1)
- II. GOD'S GLORIOUS PROMISE - INCALCULABLE BLESSING (12:2-3)
- III. MAN'S REQUIRED RESPONSE - OBEDIENCE (12:4-5)
- IV. GOD'S TIMELY FULFILLMENT - 'SPIRITUAL' BLESSINGS (15:1-6:18:10-15:21:1-7)
- V. THE BELIEVER'S SEVERE TEST - FIERY TRIAL (22:2)
- VI. FAITH'S INDESCRIBABLE REWARD - FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD (15:6)

CONCLUSION: Abraham, the father of Faith, teaches us 'The Way of Faith'. Oh, that we each might exercise faith and be called 'the friend of God'!

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - VENTURESOME FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 12:1-5

**TEXT:** "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

**INTRODUCTION:** Many have asked, "What is faith?" A brief survey of the life of Abraham teaches one the true and simple meaning of faith.

"Faith is simply believing what God has said, what God had promised; it is the knowledge that what He has said He will do. Faith is not a series of propositions which are either believed or not believed. It is instead that trust in God which leads one to follow him in whatever situation one may find himself, a trust which waits on the Lord even in times when one is fearful for his life.... Faith is primarily a relationship word which involves our commitment to the faithful One. A man can keep a great number of rules regarding right behavior and still not be a man of faith." (The Book of the Acts of God; pg.68) (G. Ernest Wright and Reginald Fuller)

**PROPOSITION:** The life of Abraham shows us, step by step, the way of faith, Abraham is called the friend of God. Because he believed God and obeyed His instruction, he was reckoned righteous. It is important to understand and follow the way of faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God.

#### I. GOD'S FIRST WORD - A COMMAND (12:1)

God has a right to give commands. God is creator and as such He has the right to command Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden.

God has a right to command Jonah to go to Nivevah. "The Word of the Lord came to Jonah, *'Go to the great city of Nineveh'*" (Jonah 1:1). Jonah's disobedience to God's command brought near-fatal consequences.

We, like Jonah, can run from the Lord (Jonah 1:3), or we, like Abraham, can do as the Lord tells us (Gen. 12:4).

God had a right to call Jeremiah. (Quote Jeremiah 1:4-6)

God is Sovereign. God is creator. God is Redeemer! God owns you, therefore God has a right to use you.

*"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:20-21 NIV)*

## II. GOD'S GLORIOUS PROMISE - INCALCULABLE BLESSING (12:2-3)

"To make a new beginning, God takes this man out of his surroundings; he has to leave his father's house, the place where he was settled; he has to leave behind everything that ties him to the past, and, most of all, he has to leave his gods." (The Witnessing Community; De Detrich pg.33)

The measure of God's blessings far outweigh the price of man's sacrificial obedience! God multiplies his blessings to the believing and obedient heart. So it was with Abraham and so it will be with his spiritual descendants - you and me! No man can ever outgive God. Man is always on the receiving end. The God of is the giver of all good and perfect gifts.

The great nations have come and gone, but that single Aramean nomad - Abraham - is still claimed as a great ancestor by the Jews, by Christians and even by the Moslems!

Said God to Abraham, *"Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...So shall your descendants be."* (Gen. 15:5)

God's promises to Abraham are most generous and God's promises to the believer today are most generous.

Christianity is not command-oriented, although it has commands. Instead, Christianity is promise-oriented. Someone calculated that there are 365 'don'ts' in the Bible, but that there are 8000 promises in the Bible!

God desires to fill your life with unspeakable blessings. Proverbs 3:9,10 deeply impresses me! "Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income, and He will fill your barns with wheat and barley and overflow your wine vats with the finest wines."

For many years I have pictured heaven's opened window pouring out blessings upon the obedient believer, as described in Malachi 3:10. *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty,* and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (NIV)

When you give to God, He always gives back to you - in multiples!

God is not afraid to promise rewards to the believing child of God. "The mind of Christ is gloriously positive..... All his teaching and example cry aloud that life is good. His whole purpose in coming to earth, he declared, was that we might have life and have it to the full.....In the most famous passage where Jesus praises self-denial and commends the cross, he says that those who lose their lives shall find them. Finding, not losing, is the last word of Christianity. Indeed, in one place Jesus goes into the mathematics of it! Whatever you lose you will receive a hundredfold - and eternal life as well.... The New Testament is full of rewards." (The Secret of Radiant Life; Sangster pg. 108,109)

### III. MAN'S REQUIRED RESPONSE - OBEDIENCE (12:4,5)

God's glorious promises must be met with man's wholehearted obedience. It may not always be convenient to obey, but it is always wise. Hebrews 11:8 says of Abraham, "*He went out, not knowing where he was to go.*"

"To understand the nature of the break implied in these few and sober words, we must remember the tribal system in which religious, social, and cultural life is so closely knit that to be cut off from the tribe is to lose one's identity, is to be like a branch severed from its stem." (The Witnessing Community; pg.33) (Susanne DeDietrich)

Because Abraham severed himself from his past totally, God created a new community for Abraham: "*I will make of you a great nation..... in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" (Genesis 12:2-3)

Faith means that we, like Abraham, must 'leave' the old way of life to follow God into a new beginning. We must cut ourselves off from our past life of sin, and identify with the community of faith. We dare not turn back. Said Jesus, "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*" (Luke 9:62)

It is not always easy to leave the familiar surroundings of sin to follow God into a new and unknown land of righteousness. This is why we do not listen very carefully to what God says to us. Do you remember the rich young ruler? Jesus commanded him to leave the very thing that ensnared him - his riches - and follow Christ. Loving his riches more than the kingdom of God, he failed to follow Jesus, and he went away sorrowfully, 'for he was very rich'. Whether one has much or little, he can be too rich to follow Christ!

Abraham forgot his past and followed God. This is faith. Wrote Paul, "*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.*" (Phil.3:13) Abraham was a forward-looking man of faith. He left all to follow God.

Abraham's faith action reminds one of Ruth who also left her past and followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, into a new land, to become a part of the chosen people of God and indeed even an ancestor of the Messiah himself! She had to leave the old way of life before she could be the recipient of the gracious promises of God. Faith is active and venturesome, not passive and indifferent.

Joshua 1:7 is God's command not to turn back, but to leave the past and to march forward with God into the promised land.

The prophet Ezekiel was God's mouthpiece to speak judgment on Israel because of Israel's idolatrous unfaithfulness. As a wife is unfaithful to her husband, so Israel was unfaithful to God. Israel refused to leave her idolatry and to follow God. (Ezekiel 23:7,8)

The believer, just like Abraham, must separate himself from the past sins of his life. (2 Cor. 6:17,18)

*"Therefore come out from them and be separate, Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

#### IV. GOD'S TIMELY FULFILLMENT - 'SPIRITUAL' BLESSINGS (15:1-6; 18:10-15; 21:1-7)

In God's own time, He fulfills his promises. "Abraham had to wait twenty years before there was even a hint that this (promise of a son) would come to pass." (God's unfolding purposes;pg.51. Susanne De Dietrich)

The promise was fulfilled, miraculously. The birth of Isaac is seen to be the miraculous activity of God, a gift of God's grace. "The child promised by God contrary to all hope and all human expectation is truly a child of grace." (Ibid;pg.52)

The fulfillment of God's promise - to raise up a great people from Abraham - is not found in Israel's cultural greatness, or military greatness, or economic greatness. Wherein is found Israel's greatness? Israel's true greatness is found in the fact that Israel was the nation to whom God spoke and by whom God speaks to the rest of the world. (Ibid;pg.51)

God's promises are found in a spiritual fulfillment to the man who patiently waits. No man must `force the hand of God'. Abraham, in his humanity, grew impatient, and had a son by Hagar. He was not the promised son. How like us - wishing to speed up God's timing!

Faith involves waiting, at times. Writes James to all believers: *"Be patient, then, brothers until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the fall and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."* (James 5:7,8)

Just as in the case of Israel, God will fulfill His promise to the man of faith, not always or primarily, in terms of cultural or economic blessings, but most wonderfully in terms of spiritual fruitfulness. *"He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."* (Ps.126:6)

To be used of God as a witness and proclaimer of salvation is the greatest blessing of all. *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good News!'"* (Romans 10:13-15, NIV)

To be given the `heathen' as converts is the greatest gift and blessing possible! *"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession."* (Psalms 2:8)

To be a holy people in the world, in the midst of an unholy generation, is the greatest possible blessing from heaven. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, not in the mere giving of physical descendants, by in the giving of an unnumbered company of spiritual descendants through the true heir of Abraham, Jesus Christ. *"These descendants, as numerous as the stars of the sky* (Genesis 15:5), are the multitude `which no man could number', referred to in the visions in Revelation Revelation 7:9)." (God's unfolding purposes;pg.52. Susanne De Dietrich)

#### V. THE BELIEVER'S SEVERE TEST - FIERY TRIAL (Genesis 22:2)

*"There is not a page in the whole Old Testament more poignant than the twenty-second chapter of Genesis: 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.'"* (Genesis 22:2). (God's unfolding purpose;pg.53)

This command to offer Isaac was the severest of all tests to faith. "What is involved here is the faithfulness of God, the hope of the believer, and even the salvation of the world." (Ibid;pg.53)

As the early church father Chrysostom said concerning this command of God, "Here God contradicts God, faith contradicts faith, the commandment contradicts the promise." (Ibid;pg.53)

But Abraham's sever test, successfully met, issued forth in Abraham's unspeakable joy. God stayed the hand that would have plunged the dagger into the heart of Iassc. God provided a substitute lamb for a sacrifice.

Do you remember the Biblical account? Abraham's faith had been tested and perfected, and therefore Abraham's troubled (yet obedient) heart was comforted. (Quote Gensis 22:12-18)

Abraham's would-be sacrifice of his only son is a foreshadow of God's literal sacrifice of his only Son. "The very thing that God asks of Abraham, as a test of his faith, is something God himself is willing to endure." (Ibid;pg.54)

Faith must be tested and perfected. As the faith of Abraham was tested, so the children of Abraham (spiritually speaking) will also be tested. (Quote I Peter 1:3-7)

Job's faith, you recall, was severely tested. He stood the test and was spiritually refined. Said Job, "*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.*" (Job 23:10)

Believers, at times, may be called to go through the furnace of affliction. "*I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*" (Isaiah 48:10b)

Do you remember the three Hebrew children who were thrown into the fiery furnace? They came out of that ordeal without even their garments having the smell of smoke upon them. Only God can take a person successfully through the furnace.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

(How Firm a Foundation)

God allows his saints to be afflicted, only in order to purge them of the dross and defilements of life. Remember, God never allows his children to shed 'needless tears'. During times of affliction and severe testing, keep your faith in a

faithful and loving God, just like Abraham did. Exhorts the apostle Peter, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trail which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" (I Peter 4:12)

Have you considered the ways of God, as they relate to the testing and perfecting of man's faith?

Several times in scripture, there is a God-given birth of a vision, followed by the death of that vision, only to be eventually followed by a supernatural fulfillment of the vision. Notice this pattern in scripture.

Take Abraham for instance. The birth of a vision is seen in God's promise to make of Abraham a great nation. The death of this vision is seen in Sarah's barrenness. The supernatural fulfillment of the vision is seen in Isaac's birth in Abraham's old age.

Take Joseph, as an example of this pattern. The birth of the vision is seen in Joseph's dream's of Leadership. The death of the vision is seen in Joseph being sold as a slave into Egypt. Supernatural fulfillment - Leadership in Egypt. Or take the nation of Israel. Her vision was national greatness. The death of that vision is seen in Israel's oppression by the world's nations. The supernatural fulfillment of Israel's vision is seen in the salvation of the world's peoples through Israel's greatest Jew - Jesus Christ.

Why the severe test of faith? Why the death of faith's vision? Because God will share His glory with no man. The vision of faith can only be fulfilled by the Giver of Faith - God Himself. "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit", saith the Lord of Hosts.

God produces character through death. Only when a grain of seed falls into the ground and dies, does it bring forth a mighty spiritual harvest. "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*" (I Peter 5:6)

Abraham humbled himself in being willing to offer his son of the alter. God honored his humble obedience and exalted him in due time - to become the great father of the faithful. All the people of the earth call him blessed.

God always rewards the faith which stands the test of the fire! Abraham remains throughout the ages the veritable type of the believer not only because he receives everything from the hand of God, but because he is ready at any time to give it back to God. In the life of Christians there are moments when we walk in darkness, and must give up our most beloved

ones, our most cherished hopes. We have to give God a blank check of faith and obedience. Then only can we understand something of the agony of 'our father in the faith.'" (The Witnessing Community;pg.39)

#### VI. FAITH'S INDESCRIBABLE REWARD - FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD (15:6)

James 2:23 refers to Genesis 15:6 when it says, "*And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness', and he was called God's friend.*"

The ultimate reward for faith is nothing less than heaven! Faith's immediate reward is to enjoy the friendship of God! A right relationship with God! "In a single verse, the Bible sums up what made Abraham important: '*He believed the Lord;and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.*' (Genesis 15:6).

It is because of his faith in God that Abraham becomes the archetype for true belief. '*And he was called the friend of God.*' The Bible tells us. (James 2:23). To believe means to trust the God who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to take him at his word. It means to obey his commandments and to be convinced that his promises are absolutely sure." (God's unfolding purposes;pg.57)

So it is with the man of faith today. Faith is not an option; it is an absolute necessity. "*And 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.*" (Hebrew 11:6)

He who exercises faith, pleases God. He who fights the good fight of faith is given a crown of righteousness. "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.*" (II Timmothy 2:7,8)

He who is faithful unto death is given a crown of life (Revelation 2:10 c). Great is the reward awaiting the faithful and loving saints of God.

"*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.*" (I Corinthians 2:9)

**CONCLUSION:** Abraham, the father of faith, teaches us "The Way of Faith."

We have noted the six sequential steps of faith:

- (1) God's First Word - A Command
- (2) God's Glorious Promises - Incalculable Blessings
- (3) Man's Required Response - Explicit Obedience
- (4) God's Timely Fulfillment - 'Spiritual' Blessings
- (5) Believer's Severe Test - Fiery Trials
- (6) Faith's Indescribable Reward - Friendship with God.

Oh, that we each might exercise faith and be called 'the friend of God'!

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - VENTURESOME FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. As a result of making a brief survey of the life of Abraham, how would you define 'faith'? Is it possible for a man to keep a great number of rules regarding right behavior and still not be a man of faith? Why or why not?
2. On what basis does God have a 'right' to command humans to do certain things or to go to certain places? (Note Romans 9:20-21)
3. In the case of Abraham, what do you think was the 'rationale' behind God's command to Abraham to leave his homeland?
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The measure of God's blessings far outweigh the price of man's sacrificial obedience!"
5. What three groups of people each claim Abraham as their 'spiritual father'?
6. What evidence can you cite to document the statement that Christianity is not command-oriented, but that it is basically promise - oriented?
7. Is it evidence of spiritual immaturity for a believer to be excited about earthly and spiritual and heavenly rewards?  
(Note [????]12:32; Mark 10:30) Is the last word of Christianity 'finding' or 'losing'? What is meant by the statement:  
"Man is always on the receiving end and God is always on the giving end"?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement! "It may not always be convenient to obey God, but it is always wise!" (Note Hebrews 11:8) Considering the cultural characteristics of the tribal system during the time of Abraham, explain why Abraham's obedience to God's command must have been especially difficult.
9. Spiritually speaking, what does it mean for a person today (like Abraham) to "leave the familiar and to venture into the unknown"?

10. Why can Isaac, the son of Abraham, be considered 'a child of grace'?
11. Wherein is found the greatness of Israel as a nation?
12. Because of the seeming 'slowness' of God in fulfilling His promises, is there a tendency for people to grow impatient (as in the case of Abraham) and then 'to force the hand of God' or 'to speed up God's timing'?
13. Is there evidence from the scripture that often times one important element in faith is waiting upon God? (Note James 5:7,8)
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement! "Just as in the case of Israel, God will fulfill His promise to the man of faith, not always or primarily, in terms of cultural or economic blessings, but most wonderfully in terms of spiritual fruitfulness."
15. How can God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham best be described and identified? (Genesis 15:5 and Revelation 7:9)
16. Why do you believe God required such an unusually severe test to be given to Abraham (Genesis 22:2)? What are some of the purposes of trials and tests which God allows or brings into the lives of His people? (Note I Peter 1:6-7; Job 23:10; I Peter 4:12)
17. In considering 'the ways of God' as they relate to the testing and the perfecting of a believer's faith, describe what is meant by 'the birth of a vision', 'the death of a vision', and 'the supernatural fulfillment of a vision'. Give examples of these three stages in the lives of Biblical characters.
18. What positive purposes can be accomplished when God allows a 'death' to faith's vision?
19. What does the sacrificial faith of Abraham teach the person who is earnestly seeking to serve God? Can you share from your own personal life (or from your observation of the life of a personal friend) what it means to give God 'a blank check of faith and obedience'?
20. What are the immediate and the ultimate rewards from exercising strong faith in the Living God? (James 2:23; Genesis 15:6; II Timothy 2:7,8)



**CHAPTER 4**

**FAITH**

**ABRAHAM - OBEDIENT FAITH**

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - OBEDIENT FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 11:8-10

INTRODUCTION: What does it mean to be a man of faith? The faith of a true believer expresses itself in various ways. There is the faith which ventures, the faith which waits, and the faith which anticipates.

PROPOSITION: A true faith is a three dimensional faith. There are times when faith ventures, times when faith waits patiently, and times when faith anticipates and hopes. Faith appropriately responds to each unique set of circumstances.

I. ADVENTURESOME FAITH (Faith That Ventures) - Verse 8

II. PATIENT FAITH (Faith That Waits) - Verse 9

III. ANTICIPATORY FAITH (Faith That Hopes) - Verse 10

CONCLUSION: What is a three dimensional faith? It is a faith that can venture courageously, a faith that can wait patiently, and a faith that can hope expectantly. We must have all three aspects of faith - the faith that can take bold steps ahead for God, the faith that can wait on its knees for God to act, and the faith that can inspire hope as the saint awaits his final reward. Pray for a three dimensional faith - a faith that can venture, a faith that can wait, and a faith that can hope.

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - OBEDIENT FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:8-10

**INTRODUCTION:** What does it mean to be a man of faith? The faith of a true believer expresses itself in various ways. There is the faith which ventures, the faith which waits, and the faith which anticipates.

**PROPOSITION:** A true faith is a three dimensional faith. There are times when faith ventures, times when faith waits patiently, and times when faith anticipates and hopes. Faith appropriately responds to each unique set of circumstances.

#### I. ADVENTURESOME FAITH (Faith That Ventures) - Verse 8

*"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Hebrews 11:8)*

Abraham's faith enabled him to take bold and aggressive steps forward. "If faith can see every step of the way, it is not faith." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 163)

"In any local church, there are three kinds of leaders - risk-takers, caretakers, and undertakers. The risk-taker is not merely a gambler. He carefully assesses a situation, seeing the new possibilities within it. In a wholesome way, he is visionary. His risks are calculated, and he derives blessing from helping his followers to see and share the risks - for Christ's sake. The risks may have to do with new ministries, new approaches to evangelism, the planting of new churches, outreach into new communities, new ways of experiencing Christian fellowship, or new ways to make worship more meaningful to God's people. You'll see all these concerns reflected in the vibrant church of New Testament times."

"The caretaker-type leader is more interested in maintenance. He thinks in terms of leaving things no worse than he found them. He is the faithful sort but cautious and unvisionary. Caretaker leaders are not nearly so stimulating to be around as risk-takers."

"The problem so far as the church is concerned is that caretaker leaders too often pave the way for the undertaker. He, too, is a kind of leader, presiding with dignity over the affairs of death. Local churches too long on a

caretaker regime will eventually be ready for the ministrations of the undertaker." (Donald Bastian; Adventures In Church Membership; page 203)

Faith is willing to venture for the Lord, not in some foolhardy way but in a wise and trusting and courageous way.

Abraham was willing to venture to an unknown land because God told him to leave the familiar and secure environment to go to an unknown land.

Faith will sometimes call us to leave the familiar and the secure environment to go into unknown lands (if not literal 'lands', then new areas of endeavor for the Lord).

(Illustration: God called me to leave the secure environment of my church office to go out into homes to hold Home Bible Studies; I went 'door to door' when I first became pastor; my wife had to give me a little push out the door to get me into new homes; God has blessed with the salvation of hundreds of people in their homes through the years; I challenge all to venture for the Lord - to do what God wants you to, even though it may mean venturing out into unfamiliar territory or into new areas of service for the Lord, like teaching a Sunday School class, or witnessing, or tithing, etc.)

Are you willing to take risks for God? Do you have the adventuresome spirit? Are you willing to leave the familiar and the secure environment to go into a new and different country for the Lord or into a new ministry for the Lord? Are you willing for God to tap your unknown resources and potential and gifts and abilities? Are you willing to obey God even though you don't know the specifics and the details of God's will for your life? Abraham committed himself to obey the Lord before he had the knowledge of God's will specifically. (Obedience comes before knowledge in Christianity, even though our society teaches that we are to get knowledge first and then decide whether or not we want to obey. The latter method does not work. God demands obedience to Him first, and then God will impart knowledge. A man commits himself to a woman in marriage before the knowledge of her is fully revealed to him. Commitment leads to knowledge. There is great faith involved in a man taking a woman as his wife for a lifetime, with little knowledge of the woman herself or of the future happenings with her).

## II. PATIENT FAITH (Faith That Waits) - Verse 9

*"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a*

*strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.*" (Hebrews 11:9)

"To Abraham God's promise never came fully true; and yet he never abandoned his faith." (Barclay's Hebrew; page 163)

There is the faith that ventures and there is also the faith that waits patiently.

"We must see that in the abundant life of Christ's indwelling fullness, through the Holy Spirit, there are two ranges of power. One is related to the ACTIVE side of the Christian's - or, if we may think collectively - of the Church's life. Here we achieve, venture, preach, sing, organize, administer. The other is related to the PASSIVE side of life. Here we submit, endure, suffer, wait. The history of Christian sanctify shows, I think, that not infrequently the critical test comes to us in this passive area of our experience. Here it is crucially revealed whether or not we are appropriating the full measure of strength offered us by our mighty Lord. Power to DO and to DARE? Wonderful! To BE and to BEAR? Perhaps even more wonderful!" (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 70; Rees)

It takes great faith to wait upon God, especially when, while waiting, nothing spectacular seems to be happening.

"To wait is even harder than to adventure. The hardest time of all is the time in between. At the moment of decision there is the excitement and the thrill; at the moment of achievement there is the glow and glory of satisfaction; but in the in-between time there is necessary the ability to plod and to wait and to work and to watch when nothing seems to be happening. It is then that we are so liable to give up our hopes and lower our ideals and sink into an apathy whose dreams are dead. The man of faith is the man whose hope is flaming bright, whose effort is intensely strenuous even in the grey days when there is nothing to do but to wait." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 163, 164)

If we need the faith that enables us courageously to venture and to dare for the Lord, we also need the faith that enables us patiently to wait upon the Lord for Him to work in His own time and in His own way.

We are often told in Scriptures that we are not to lose heart. *"Don't grow weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye do not faint."* (Galatians 6:9)  
*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (I

Corinthians 15:58)

Life can be 'so daily' and so routine. We must realize that God is working at all times. Sometimes in the Christian life there seems to be fast and obvious progress. At other times in the Christian life there seems to be slow and halting progress. But the man of faith will always hold steady - in times of plenty and in times of poverty, in times of success and in times of failures, in times of aggressive venturing and in times of passive waiting, in times of routine and in times of crisis, in times of praise and in times of persecution.

Wrote Paul, *"I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

Faith adjusts itself to the situation - sometimes venturing and sometimes waiting quietly upon the Lord.

A mother in the home with small children must daily exercise the faith that is able to wait. When a woman invests so much of herself in her children, she must wait sometimes for years to see the results of her investment - in the lives of dedicated children who take their mature place in the world, serving unselfishly in turn as their mother did before them. Faith, as in the case of Abraham, may mean that one will not even live long enough to see all of God's promises fulfilled. I repeat: "To Abraham, God's promise never came fully true; and yet he never abandoned his faith." Think of the mother who prays in great faith for the salvation of her family. She may wait for years for their salvation and she may not even live long enough to see the salvation of all of them.

When we see great and quick results from our faith, we should rejoice exceedingly, giving God all the glory for victory, but when we do not see quick or obvious results from our faith but instead have to wait patiently for answered prayer, we also should rejoice that God is working faithfully while we are waiting patiently upon Him. Obey God while you are waiting and allow God to work - either quickly or slowly.

### III. ANTICIPATORY FAITH (Faith That Hopes) - Verse 10

*"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11:10)

Abraham was able to keep going in life because he had his

eyes fixed on a goal. He had his eyes on the heavenly Jerusalem. All of earth's struggles were worthwhile because Abraham knew that God would someday grant him entry into the *"city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11:10) "The vision of the goal made him able to face the difficulties and discouragements of the way." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 164)

The vision of heaven's future rewards makes the present toils of life endurable. If we suffer for Christ now, we shall reign with Him then. The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall follow hereafter.

(`It Will Be Worth It All')

"Life's trials will seem so small,  
When we see Jesus.  
So bravely run the race  
`Till we see Christ."

(`When We've Gone The Last Mile')

"When we've gone the last mile of the way,  
We will Rest at the close of the day,  
And I know there are joys that await me,  
When we've gone the last mile of the way."

(When We All Get To Heaven)

"While we walk the pilgrim pathway,  
Clouds will overspread the sky;  
But when trav'ling days are over,  
Not a shadow, not a sigh.

"Let us then be true and faithful,  
Trusting, serving ev'ry day;  
Just one glimpse of Him in glory  
Will the toils of life repay.

Onward to the prize before us!  
Soon His beauty we'll behold;  
Soon the pearly gates will open,  
We shall tread the streets of gold.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him."

When one loses sight of his goals, he loses hope, and when one loses hope, he loses purpose for living. Despair sets in and one flags in zeal and eventually abandons all his

labors. Only as one keeps his visions clear and his goals concrete, can he meet the toils and troubles of life with fortitude and courage. The vision of heaven must be clear if the labors on earth are to be endured with courage.

Jesus said, *"Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* (John 14:1-3)

Why was Abraham able to endure the hardships of his life and labors on earth while he long awaited the fulfillment of God's promises to him? Because *"he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10) Why are believers today able patiently to labor decade after decade for the Lord and to endure hardship as soldiers of the cross? Because they look to Jesus who, as the author and finisher of their faith, has promised to give them mansions in the sky by and by! *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* (Luke 12:32)

Wrote Paul, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."* (II Timothy 4:7,8). Why was Paul able to fight the good fight and to keep the faith? Because he never lost sight of his coming day of reward when God would crown him with the crown of righteousness in heaven! Paul could endure so much and labor so faithfully and wait so patiently because he kept his eye on heaven's rewards. To the degree that one's anticipation of heaven is great, to that same degree can one patiently wait. When one knows that the business of heaven is unalloyed joy, he can endure the pain and struggles of earth.

Heaven will be a place of indescribable beauty, a place of unalloyed joys, restful labors, creative pursuits, unblocked fellowship, total knowledge, intimate companionship, complete understanding, unlimited growth, and much more!!

Just as Abraham was able to persevere in faith because *"he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10), so believers today are able to persevere in faith because they see *"the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven."* (Revelations 21:2)

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"*  
(Revelations 21:1-5)

A goal-oriented life is a life that can endure much during the routine of daily living. One can wait patiently now if he knows he will be crowned then! It is when one loses the vision of the future crown that the sufferings of the present become unbearable. John the Baptist could wait patiently and suffer courageously while he was in prison, as long as he could be reassured that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah whose promises of future glory were all true!

As long as one can keep his vision intact he can keep his life intact. One's vision of the innumerable company of saints who will someday be gathered around the throne of God, enables one to keep his faith during life's pilgrimage which sometimes involves walking alone on the dusty roads of life. The saint on earth can patiently bear the changes and the chances of life, if he knows that he is headed for a glorious destiny where change and decay will be no more and where the changeless Christ will forever dwell with him!

When we get to heaven, faith will give way to sight. We shall know Him face to face, beholding His glorious beauty forever! Earth's experiences will then be seen as a preface to a book, a prelude to a song, a porch to a house, and a journey to a destination. In heaven the vision will become the reality, the aspiration will become the fulfillment, the shadow will become the substance, the sunset will become the sunrise!

**CONCLUSION:** What is a three dimensional faith? It is a faith that can venture courageously, a faith that can wait patiently, and a faith that can hope expectantly.

We must have all three aspects of faith - the faith that can take bold steps ahead for God, the faith that can wait on its knees for God to act, and the faith that can inspire hope as the saint awaits his final reward.

Pray for a three dimensional faith - a faith that can  
venture, a faith that can wait, and a faith that can hope.

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - OBEDIENT FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Share your understanding of the difference between bold and aggressive steps of faith and presumptuous actions which are motivated by selfish ambition.
2. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "If faith can see every step of the way, it is not faith."
3. Define and describe the following three types of leaders in a local church: risk-takers, caretakers, undertakers.
4. Share experiences from your own life (or from the lives of personal friends) when God has called you (like as in the case of Abraham) to leave your familiar and secure environment to go into 'unknown' areas of ministries (or localities) for the Lord.
5. What are some of the factors that keep people from making 'faith ventures' for the Lord? Do some 'believers' expect God to reveal His specific will to them before they decide to make a commitment to follow God into 'unknown territory'? From a study of the life of Abraham, is it accurate to conclude that Abraham committed himself to obey the Lord before he had the knowledge of God's will specifically? Do you agree with the following statement: Obedience comes before knowledge in Christianity, even though our society teaches that we are to get knowledge first and there decide whether or not we want to obey?"
6. In order for the integrity of God's character to be maintained, is it necessary for God always to fulfill His promises to His people on this earth? Why or why not? Were all of God's promises to Abraham fulfilled during the lifetime of Abraham? Does it take more faith to trust God, in spite of the lack of fulfillment of God's promises, than it does to trust God because of His promises being fulfilled during one's 'earthly pilgrimage'?
7. Explain and describe the Active and the Passive sides of Christianity, as these dimensions of the Christian life relate to the life of Faith. Which dimension of the Christian life requires a greater exercise of faith? Why?

8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It takes great faith to wait upon God, especially when, while waiting, nothing spectacular seems to be happening." What is meant by the "in between" times of life?"
9. Why is it so important for the person of faith to 'hold steady' during the changes and the chances of life? (Note Galatians 6:9 and I Corinthians 15:58 and Philipians 4:11-13)
10. Do you agree with the following statement: "When we see great and quick results from our faith, we should rejoice exceedingly, giving God all the glory for victory, but when we do not see quick or obvious results from our faith but instead have to wait patiently for answered prayer, we also should rejoice that God is working faithfully while we are waiting patiently upon Him".
11. In light of the fact that God's promises to Abraham never came fully true, what kept Abraham from abandoning his faith and what kept Abraham's hope alive? (Note Hebrews 11:10) How does keeping a clear vision of one's spiritual goal help one to face life's difficulties and discouragements? (Note John 14:1-3; Luke 12:32; II Timothy 4:7,8)
12. According to your limited understanding of the Bible's teaching regarding 'Heaven' how would you describe the life and the conditions of 'Heaven'? (Note Revelation 21:1-5)
13. Do you agree with the following statement: "It is when one loses the vision of the future crown that the sufferings of the present become unbearable."
14. Give your comments on the following statements regarding heaven:
 

When we get to heaven, faith will give way to sight. We shall know Him face to face, beholding His glorious beauty forever! Earth's experiences will then be seen as a preface to a book, a prelude to a song, a porch to a house, and a journey to a destination. In heaven the vision will become the reality, the aspiration will become the fulfillment, the shadow will become the substance, the sunset will become the sunrise!
15. What are the characteristics of 'a three dimensional faith'?

CHAPTER 5

FAITH

ABRAHAM - SACRIFICIAL FAITH

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - SACRIFICIAL FAITH

#### OUTLINE:

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:17-19

**INTRODUCTION:** Notes Clarence Macartney, "Abraham is revered by more people of different faiths and race than any other man in the Bible. The Jews venerate him as the Father of the Faithful; the Moslems venerate him as their ancestor through his son Ishmael; and the Christians venerate him as the Friend of God and the type of redeeming faith in Christ, for Christ said that Abraham rejoiced to see his day."

**PROPOSITION:** From a study of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we may state with conviction that a supreme test from God which is met with a supreme trust in God will result in a supreme triumph for God.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. THE COMMAND THAT DEFIES REASON (Genesis 22:1-2) - Supreme Test
- II. THE AGONY THAT DESCRIBES OBEDIENCE (Genesis 22:3-8) - Supreme Trust
- III. THE RESCUE THAT DEFINES VICTORY (Genesis 22:9-19) - Supreme Triumph
  - A. Human Obedience (v.9-10)
  - B. Divine Rescue (v.11-18)
    - (1) God's Pleasure (Genesis 22:12) - Here is praise for a test successfully passed.
    - (2) God's Provision (Genesis 22:13-14) - Here is provision of a sacrifice lovingly given.
    - (3) God's Promise (Genesis 22:15-18) - Here is promise of future blessings confidently reiterated.
  - C. Human Enjoyment
    - Benefits of Obedience in Isaac's Life.
    - (1) Obedience allowed Isaac to see God's miracle of salvation of his life at the last moment.
    - (2) Obedience allowed Isaac to enjoy God's favor resting upon him as the promised child of Abraham.
    - (3) Obedience allowed Isaac to be in submission to his father during the test, and to be in closer fellowship than ever with his father following the test.

- (4) Obedience allowed Isaac to be more strongly convinced that he was the promised son through whom all future generations would be blessed.

- Benefits of Obedience in Abraham's Life

- (1) Obedience allowed Abraham to observe the miracle of God's intervention.
- (2) Obedience allowed Abraham to confirm his faith in God's ability to provide in the hour of greatest need.
- (3) Obedience allowed Abraham to enjoy the comfort of God's intimate presence and God's wonderful saving power.
- (4) Obedience allowed Abraham to enjoy, as never before, the companionship of his son whom he grew to love more deeply, following the test.
- (5) Obedience allowed Abraham the privilege of receiving God's reiterated blessings regarding future generations.

**CONCLUSION:** The rewards for obedience today are many: (1) seeing God's miraculous interventions in our lives; (2) enjoying God's nearer presence and His favor resting upon us; (3) experiencing deeper fellowship with fellow believers; (4) receiving assurance that our future generations will be blessed.

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - SACRIFICIAL FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:17-19

**INTRODUCTION:** Notes Clarence Macartney in his book. 'The Greatest Men of the Bible', "The spring or fountain from which a river flows is more important than any other part of the river. Abraham is the fountain whence flows the stream of faith in God. The great work of faith and redemption, God's plan for the ages, commenced with Abraham, when God called him out of Ur of Chaldee and made him the father of the faithful and the founder of the Hebrew race. He told Abraham that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed. That prophecy, to a degree, has been fulfilled today, for all mankind have been blessed by the revelation of God given to Israel and the fulfillment of that revelation in Jesus Christ. Abraham is revered by more people of different faiths and race than any other man in the Bible. The Jews venerate him as the Father of the Faithful; the Moslems venerate him as their ancestor through his son Ishmael; and the Christians venerate him as the Friend of God and the type of redeeming faith in Christ, for Christ said that Abraham rejoiced to see his day." (pg. 85,86)

The story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is doubtless the most popular and the most important episode from the life of Abraham. The story is recorded in Genesis 22:1-19 which we will look at in some detail.

From this episode in Abraham's life, we learn three broad truths: (1) The Command that Defies Reason (Genesis 22:1-2); (2) The Agony that Describes Obedience (Genesis 22:3-8); (3) The Rescue that Defines Victory (Genesis 22:9-19).

**PROPOSITION:** From a study of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we may state with conviction that a supreme test from God which is met with a supreme trust in God will result in a supreme triumph for God.

#### I. THE COMMAND THAT DEFIES REASON (Genesis 22:1-2) - Supreme Test

Notes Barclay, "Abraham is the pattern of the man who accepts what he cannot understand. To Abraham there had come this completely incomprehensible demand. It did not make sense. The promise was that in Isaac his seed would grow and grow until he became a mighty nation in which all nations would be blessed. On the life of Isaac depended the promise; and now God seemed to demand that life to take it away. As Chrysostom put it: 'The things of God seemed to fight against the things

of God, and faith fought with faith, and the commandment fought with the promise. Into life for everyone at some time there comes something for which there seems to be no reason, something which passes comprehension and something which defies explanation. It is then that a man is faced with life's hardest battle - the battle to accept when he cannot understand. At such a time there is only one thing to do - to submit, to accept, to obey; and to do so without resentment and without rebellion, saying: 'God, Thou art love! I build my faith on that.'" (Barclay's Hebrews; pg. 172,173)

## II. THE AGONY THAT DESCRIBES OBEDIENCE (Genesis 2:3-8) - Supreme Trust

God's ways are not our ways; therefore, there may be times when God asks us to do something which at the time seems difficult or even unreasonable.

It is certain that God will command us to give up our sons and daughters to Jesus Christ. It may seem hard to do this. Our tendency, as parents, is to hold on to our sons and daughters, to be possessive of them, or to squeeze them into our own molds. There must come a time when we truly dedicate them to the Lord, even if this means that, in giving them to the Lord, we give them up to die for the Lord on the mission field.

As in the case of Abraham, it can be a very emotional experience to sacrifice our children for the Lord. Abraham was successful as a father for he did not allow his personal emotions of agony, due to God's command to sacrifice his son, to stand in his way of actually obeying the Lord's command.

The supreme test of fatherhood is to act in obedience to God when our emotions direct us to act in disobedience to God. To be a good father means to obey the voice of conscience instead of the clamor of one's own emotions, when the latter challenges the former. If Abraham would have obeyed his emotions instead of his conscience, he would have disobeyed God.

There are times when fathers must lay their sons and daughters on the altar of God and surrender them to the service of God. The way of surrender may not always be easy, but it is always right, and even though the way of surrender and sacrifice may seem to be the way of defeat, it is always and ultimately the way of victory!

Surrendering your children to God will always lead ultimately to joy and victory, but initially the way of surrender may bring emotional sorrow and may even defy reason.

Thousands and thousands of fathers and mothers have climbed the steep and lonely path of Moriah to offer their sons and daughters to the Lord. Some have given up their children by sending them off to a Christian college, far away from home, when emotionally those parents would have rather had their children stay home to take over the family business or ranch or farm. Those children never returned to the home place but instead married and are now serving the Lord far away from their home. Other parents have sacrificed their sons and daughters on the altar of missionary service, and as a result see their children only once every four or five years when they are on missionary furlough. A few fathers and mothers have made the supreme sacrifice and have literally given up their children to die on the mission field.

Other parents have given up their children to die in the service of their country, as in World War II.

Have you, as a father or a mother, truly dedicated your children to the Lord? Have you placed them on the altar of sacrifice? Have you taken your hands off of them and placed them into the hands of God?

This is not to say that we, as parents, are not responsible for them or that we are not to act as God's hands of guidance to them, or as God's voice of instruction to them, or as God's representative of love to them. We are to provide guidance, instruction, discipline, and love to them. But we, as parents, are never to be possessive of them. We are instead to recognize that we do not own our children; they are loaned by God to us for a few years. They belong to God. We must allow God to lead them into His service. We must not stand in the way of God's leadership in their lives.

Even though our emotional ties to our children are rightly strong and intense, we must never allow our emotions to rule our responses toward our children. We must obey the voice of God rather than the emotions of our heart, even when to obey God's voice (as in the case of Abraham) seems to defy our reason and to crush our emotions. To obey God as it relates to our children may be costly.

As in the case of Abraham, it is hardest of all to obey when your mind is confused and your hopes are dashed and your emotions are crushed. It is hard to obey, when to obey seems to mean that your total future is forfeited! Obedience to God can bring tears to the eyes, but obedience to God cannot take faith from the soul. For obedience, even though it can defy the reason and even though it can bring agony to the emotions, is the very thing that brings life to the soul. As Abraham was on his way up the mountain to sacrifice his son, his mind was confused and his heart was heavy, but his spirit was alive

to faith, for he was able to answer his son when he asked Abraham where was the sacrifice, 'The Lord will provide.' Amidst the agony of sorrow there was the ecstasy of trusting God for the provision of a sacrifice. In the darkest night of sorrow, often the brightest words of faith are spoken: 'God will provide.'

When your mind is confused and when your heart is broken, your spirit can still declare with conviction: "The Lord will provide." These are words of faith which express belief in the unseen provisions of God. When all doors are closed to man, there is always a door open to God! When all human options are exhausted, there is always a divine option available! "The Lord will provide" - in His own unique time and way!

The story of Abraham teaches us the importance of demonstrating supreme trust in God during the hour of a supreme test. Abraham was tested severely - he was commanded to sacrifice his promised son, the very son from whom all future generations would descend. But in the midst of his supreme test, when his mind was confused and his heart was crushed, he exercised supreme trust in the living God: "The Lord will provide." These are words of total trust that the unseen God will give victory in the face of defeat and will bring meaning out of a confusing, incomprehensible set of circumstances! Faith is the way of victory. A supreme test which is endured with supreme trust will lead to supreme triumph! To obey a divine command which seems unreasonable may bring agony to the soul now but obedience ultimately will bring total victory.

"The story (of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) teaches us that we must be ready to sacrifice that which is dearest to us for the sake of loyalty to God." (Barclay's Hebrews; pg. 171)

We have already spoken of the Christian parent's responsibility of laying his children on God's altar of consecration. Every Christian parent must surrender his children to God, even if this means giving up his children literally to die on some foreign field of service.

The story of Abraham teaches us that we must die to our own desires and obey God even if at times this obedience brings confusion to the mind and tears to the heart! Obedience ultimately leads to indescribable joy, but obedience to God's commands may initially involve great sacrifice which brings agony to the soul!

Notes Paul Rees, "I have long been charmed and, I may add, chastened by the life-story of Henry Martyn.

With his brilliant student career at Cambridge behind him, there came the call of his Lord to the mission field. Though several attractive, lucrative vocations were open to him, he said: "Here I am, Lord: send me to the ends of the earth; send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness; send me from all that is called comfort in earth; send me even to death itself if it but be in Thy service and in Thy kingdom."

When he fell deeply in love with a girl named Lydia, he told her of his call from God to live and minister in India. Was this agreeable to her? He pleaded that it might be. It was not. If he would stay in England, he could have her as his bride. If he went to India, it would be without her. Hence the question, like a drum-beat in his brain: "India or Lydia? Lydia or India?..."

But Martyn was a master man-mastered by love and love's Master. Therefore the mastery was his in a crisis of poignant choice. Pain-drenched yet triumphant was his witness: "My dear Lydia and my duty call me different ways."

Yet God hath not forsaken me....I am born for God only. Christ is nearer to me than father or mother or sister."

Obedience to God's call resulted in great agony of soul to Henry Martyn, but because of his supreme trust in God during this supreme test of obedience, Henry Martyn could also testify to supreme triumph in God: "I am born for God only. Christ is nearer to me than father or mother or sister."

Sacrificing the dearest thing to you may involve agony, as it did in the case of Abraham, but during the supreme test and sacrifice you may say (as Abraham said) "God will provide".

Henry Martyn had to sacrifice getting married to follow Christ, but God provided for Henry Martyn.

Sacrifice for some might involve surrendering one's money to God (Note Matthew 17:21).

For others, sacrifice might involve surrendering ease, prestige, and luxury to follow Christ. Think of Albert Schweitzer, whose call from God took him to the jungles of Africa as a missionary for a lifetime. Schweitzer had several earned doctorate degrees - in theology, in music, in medicine - and yet he chose to surrender ease and wealth in America and accept challenge, hard work, inconveniences, and heartache to minister to the poor and the diseased in Africa. But a supreme trust that matches a supreme test results in a supreme triumph in life. Albert Schweitzer's sacrificial life will

always be highly revered in the hearts of millions! He who sacrifices greatly is honored greatly!

### III. THE RESCUE THAT DEFINES VICTORY (Genesis 22:9-19) - Supreme Triumph

A supreme test from God that is met with a supreme trust in God results in a supreme triumph for man! Abraham experienced the greatest test of his life when he was commanded by God to sacrifice his promised son on an altar. But, because he obeyed explicitly and trusted totally ("the Lord will provide"), Abraham ultimately enjoyed the greatest triumph of his life. Obedience in an hour of severe trial brought to Abraham God's pleasure (v.12), God's provision (v.13,14), and God's promise (v.15-18). In considering Abraham's supreme triumph, we must look at three things: Human obedience, Divine rescue, and Human enjoyment.

#### A. Human Obedience (v.9-10)

Genesis 22:9-10 describes Abraham's obedience. No greater demonstration of human obedience to a divine command can be found in Holy Scripture! No greater confusion of mind or agony of heart has been experienced by any man than that which Abraham experienced on that dreadful day when he raised the knife preparing himself to kill his long-awaited-for and divinely-promised son. Neither doubt that assailed his mind nor sorrow that filled his heart nor fear that plagued his soul could keep Abraham from binding his son on the altar and from raising his knife high into the air! Nothing other than the angel's voice could stop Abraham's hand from descending to slaughter his son and presenting him as a sacrifice to the God of Heaven. Abraham's love for his son was great, but his love for his God was greater yet. And love for one's Master always means obedience to one's Master. Love for God is not mere sentimentality; love is obedient action, even if that obedient action means sacrificing the dearest thing on earth to one's God!

And so it is today. Love for God means obedience to God, even if that obedience seems to defy the reason and crush the heart. Obedience is an act of the will, with or without the understanding of the mind or the joy of the heart. Reason and emotions must both bow before the dictates of the will. In positively exercising his will in obedience to his God, Abraham was also submitting the reasons of his mind and the emotions of his heart to the dictates of his will, in order to fulfill the hard commands of his God!

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye keep my commandments." This is Jesus' word to every disciple today!

Wrote John, "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him', but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him." (I John 2:3-5) Obedience to God's commands not only demonstrates the genuineness of love, but obedience also perfects one's love for God. It was so in Abraham's case, and it is also true in our case!

We must now look at the rewards for obedience.

B. Divine Rescue (v.11-18)

(1) God's Pleasure (Genesis 22:12) - (Here is praise for a test successfully passed)

There can be no greater reward for obedience than the 'smile of God's approval' resting upon the obedient one. To know that God backs your actions is to know that you are living in harmony with the universe. 'If God is for us, who can be against us?'

(2) God's Provision (v.13,14) - (Here is provision of a sacrifice lovingly given)

What Abraham declared by faith - 'The Lord will provide' - the Lord fulfilled miraculously - just in the 'nick of time'. A moment later, Isaac would have been dead!

In our greatest hour of trial, when all seems hopeless, the Lord will miraculously provide! God rescued Isaac from the hand of death through the provision of a substitutionary sacrifice in the form of a ram caught by its horns in a thicket.

God provides for sinful mankind, but God's provision for sin was made possible, not through the last minute rescue of His Son from the cross, but through the agonizing death of His Son on the cross. 'By His stripes we are healed' from the deadly disease of sin. Because Jesus died, we may live.

As believers who are seeking to obey God, we can be assured that God will provide safety, security, and eternal salvation to us. Divine rescue in some

form is always the gift of God to believing, obeying Christians. Divine rescue means, most of the time (but not all the time), rescue from physical harm. But, if God chooses not to rescue us from the jaws of physical death, He has promised always to rescue us from the jaws of eternal death and to save us for His eternal kingdom (Hebrews 11:35-38). God will provide for all the needs of the obedient Christian - both in life and in death, both in the routine of everyday living and at the altar of severe testing on the top of Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:14).

(3) God's Promise (v.15-18) - (Here is promise of future blessings confidently reiterated)

"Abraham had stood the terrible test. To all intents and purposes, he had offered up his only son on the altar. God knew that Abraham feared him and believed in him, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.' That was the end of Abraham's probation. He had been tried and not found wanting. Now God repeated the blessing. It was no longer a hypothetical blessing, but one which was assured. The faith of Abraham guaranteed the blessing. God said to him, 'Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore;...and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice.' Think of that! All humanity, to the remotest age, forever blessed because there on the mount one man obeyed God!" (The Greatest Men of the Bible; Macartney;pg.94,95)

When we obey the Lord during the tests of life, we bring God's pleasure upon us, God's provisions to us, and God's promises through us to future generations. Abraham did not see the fulfillment of all God's promises to him personally, but all future generations since his time have reaped the benefits of his obedience to God.

It is an exciting thought to realize that your obedience to God not only brings God's present favor upon you and God's present provisions to you, but that your obedience to God also brings future blessings upon your future generations! Your obedience and godly life now will have their definite positive benefits upon future generations

- even to the fourth and fifth and sixth generations.

### C. Human Enjoyment

In considering Abraham's supreme test, we have looked at Human Obedience and Divine Rescue (Genesis 22:9-18). In looking at this story, it is easy to note the results of obedience, in both the lives of Abraham and Isaac, in terms of Human Enjoyment!

Sweet is the fruit of obedience! We can note at least four or five similar benefits in the life of Abraham and in the life of Isaac, because both were obedient to the commandment of God. Abraham's obedience is expressed in terms of the active initiator, and Isaac's obedience is expressed in terms of the passive cooperator.

#### Benefits of Obedience in Isaac's Life

1. Obedience allowed Isaac to see God's miracle of salvation of his life at the last moment.
2. Obedience allowed Isaac to enjoy God's favor resting upon him as the promised child of Abraham.
3. Obedience allowed Isaac to be in submission to his father during the test, and to be in closer fellowship than ever with his father following the test.
4. Obedience allowed Isaac to be more strongly convinced that he was indeed the promised son through whom all future generations would be blessed.

#### Benefits of Obedience In Abraham's Life

1. Obedience allowed Abraham to observe the miracle of God's intervention.
2. Obedience allowed Abraham to confirm his faith in God's ability to provide in the hour of greatest need.
3. Obedience allowed Abraham to enjoy the comfort of God's intimate presence and God's wonderful saving power.
4. Obedience allowed Abraham to enjoy, as never before, the companionship of his son whom he grew to love more deeply, following the test.
5. Obedience allowed Abraham the privilege of receiving God's reiterated blessings regarding future generations.

The rewards for obedience today are many and multiple and wonderful. We can be sure that obedience will bring

great blessings to us, as obedience brought to Abraham and Isaac - blessings like (1) seeing God's miraculous interventions in our lives; (2) enjoying God's nearer presence and His favor resting upon us; (3) experiencing deeper fellowship with fellow believers; (4) receiving assurance that our future generations will be blessed.

**CONCLUSION:** In looking at the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we have seen three main things: (1) The Command that Defies Reason (v.1-2), (2) The Agony that Describes Obedience (v.3-8), (3) The Rescue that Defines Victory (v.9-19).

There may be times in our lives when God gives us a Birth of a vision, only to bring a Death to that same vision, in order eventually to give a Resurrection to that vision. When God delivered a death to the very vision which God had given birth to, this act of God seemed totally contradictory, but Abraham continued to believe in God nevertheless. The 'Nevertheless' of faith is the key to understanding Abraham's faith. Even though God's command ('sacrifice Isaac') fought against God's promise ('in Isaac shall all the nations be blessed'), Abraham was convinced that God would miraculously solve this dilemma. "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the death." (Hebrews 11:19) The God who gives birth to a vision and who brings death to the same vision, is the God who gives resurrection to the vision.

God's command which defied Abraham's reason seemed to contradict God's divine promises. The agony which describes Abraham's obedience seemed to crush Abraham's human feelings. But, praise be to God, the divine rescue that defines human victory, seemed to perfect Abraham's love immeasurably!

God always has a purpose for what He does and, even though God's purposes may at times defy human reason and devastate human emotions, the man of faith must obey explicitly if he is to enjoy the blessings of God fully.

The supreme test which is met with supreme trust results in supreme triumph!

## FAITH

### ABRAHAM - SACRIFICIAL FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why do you think that Abraham "is revered by more people of different faiths and race than any other man in the Bible" (Clarence Macartney)?
2. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "A supreme test from God which is met with a supreme trust in God will result in a supreme triumph for God". Can you share any personal experiences from your own life which validates the truth of this statement?
3. Considering Genesis 22:1-2, how would you describe a believer's hardest battle in life?
4. What should be the attitude and the response of a believer when things happen in life which defy reason, and/or when God requires a believer to face a trial or a test which he cannot understand?
5. From your own experiences or from your observation of the experiences of others, have you learned that (as in the case of Abraham) obedience to God sometimes requires making a hard decision that may be contrary to one's own rational understanding or contrary to one's own emotional desires?
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The way of surrender to God may not always be easy, but it is always right, and even though the way of surrender and sacrifice may seem to be the way of defeat, it is always and ultimately the way of victory!"
7. Share various ways in which modern-day parents can place their sons and daughters on 'the altar of sacrifice' to God. Is it still true to say (as in the case of Abraham's would-be sacrifice of Isaac on a literal altar) that to obey God, as it relates to our children, it may be very costly?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Obedience, even though it can defy the reason and even though it can bring agony to the emotions, is the very thing that brings life to the soul."

9. In what way was Abraham's reply to Isaac's question, regarding the whereabouts of the animal sacrifice, an answer of strong faith?
10. During a time of severe testing, when a man of faith declares "The Lord will provide," what, in reality, is he declaring regarding life's obstacles and regarding God's power?
11. Is it true to say that the person of faith must always be ready to sacrifice that which is dearest to him for the sake of loyalty to God? What specifically must a believer be ready to sacrifice to God because of his love for God?
12. Do you agree with the following description of Obedience: "Obedience is an act of the will, with or without the understanding of the mind or the joy of the heart"? Have you ever had a time in your life when your reason and your emotions both had to bow before the dictates of your will, based upon your determination to obey a hard command of God?
13. What is the relationship between 'Obedience' and 'love', as these relate to each other during a time of severe testing? (I John 2:3-5)
14. In what ways did God richly reward Abraham for his explicit obedience to God's hard command? (Genesis 22:12-18)
15. With the illustration of Abraham's would-be sacrifice of Isaac in mind, what can you say is the basis of God's rescue of lost mankind?
16. Does God's rescue of believers always include physical protection? Why or why not? (Note Hebrews 11:35-38). Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God will provide for all the needs of the obedient Christian - both in life and in death, both in the routine of everyday living and at the altar of severe testing on the top of Mount Moriah."
17. From your knowledge of Biblical characters and from your personal life experiences, illustrate the truth of the following statement: "When we obey the Lord during the tests of life, we bring God's pleasure upon us, God's provisions to us, and God's promises through us to future generations."

18. List several benefits which Abraham and Isaac each received, as a result of their successful response to God's most challenging test to them. List some of the benefits that present day believers will experience as a result of careful obedience to God's explicit instructions.

**CHAPTER 6**

**FAITH**

**LOT - SHALLOW FAITH**

## FAITH

### LOT - SHALLOW FAITH

#### OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:1-13; 19:15-38

TEXT: "Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom."

INTRODUCTION: Lot was a believer, but he was a shallow believer. He can be characterized as a worldly-minded believer, one who set his heart upon material wealth rather than upon spiritual growth, one who allowed himself to be overcome by covetousness and greed.

PROPOSITION: Lot is like too many professors of Christianity - worldly-minded and preoccupied with material pursuits rather than spiritual pursuits. Lot compromised with sin, and too many believers today are also flirting with sin. To flirt with sin is to court disaster, however.

#### OUTLINE:

##### I. LOT WAS TOO EASILY INFLUENCED BY MATERIALISTIC CONSIDERATIONS.

- A. Materialistic Pursuits Caused him to make selfish choices.
- B. Materialistic Pursuits Caused him to be insensitive to spiritual values.

##### II. LOT GRADUALLY COMPROMISED WITH SIN AND ULTIMATELY LOST EVERYTHING.

CONCLUSION: Lot forever teaches us the folly of being a worldly-minded believer. The perils of materialism are ever present. Stay close to the company of the godly. Don't compromise with sin. Don't pitch your tent toward Sodom!

## FAITH

### LOT - SHALLOW FAITH

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PROPOSITION: Lot is like too many professors of Christianity - worldly-minded and preoccupied with material pursuits rather than spiritual pursuits. Lot compromised with sin, and too many believers today are also flirting with sin. To flirt with sin is to court disaster, however.

Lot was a materialist. He was too easily influenced by materialistic considerations. Lot gradually compromised with sin and ultimately lost everything.

#### I. LOT WAS TOO EASILY INFLUENCED BY MATERIALISTIC CONSIDERATIONS.

##### A. Materialistic Pursuits Caused him to make selfish choices

Lot did not feel bad to put himself and his own materialistic interests first, before the interests of Abraham.

His love of money caused him to disregard others. Money can still put blinders on people's eyes, causing them to be oblivious to the needs and interests of others.

Life becomes cheap when one considers things more important than persons. Lot was selfish in his response to his godly uncle Abraham. He took what he thought was the best land, but eventually his selfishness landed him in Sodom and ultimately his selfishness caused him total loss of even his earthly possessions.

In contrast to Lot, the man who seeks first God and His Kingdom, is the man who will also have material things added to him. The man who seeks his own selfish advantage rather than the will of God and the good of others, will lose out spiritually and also lose out physically and materially. Selfishly, "Lot thought that he could manage his own affairs. He did not want God to interfere with his business transactions." (Moody's Bible Characters; page 79) Lot was

guided by secular and materialistic considerations. Lot wanted the best land and he wanted to prosper financially. Abraham was a spiritually-minded man. He honored God and obeyed God, and his faith was counted unto him for righteousness. Abraham was called the friend of God. Abraham lived not for the wealth of the earth, but he lived for "the city which hath the foundation, whose Builder and Maker is God." Abraham had a proper vision of reality; He lived not for the wealth of earth, but he set his heart upon heavenly treasures.

Lot might be described as a materialistic believer. He was strongly influenced by the profit motive. "And Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere....Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan."

What a self-centered, materialistically-motivated choice! "What a man chooses, and how a man chooses, when opportunities and alternatives and choices are put before him - nothing more surely discovers a man than that." (Bible Characters; Whyte; page 84)

How easy for believers to succumb to a worldly profit motive rather than live by the service motive! Notes Barclay, "The essence of the world's standard is that it sets self in the center; the essence of the Christian standard is that it sets Christ and others in the center. The essence of the worldly man is, as someone has said, that 'he knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.' The world's motive is the profit motive; the Christian's dynamic is the desire to serve." (Barclay's Ephesians; page 115)

The secularist is involved in a bitter battle of competition and cares not if he tramples on another in his vicious pursuit for riches and honor. Money is a prestige symbol and many will bury their honor in the dust to get another dollar. Says Mavis, "Secularism has a strong appeal to practical-minded people, such as Americans, because secular values are utilitarian. We have been conditioned to appreciate gadgets more than ideas." (The Psychology of Christian Experience; page 112)

Mavis further notes, "Modern man has a clear vision for secular goals, but dull vision for spiritual goals. It seems that some evil spirit, to use Kierkegaard's figure of speech, has put a pair of glasses on the nose of this generation. One of the lenses is a powerful magnifying glass; the other is an equally strong reducing glass. Our generation looks at the secular things through the strong lens and at the spiritual things through the reducing one." (Ibid; page 103)

In many ways, Lot was a secularist, even though he was a believer in God. Lot was taken in by the 'deceitfulness of riches.' Jesus warned against the possibility of present-day believers becoming enamored by money. In His parable of the four soils, Jesus says, "*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hearth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*" (Matthew 13:22)

What is secularism? W. Curry Mavis says, "Secularism means, most simply, a regard for the interests and affairs of this life to the neglect of matters pertaining to the future life. It represents the enthronement of personal interests and human sufficiency at the very center of life. Man takes a priority over God in the practical matters of life, and he maintains a nonchalant attitude toward Him....In secularism, 'temporal values are seen as ends in themselves', and men devote their lives to them." (Ibid; page 107,108)

In all fairness to Lot and in all fairness to the total Biblical interpretation of Lot, we must say that Lot was NOT a thorough-going secularist. He may have to be described as a worldly-minded believer, but nevertheless he was a believer. He may have compromised with sin, by moving to Sodom, but Lot nevertheless maintained an aversion toward the perversions of sinful men in Sodom.

In II Peter 2, we find a description of Lot that is interesting. In verses 7, 8 of this chapter, Lot is described as 'a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)." (Living Bible)

Notes Dr. Alexander Whyte, "To read (this II Peter portion) only makes us stop and say and ask, Why did a man with a beginning like Lot, and with past experiences like Lot, why did he not rise up and leave a life, and a neighborhood and an occupation, and a companionship out of all which so much danger and so much vexation of soul continually sprang? The reason was that he had invested in Sodom, as our merchants would say. He had invested money, and he had embarked himself and his household in the land round Sodom, in the produce of Sodom, and in her splendid profits. And all the vexations that wrung his heart Lot could never make up his mind to be done with Sodom and Gomorrah for ever." (page 86) "Lot therefore is the father of all those men whose righteous souls are vexed with the life they are leading, but who keep on enduring the vexation." (page 87)

Only the fire of God from heaven which destroyed Sodom was able to deliver Lot from his materialistic entanglements in Sodom!

Lot's life could have been so different if materialistic considerations had not overcome spiritual values in his life! "Had Lot just held on as he began; had he kept close to Abraham, and had he been content to share Abraham's life; he would have escaped many sorrows, and, instead of being scarcely saved; saved indeed, but saved with the fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorrah smoldering in his skirts; he would have gone down to a truly patriarchal grave, an elder of a good report and a father of a blameless name. All went well enough with Lot as long as he had the good sense, and the good feeling, and the good manners to know his proper place and to keep it." (Ibid; page 82)

B. Materialistic Pursuits Caused Him to be Insensitive to Spiritual Values.

Lot went to live in Sodom where possibly his business could be more profitable, but he was insensitive to worldly influences on his children in that wicked city. "You take your children to Sodom, and you will find it will not be long before they will want to stay there. It is easier to lead your children into temptation than it is to lead them out. What a mistake Lot had made! He had taken them away from the society of Sarah and Abraham, that holy family, living out on the plain in communion with heaven daily. He had taken them down to Sodom, and they were steeped in the sins of Sodom." (Bible Characters: Moody; page 84)

But, as the story unfolds and Sodom is to be destroyed, the angels tell Lot to warn his children. "But they mock him. Ah! poor Lot has lost his testimony and his own children do not believe him...I tell you, when men live so like the world that their own children have no confidence in their piety, they have sunk very low." (Ibid; page 85)

Because Lot put materialistic values ahead of spiritual values, Lot had to suffer the consequence of seeing his daughters marry evil Sodomites! "You go into the world and live like the world, and see what the result will be. How many fathers and mothers are now mourning on account of marrying their sons and daughters to Sodomites! Marrying them to death and ruin!" (Bible Characters of Famous Authors; page 99)

Lot nearly lost his own soul in Sodom! Jesus said, "*What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul?*"

Lot is a warning to all believers to avoid the folly of secularism. Lot grew fat on his wealth, but he refused to leave Sodom, and return to God. He was vexed in his spirit because of Sodom's sins, but not vexed enough to leave Sodom. His business interests had too strong a hold on Lot.

The greedy secularist who has grown fat on the accumulation of material goods, remains dissatisfied because of the leanness of his soul. To his bitter disappointment he learns that life does not consist in the abundance of things that a man possesseth. His riches have only given ulcers to his stomach and taken peace from his mind. His false friends stand by to mock him, and his sad delusion turns to suicidal despair. The crackle of the dollar and the glitter of the coin have lost their appeal, for he finally learns that everything does not have its price and there are qualities that have no monetary value. Sliding down the slope of life on the bed of perpetual pain caused from his indulgent living, the disillusioned secularist realizes that he has been the subject of a cruel tyrant. The sweet wine of frivolous living has left a bitter taste in his mouth. His one-time admirers and lovers now scorn the 'wrinkled old man'. The swinging music of his youth remains as a strange echo in his mind to mock him as a fool. As Solomon of old, the materialistically-preoccupied secularist must learn that *"the lover of money shall not be satisfied with money, nor the lover of wealth with his gain; this, too, is futility. With the increase of goods there is an increase of those consuming them."* (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

In the light of the transitoriness of life, the money-inflamed is a fool. To become preoccupied in the accumulation of material possessions, is like a duck who has become so fat on grain that it is unable to soar into the skies as it was meant to soar. Man was meant to soar into the realm of spiritual living which leads to eternal life, but many, just as the fatten duck, are living indulgent, earth-centered lives. Some have never known the joys of soaring the heights of spiritual ecstasy, and such will never know the joys and peace of eternal life unless they repent of their indulgent, Christless lives. How foolish is the man who toils for the almighty dollar. Why? Because material riches are limited only to this material world. The rich man cannot take his riches with him when he dies. *"As he came naked from his mother's womb so he shall return again as he came, and nothing shall he take for his labor that he may carry away in his hand."* (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

## II. LOT GRADUALLY COMPROMISED WITH SIN AND ULTIMATELY LOST EVERYTHING.

Lot's choice of the plain of Jordan was most devastating to him and to his family. "Mark how Lot was swiftly swept into

the vortex; first he saw; then he chose; then he separated himself from Abraham; then he journeyed east; then he pitched his tent toward Sodom; then he dwelt there; then he became an alderman of the place, and sat in the gate. His daughters married two of the men of Sodom; and they probably ranked among the most genteel and influential families of the neighborhood. But his power of witness-bearing was gone." (Book by Meyer, 'Abraham' page 44)

Gradually, but surely, Lot was swept into the whirlpool of sin! Sad it is that many have yielded to the enticements of materialistic gain, only to find that, as a result, their families have fallen completely away from God. Lot took his life into his own hands and acted independently of God. Lot was selfish, pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent. Many there are who are following Lot's choice and example - who disregard moral standards and say that 'Business is business; and thus subject their family to a gross materialism. Money, pleasure, and prestige became the basis of Lot's choice. "It is told that a man came to Tertullian with his problem. He told Tertullian his problem and then he said, 'But after all I must live'. 'Must you?' said Tertullian.'" (Barclay's Corinthians; page 247)

Sin is dangerous. To compromise with sin can have devastating consequences. At first when one sins, he feels very bad. the more he repeats his sin, the more insensitive he becomes to sin. The less horrified one is in the presence of sin and sinful companions, the more one rationalizes with sin, and the more one feels comfortable in an evil atmosphere.

Remember, "Evil companions corrupt good manners." Sinful companions can have a great corrupting affect upon believers. As long as Lot was under the good influence of godly Abraham, Lot was safe. "His mistake was in leaving him" (Abraham). (D.L. Moody) The downfall of many one-time believers is leaving the godly company of the Church or of godly friends. How often I have seen young believers go back into sin because they left the godly company of the Church (Example: One man, with whom I had many Home Bible Studies and who regularly attended Church services with his family. He and his family did well while they regularly attended Church, but when they drifted away from the godly influence of the Church, he and his wife divorced and their children were emotionally injured.)

Jesus said that we are to be IN the world but not OF the world. We are not to absorb the worldly spirit. Notes John, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For

*everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and his pride in possessions - comes not from the Father but from the world." (I John 2:15,16: NIV)*

Says James, *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."* (James 4:4)

To flirt with sin and sinful practices is to court spiritual disaster! The Bible says, *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."* (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Lot was foolish for he "pitched his tent toward Sodom."

Lot was foolish because he did not discern the perils of evil influence.

It is frightening to behold the braggart spirit of some shallow believers who feel that they can play around with sin and yet not get hurt. Can a person play with a rattle snake and not get bitten? *"Can a man hold fire against his chest and not be burned? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet?"* (Proverbs 6:27,28; Living Bible)

Can a man 'pitch his tent toward Sodom' and not eventually enter Sodom? Can a man experiment with sin and not become dominated by sin?

For instance, can a believer experiment with social drinking and not lose his vibrant witness for Christ?

Can a believer maintain a vital witness for Christ and at the same time blow cigarette smoke in the face of the man he seeks to reach for Christ?

Can a believer listen to the same music which outright unbelievers listen to and expect to be uninfluenced by worldly values? I have heard this poor reasoning by some professing Christians: "I only listen to the beat. I don't even listen to the words of the song." Who can say what one's subconscious mind 'hears' and 'absorbs'? Who is to say that listening to and enjoying the beat of Satan-inspired songs, written by Satanic priests, is right for Christians? A former Satanist witch, Mr. John Todd, reports that KISS stands for Kings in Satanic Service, the name of the popular Rock Group. To listen to such music, to say the least, is to pitch your tent toward Sodom'.

Is not the viewing of sensual or violent T.V. shows the same as `pitching your tent toward Sodom'? Should Christians surrender their time and their attention to the godless actors of Hollywood who trample on the blood of Christ and who ridicule the sacred standards of the Bible and Church? Who wields the most influence in believers' lives - Christ, in whose presence many Christians spend five minutes daily in prayer, or Television in whose presence most Christians spend two or three hours daily.

Too many believers, like Lot, are `pitching their tents toward Sodom'!

Notes D.L. Moody, "Lot allowed the world to get the advantage; and that is where thousands of Christians are failing in the present day. They do not let the Lord choose for them in regard to temporal things, and they make great mistakes." (Bible Characters; 77)

The Proverbs gives us good advice: *"Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life....Watch your step. Stick to the path and be safe. Don't side-track; pull back your foot from danger."* (Proverbs 4:23,26,27)

Lot failed to guard his affections. He grew careless and covetous. He looked toward Sodom. He observed the well-watered plains. Eventually Lot's heart was in Sodom, for Sodom was an opportunity for financial gain. Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart also be. And where one's heart is, there will his body and presence also eventually be.

Lot's heart was in Sodom, and so eventually Lot moved his tent from the well-watered plains into the very city of Sodom.

How many sad cries are heard from backslidden Christians: "I didn't mean to go all the way. I meant to stop before I got to this point."

The young girl who plays around with sin, gradually sacrificing her standards, only to find that she has gone all the way and has lost her virginity! She pitched her tent toward Sodom' and found that eventually she was living in Sodom!

To flirt with sin is to court disaster. To compromise with sin is to become conquered by sin!

This principle, just mentioned, applies to young men as well. Says the Proverbs: *"Spurn the careless kiss of the*

*prostitute. Stay far from her. Look straight ahead; don't even turn your head to look.*" (Proverbs 4:24,25) Says Paul to young Timothy, "*Flee youthful lusts.*"

This is like saying: "Stay in the company of the godly. Stay with godly Abraham. Don't pitch your tent toward Sodom, even though the plains near Sodom are well-watered!"

"Guard your affections, for they influence everything else in your life."

Don't let the lure of money and the desire for profit and power and prestige draw you into sin's net! Stay with godly Abraham! Evil companions corrupt good manners! Remember, "If you can go around Temptation, don't expect God to take you through temptation!" Don't put yourself into the very trap of temptation! Avoid evil places, evil companions, and evil meditations! It's true, you can't help it if the birds fly above your head, but you can keep the birds from making nests in your hair! You cannot keep evil out of the world, but you can keep evil out of your life! You can't help being tempted, but you can keep yourself from yielding to temptation! You cannot help it if there are Sodoms in the world, but you don't have to pitch your tent toward Sodom! It is God's job to bring judgment upon the Sodoms; it is your job to stay out of Sodom!

The Bible says, "*The Lord God sanctify you.*" Yes, God separates you and makes you holy! This is God's work. But the Bible also says, "*You sanctify yourselves!*" As a believer, you have your own responsibility to separate yourself from evil, and make yourself holy and clean. God's work of sanctification cannot substitute for your work of sanctification. The Bible says, "*Save yourselves from this perverted generation.*" (Acts 2:40) "The Lord is our strength." Yes, this is true, but the Bible also says, "*Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, live like men, be strong!*" (I Corinthians 16:13; Phillips) God cannot make you strong without your cooperation.

The choice is yours as a believer. Paul says, "*We are not ignorant of the devices and tricks of Satan.*" Every believer is responsible to be aware of Satan's devices. One of his devices is the device of Compromise. If Satan can get the believer to 'pitch his tent toward Sodom', then Satan has a good chance of getting the modern-day Lots to eventually live in the city of Sodom. To live in Sodom is to experience total loss!

Lot lived in Sodom and Lot lost everything - his cattle (Possessions), his sons-in-law and his wife (family), his reputation, and everything else that he valued!

Sin pays terrible wages! The wages of sin is death! Lot was saved from Sodom's destruction by the 'skin of his teeth'.

It was Jude who wrote, *"And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."* (Jude 22,23)

The Bible talks about some believers whose souls will be saved but whose lives will be lost. That is, the shoddiness of these believers' lives will be such that they will not endure the flames of God's 'judgment of evaluation'. (Read I Corinthians 3:11-15)

Lot was like 'a man escaping through a wall of flames.' He verily escaped the judgment of Sodom!

**CONCLUSION:** Lot forever teaches us the folly of being a worldly-minded believer. The perils of materialism are ever present. Stay close to the company of the godly. Don't compromise with sin. Don't pitch your tent toward Sodom'.

## FAITH

### LOT - SHALLOW FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. From your own personal experience and observations, illustrate the truthfulness of the following statement: "Money can still put blinders on people's eyes, causing them to be oblivious to the needs and interests of others."
2. Even though a selfish action may seem to be a financially profitable action, what are some of the ultimate consequences of selfish actions and decisions (as illustrated in the life of Lot)?
3. Like Lot, are there still professing Christians who wish to be religious in some of their actions and who, at the same time, are profoundly secular in their business transactions?
4. In contrast to Lot, why is Abraham considered to be so godly in his reactions to Lot's request and in his general attitude toward earthly values?
5. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "What a man chooses, and how a man chooses, when opportunities and alternatives and choices are put before him - nothing more surely discovers a man than that."
6. Give your interpretation and illustrations of the following statement: "The worldly man knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."
7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "As practically-minded people, we American have been conditioned to appreciate gadgets more than ideas."
8. What is meant by "the deceitfulness of riches", and why is the latter such a great snare to modern-day American Christians? (Note Matthew 13:22 and I Timothy 6:10)
9. Describe and define 'Secularism', as this term relates to the importance of tangible things in comparison to spiritual values, and the importance of human sufficiency in comparison to divine intervention.

10. Briefly give a 'profile' of a spiritually-minded believer, a worldly-minded believer, and a totally-secular nonbeliever, in terms of how these persons value spiritual matters.
11. Why, in spite of all the vexations which Lot felt in his soul as he observed the gross behavior of people in Sodom, did he not move away from the city of Sodom? Why are some modern-day Christians hesitant to 'move away' from the association with non-Christians with whom they are in close business partnerships, in spite of the fact that these Christians are deeply distressed with the 'loose lifestyle' of their worldly partners?
12. If the judgment of God's 'fire from heaven' was the only thing that finally motivated Lot to leave Sodom, what do you think it will take to disentangle modern-day Christians from unholy 'business' alliances?
13. What benefits will accrue to the younger believer who maintains an intimate relationship with an older and more mature saint of God? What benefits would have been gained and what losses would have been avoided, if Lot would have stayed close, both geographically and spiritually, to Abraham?
14. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "You take your children to Sodom, and you will find it will not be long before they will want to stay there. It is easier to lead your children into temptation than it is to lead them out." What are various ways in which insensitive 'Christian' parents can lead their children into temptation? Suggestions: (a) Sending their children to a secular-oriented public school instead of to a Bible-centered Christian school; (b) Taking their children to 'questionable' places of entertainment, (c) allowing their children to watch 'worldly' television shows and videos, or to attend 'godless' movies at the neighborhood theater; (d) allowing their children to date non-Christians.
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "When men (like Lot) live so like the world that their own children have no confidence in their piety, they have sunk very low."
16. From your observation of the secularists around you, describe the disillusionment that eventually comes to the secularist whose materialistic pursuits fail to satisfy his spiritual and soul needs? (Note Ecclesiastes 5:10,15)

17. Considering the example of Lot, describe the gradual, and sometimes subtle, process of worldly compromise which many professing Christians have experienced, as they move away from godly associates to godless company. Are most professing Christians suddenly or gradually swept into the 'whirlpool of sin'?

18. Why is even one deliberate act of disobedience (sin) so very dangerous? Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Evil companions corrupt good manners." How does John (in I John 2:15,16) describe the 'love of the world'?

Is it possible to be, at one and the same time, a 'friend of the world' and a 'friend of God'? (Note James 4:4 and 2 Corinthians 6:17)

19. Can a man 'pitch his tent toward Sodom' and not eventually enter Sodom? Can a man experiment with sin and not become dominated by sin? (Note Proverbs 6:27,28) Give specific illustrations of experimentation with worldly practices, all of which can eventually lead to devastating spiritual consequences.

20. Why is the guarding of one's affections so important in the successful living of the Christian life? (Note Proverbs 4:23,26,27)

21. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements:

(a) "If you can go around Temptation, don't expect God to take you through Temptation."

(b) "It is God's job to bring judgment upon the Sodoms; it is your job to stay out of Sodom!"

22. What is God's responsibility and what is Man's responsibility as regards to the work of 'Sanctification' of the believer's life? (Note Acts 2:40; I Corinthians 16:13)

23. Considering I Corinthians 3:11-15, is it possible that the shoddy lives of some 'worldly believers' will be destroyed, even though the souls of such persons will be saved? Do you believe, as in the case of Lot, that there will be some believers who will verily escape the judgment of God, like 'a man escaping through a wall of flames'?

24. Would you characterize any of your present actions or attitudes as 'pitching your tent toward Sodom'?



**CHAPTER 7**

**FAITH**

**JACOB - TRANSFORMING FAITH**

## FAITH

### JACOB - TRANSFORMING FAITH

#### OUTLINE

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 32:28

**TEXT:** *"And God said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."* (Genesis 32:28)

**INTRODUCTION:** Jacob's conversion changed the life of a whole nation. Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. His conversion was so dramatic that his changed nature demanded a changed name!

**PROPOSITION:** Conversion, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, is the greatest theme of the Bible and is the most hopeful possibility of man. If man cannot have his nature changed, then there is no hope for a changed world. But God can change man's nature, just as he changed Jacob's nature. Let us look at this great example of God's own life and times.

#### **OUTLINE:**

- I. **COMPLACENCY AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS**
  - A. God as Second-Hand Experience
  - B. Materialism
  - C. Humanism and Secularism (Egoism)
- II. **CONSEQUENCES OF SIN**
- III. **HALF CONVERSION**
- IV. **CONVICTION**
- V. **CONVERSION**
- VI. **RECONCILIATION**

**CONCLUSION:** Are you like Jacob - you know about the God of your fathers or about the God of theology, but you don't know God personally in a warm living relationship? Is money more of an attraction to you than God? Is selfish interests and pursuits more real to you than service to God and man? Is the profit motive more important to you than the motive of love for man?

Don't run away from God like Jacob did. If you are wrestling with the angel of God and your conscience is battling with

you, then surrender to Christ. Let conviction lead you to conversion. Let Christ change you completely. Conversion is the most important message of the Bible. "Unless a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Let Christ convert you today. Confess your sins. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Invite Christ to take over the rule of your life!

## FAITH

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**INTRODUCTION:** Jacob's conversion changed the life of a whole nation. Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. His conversion was so dramatic that his changed nature demanded a changed name!

Let us look at this great example of God's converting power in the life of Jacob, and apply the truths to our own life and times

I. COMPLACENCY AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS (Jacob's Cunning Character)

A. God as Second-Hand Experience (Jacob the selfish exploiter (Genesis 25:29-34) and Jacob the selfish deceiver (Genesis 27:15-20))

Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, walked with God, but God in two generations' time had faded out. Too many people have second-hand experience of God. The glow of first-hand experience is no more. There is a remembrance of God rather than a personal relationship with God. Such people can talk about their grandmother's experience with God and some can even talk with pride concerning their grandfather who was a preacher. But God to them is not a vital living person with whom they can have fellowship. God is outmoded and irrelevant, and out of touch with the modern-day perplexities and problems.

"In order to test whether this `old-fashioned-concept was persisting in modern young people, a simple psychological test was applied to a mixed group of older adolescents. They were asked to answer, without reflection, the question: `Do you think God understands radar?' In nearly every case the reply was `No', followed of course by a laugh, as the conscious mind realized the absurdity of the answer. But, simple as this test was, it was quite enough to show that at the back of their minds these youngsters held an idea of God quite inadequate for modern days." (Your God Is Too Small; Phillips;pg.20)

B. Materialism. Other people, like Jacob, not only have a second-hand contact with God, but they are materialists whose preoccupation is with money and getting ahead in life. They know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Their god is their belly, and pleasure is the delight of their soul.

C. Humanism and Secularism. Jacob made himself God. He was the center of all, and the world revolved around him. He depended on his own trickery and deception to advance his own selfish interest. If Jacob had any morality at all, it was the morality of Expediency. Anything that served his interests was considered right, and anything that hindered his interests was considered wrong. As a humanist, Jacob believed greatly in himself.

Like Jacob, there are many humanists around who enthrone 'self', and who consider all things and people valuable only inasmuch as they are instruments of serving themselves. W. Curry Mavis clearly defines the meaning of secularism. "Secularism means, most simply, a regard for the interests and affairs of this life to the neglect of matters pertaining to the future life. It represents the enthronement of personal interests and human sufficiency at the very center of life. Man takes a priority over God in the practical matters of life, and he maintains a nonchalant attitude toward Him...In secularism, 'temporal values are seen as ends in themselves', an men devote their lives to them." (The Psychology of Christian Experience;pg.107,108)

## II. CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Genesis 27:41 says, "Esau hated Jacob". As one noted; "Jacob got his way - plus the hatred of his brother." (Jones;pg.72)

He who puts himself first will have no one to praise him but himself. Think of the fruit of sin (Galatians 5) - enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, dissension, party spirit, envy - all the results of self-centeredness. When a person seeks to be first, he will be the object of scorn and resentment.

Paul writes, "*If we are living now by the Holy Spirit's power, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Then we won't need to look for honors and popularity, which lead to jealousy and hard feelings.*" (Galatians 5:25-26, Living Bible) Jealousy and hard feelings - that was the result of Jacob's self-centered living.

Jacob lived for No. 1 - himself - and the result was his running from his murderous brother to a far-off land. Self-centeredness always alienates relationships.

Later when Jacob got to his destination, and had worked some time for his father-in-law, he began to scheme to get his father-in-law's property. His dishonest plans to get that property worked, but with the property, Jacob got much more - the ill-will of the father-in-law and the brothers-in-laws (Genesis 31:1-2).

The man who looks after only himself, will have much more to look after - namely, the ill-will and hatred of others. What a terrible consequence of self-centered living!

### III. HALF CONVERSION (Religion without conversion) (Form without substance) (Sympathy without surrender)

As Jacob was leaving home, and sleeping one night, Jacob dreamed he saw a ladder between heaven and earth. He awoke and vowed that "the eternal shall be my God, and this stone which I have erected as a pillar shall be God's dwelling, and I will give thee faithfully a tenth of all that thou givest me." (Genesis 28:21-22, Moffatt).

God wants the tenth, but God wants much more than the tenth. God wants you! God wants not only the symbol of self, but God wants the self. Have you given your very self to Christ? If not, then, like Jacob, your conversion is not complete! It is a half conversion.

Some try to appease their guilt by offering some guilt-offering to God - an offering of only part of the self-perhaps some service to the Church, some gift to charity, or some lip service to God. But, like Jacob, "you can never be blest or have peace and sweet rest until your all on the altar is laid."

### IV. CONVICTION

As Jacob was fleeing from his father-in-law, he was soon to meet his brother Esau whom he had not seen for many years. Jacob's sin was catching up with him. He had already felt the consequences of sin in alienation from family members, hatred from his brother, ill-will from his father-in-law, and now fear that he and his family would soon be destroyed by Esau who was a few miles away approaching him with an army of 400!

Jacob's reaction to this crisis is recorded in Genesis 32:11, and is the cry of the defenseless sinner, caught by his sin: "*O save me from the power of my brother, from Esau! I am afraid of him attacking me and over-powering me.*" (Genesis 32:11, Moffatt).

This cry registers the first sign of Conviction of sin. But even at this stage where Jacob is beginning to see the serious

consequences of sin, Jacob is praying to be saved from the consequences of sin rather than from sin itself.

There are people who are convicted because of the consequences of sin, rather than being convicted of the sin itself. When sin begins to take its toll, some people want to be delivered from the affects of sin rather than desiring deliverance form sin itself.

But the day before Jacob met Esau, Jacob was all alone to face his moral condition. "Like an animal trapped in a corner and the hounds closing in, he had no way out. Except one way - the divine Initiative. The Bible says, 'A man struggled with him till the break of day' (Genesis 32:24, Moffatt)...The struggle with the Divine Wrestler is a symbol of struggling with yourself and your conscience - the hour of conviction." (E.S. Jones; 75)

#### V. CONVERSION

Conviction is for the purpose of leading one to Conversion. Conversion is a radical change of one's nature, affected by the power of God. Conversion is always preceded by confession. It was so in Jacob's life.

When the angel asked Jacob "What is your name?", Jacob blurted out, 'It's Jacob - which means 'the crooked supplanter of others.'

When one hits rock bottom and confesses his true moral condition to God, then God moves tin to change the person. Confession simply means to "agree along with God" regarding one's moral condition. It is to agree with God that man is morally bankrupt and in need of Christ's riches and grace. It is to acknowledge one's own insufficiency and Christ's total sufficiency.

Confession involves great humility and self-denial and self-surrender to Christ. Confession is the result of complete honesty and oneself.

"If you have not reached that place, you will have to stop everything and say this one thing to God - your name. Perhaps you will say that your name is 'Ego - I do everything for myself.' 'It's Fear - I am filled with fear.' 'It's Resentment - I am filled with it.' 'It's Self-Pity - for I am a self-pitying self.' 'It's Negative - I'm always saying No, always running away.' 'It's Hypocrisy - for I'm not real; I` trying to be two people.' 'It's Conflict - for I'm a civil war.' It will be hard to get that name out - you will choke on it. But get it out, no matter the cost, for there is no new name until you say the old names. The saying of the old

name is confession - a catharsis." (Ibid;pg.76;Jones)

Confession is the outward evidence of inner faith - faith that God is able to give you a new name and a new nature. Jacob (The Supplanter) became Israel (The Prince with God). Conversion is a change of nature. Conversion makes a bad man good.

God took Jacob, deceiver of men, and made him into a prince of God. God is in the transforming business! *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* (II Corinthians 5:17)

God took a thieving Onesimus and changed him into an honest servant. God took a demon-possessed Mary of Magdalene and changed her into a love-possessed disciple. God took a shady tax-collector and changed him into a writer of one of the Gospels, named after himself - Matthew. God took a zealous persecutor of the Church - Saul - and changed him into a flaming evangel of the Gospel - Paul. God took an indifferent brother of Jesus - James - and turned him into a strong leader of the Early Church.

When God converts you, He changes your name from "Self-centered to God-centered; from Resentment to God Will; from Fear to Faith; from Gloom to Gladheart; from Defeated to Victorious; from Barren to Fruitful." (Ibid;76)

Come to Christ just now and confess your sins and, in faith, confess your total need of Christ as Savior. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (I John 1:9)

#### IV. RECONCILIATION

When Jacob was changed to Israel, his name and nature were not only changed, but his surroundings were also changed.

Genesis 33:12 (Moffatt) notes this evidence of reconciliation: *"Then said Esau, 'Let us travel together on our way; I will march in front.'* Comments E.S. Jones; "The man who came with blood in his eyes was now proposing that they travel together and he would be a body guard to Jacob! Conversion converts us and our surroundings!" (Ibid;pg.77)

*"The essence of the world's standard is that it sets self in the center; the essence of the Christian standard is that it sets Christ and others in the center."* (Ephesians 1:15) When others become the object of love and concern, reconciliation in relationships becomes inevitable. Conversion allows one to accept personal moral responsibility and motivates one to

pursue peace in relationships. The selfish profit motive is replaced with the unselfish motive to serve.

The truly converted man not only gains peace with God, but he gains favor with men. It is written of the young Jesus that "He grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man." Reconciliation is always the result of true Conversion. A new relationship with God always results in a new relationship with men.

### CONCLUSION

Are you like Jacob - you know about the God of your fathers or about the God of theology, but you don't know God personally in a warm living relationship? Is money more of an attraction to you than God? Is selfish interests and pursuits more real to you than service to God and man? Is the profit motive more important to you than the motive of love for man?

Don't run away from God like Jacob did. If you are wrestling with the angel of God and your conscience is battling with you, then surrender to Christ. Let conviction lead you to conversion. Let Christ change you completely. Conversion is the most important message of the Bible. "Unless a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Let Christ convert you today. Confess your sins. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Invite Christ to take over the rule of your life!

## FAITH

### JACOB - TRANSFORMING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Do you agree with the following statement: "Conversion, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, is the greatest theme of the Bible and is the most hopeful possibility of man"?
2. Why, for some young people, has 'God' become merely an outdated concept or, at best, a second-hand experience?
3. What characteristics best describe a person who has chosen to serve the 'god of materialism'?
4. As exemplified in the life of Jacob, prior to his spiritual transformation, how would you define the 'most of Expediency'?
5. How would you define and describe 'the secular lifestyle'?
6. What are some of the 'fruits' and 'consequences' of a self-centered lifestyle?
7. What actions of a would-be follower of God reveal that he is less than totally sincere and less than fully committed to God? What is meant by a 'half-conversion'?
8. When a sinner begins to realize the trustful consequences of his own wrong moral choices, what should be his appropriate response to God's conviction of his sins? What is the difference between a sinner asking God to deliver him from the consequences of his sins and asking God to forgive him for the sin itself? When God forgives the sinner for his sin, does God often or always deliver him from the consequences of his previous wrong choices? Why or why not?
9. In the hour of a sinner's conviction, who can be identified as 'the Divine Wrestler', and what is the purpose of the latter's activities in the life of the convicted person?
10. What is meant by the following statement: "Conviction is a necessary prelude to Conversion"?
11. What is the meaning of 'Confession', and why is confession an absolute condition for genuine conversion?

12. What is accomplished in the life of a person when God responds to the humble cry of the repentant sinner?
13. What evidence is there, from a study of the life of Jacob, that conversion results in changing not only the person himself but also his surroundings?
14. How strongly do you believe in the following statement: "The essence of the world's standard is that it sets self in the center; the essence of the Christian standard is that it sets Christ and others in the center"? (Philippians 2:3,4) How can one maintain an attitude of humility and, at the same time, cultivate a wholesome self-esteem?
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Reconciliation with one's fellowmen is always the result of a true conversion to God."



**CHAPTER 8**

**FAITH**

**JOSEPH - PROVIDENTIAL FAITH**

## FAITH

### JOSEPH - PROVIDENTIAL FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 45:6-8

INTRODUCTION: The story of Joseph has in it all of the elements of a great and moving story - ambition, youth, sorrow, loneliness, hatred, temptation, advancement, success, love, and forgiveness. Many are the lessons which can be drawn from Joseph's life: (!) Favoritism brings tragedy in a home; (2) Adversity produces character; (3) Forgiveness is the sign of true greatness; (4) God providentially uses circumstances for the good of the one who fears God.

PROPOSITION: We will see all of these lessons as we examine Joseph's life. We will look in some detail at the tests which Joseph underwent and how these in turn produced a noble and great character who was worthy to lead. Joseph's life can conveniently be divided into three divisions: (1) Joseph the Spoiled, (2) Joseph the Tested, (3) Joseph the Ruler.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. JOSEPH THE SPOILED
- II. JOSEPH THE TESTED
  - A. In Potipher's House
  - B. In Prison
  - C. In Pharaoh's Presence
- III. JOSEPH THE RULER
  - A. In Organization
  - B. In Sensitivity
  - C. In Wisdom
  - D. In Tenderness and Forgiveness
  - E. In Humility

CONCLUSION: What lessons can we draw from a study of Joseph's life? Perhaps above all else, Joseph's life gives us a great appreciation of God's providence. Joseph's tests resulted in Joseph's triumph. God providentially planned it that way. And Joseph's triumph was God's triumph, for God uses human instruments to carry out His plan.

"My times are in thy Hands,  
Whatever they may be,  
Pleasing or painful, sad or glad,  
As best may seem to Thee."

## FAITH

### JOSEPH - PROVIDENTIAL FAITH

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#### I. JOSEPH THE SPOILED

Says the record, *"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all the rest of his sons because he was to him a son of his old age; so he made him a long coat reaching to his feet."* (Genesis 37:3) Jacob was a dotting father. He treated Joseph with great favoritism. Jacob should have learned from his own divided, jealous-ridden home of his childhood that favoritism always leads to bitterness, jealousy, and hatred. *"And when (Joseph's) brothers saw that their father prized him more dearly than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak cordially to him."* (Genesis 37:4) Joseph's well-favored treatment, richly-talented endowment, and over-ornamented dress, made Joseph's brothers burn with envy and resentment. Joseph, the next to the youngest child, was treated as the sole heir of a fortune. His father 'bowed and scraped' to his every desire and whim. He lived a life of leisure and served as his father's inspector. Joseph was sent by his father to inspect the conduct of his brothers. "Joseph told their father of their misbehavior," (37:2) and no tattle-tell is popular. Besides, Joseph had the gumption to tell his father and brothers of his ridiculous and self-centered dreams. *"You see, we were binding sheaves in the field and think of it, my sheaf rose up and stood erect while your sheaves surrounded it and bowed deeply to my sheaf.... See here, I have had another dream. Take notice: The sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."* (Genesis 37:7,9) These dreams only added fuel to the fires of resentment.

Then the day of opportunity came - the day when the brothers would silence this conceited, talkative, self-righteous little brother who always kept a suspicious eye on them and reported their every move to their father. To each other they said, as they saw Joseph approaching in the distance, "*Look! This master of dreams is coming. Now, then, come on let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits and we will say, 'A wild beast has devoured him.' Then we shall see what becomes of his dreams.*" (Genesis 37:19,20) No longer would they have to put up with their braggart brother who spent his time sticking his nose into their business and preoccupied with a sense of his own importance.

However, among the hardened brothers there remained a trace of compassion in the heart of Reuben the oldest. "*Why not just put him in a pit. He will die soon enough without actually shedding his blood.*" Reuben intended to rescue Joseph later and return him to his father.

Fate seemed to be against Reuben to shatter his good intention, for when he returned to the pit later, Joseph was not to be found. Business-minded Judah seized the opportunity of the moment to gain a little cash from Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt and who would be glad to make a profit themselves by selling Joseph as a slave at the Egyptian market.

What were the thoughts of poor Joseph while in the pit and as he was taken as human property by the Midianite traders? Serious thoughts, to be sure. As he lay in the pit thinking of oncoming, apparent death, Joseph must have begun to die to his sense of self-importance. Perhaps he felt, mixed with his emotion of paralyzing fear, an emotion of guilt as he saw the reality of things as never before. This inflated and naive adolescent of only seventeen must have begun to realize the folly of his pride and flaunting spirit.

## II. JOSEPH THE TESTED

As Joseph was carried away into Egypt, loneliness must have seized him as memories of the past flooded his soul. No longer the loving protection of father, the nourishment of good food, the pleasures and pursuits of home. Instead, a living death which is worse than actual death. Freedom gone, no special attention and love, a disregard for personality - that is the way of slavery. Anxiety concerning an unknown future must have been very real to this boy, the first time away from home. Nevertheless, Joseph was determined to make the best of his future - be it slavery or whatever.

Joseph, who was one time rich, was now forced into a life of poverty. However, while Joseph was poor materially, he now is

richer spiritually than ever he was while at home. His poverty and aloneness is driving him to God.

#### A. In Potipher's House

Joseph was sold to Potipher, official of Pharaoh, and Joseph became so popular with Potipher that he became Potipher's household steward. The 'morals' in Egypt were terribly loose and therefore it was not long until Joseph was faced with a trial of great temptation. Joseph was now in his twenties and a very well built, handsome man. Potipher's wife sought to entice Joseph into committing immorality. Here was Joseph's opportunity. "None would ever know. Besides, think of the honor of being appealed to by the very wife of Potipher. After all, you are a red-blooded, normal young man. Surely there could be no wrong in gratifying your normal desires, just once." That is the voice of the tempter. If Joseph would have contemplated concerning the offer, these rationalizations could well have been adopted by Joseph. Instead, Joseph, who honored God and abhorred sin, immediately answered: "*How could I commit so great a crime and sin against God!*" (Genesis 39:9b) Joseph feared God and realized the seriousness of sin. "An old story tells how when Joseph began to talk about God to the temptress, she flung her skirt over the bust of the god that stood in the chamber and said, 'Now, God will not see!' But Joseph answered, 'My God sees!'" (Trials of Great Men of the Bible; page 47)

Joseph was running a great risk in turning down Potipher's wife. For it has been well said,

`Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,  
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.' (Ibid; page 46)

However, despite the cost of remaining pure, Joseph was willing to pay that price. And Joseph won, for the fear of God has rewards which this world knows nothing about. Of John Knox it was said, as his body was lowered into the grave, "Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of man."

#### B. In Prison

Joseph did have to pay a price for being pure. Potipher's wife framed Joseph and got him cast into prison. Young people still face the temptation to be impure. Those who refuse to bow to convention and to moral contamination are often times ridiculed and called an assortment of derogatory terms: square, freak, odd, old foggie, etc. Those who wish to remain pure may have to stand alone as Joseph did. Joseph went to prison for being pure!

The purity, trustworthiness, and nobility of Joseph's character were soon demonstrated to the prison warden, and Joseph was entrusted with the administration of all the prisoners. *"The Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness."* (Genesis 39:21a) *"The Lord gave (Joseph) success in everything he undertook."* (Genesis 39:23b) The Lord always honors those who honor Him, and who walk uprightly before Him.

Because of Joseph's faithfulness to God, he was enabled by God to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and the baker, who had been put in prison for misconduct. The interpretations were correct. The baker was hanged and the butler was released to work again for Pharaoh. Requested Joseph of the butler: *"When all is well with you, please keep me personally in mind, and show your gratitude by mentioning me to Pharaoh; get me out of this house; for I was actually kidnapped from the Hebrew country, and here, too, I have done nothing to deserve being put in the dungeon."* (Genesis 40:14,15)

*"However, the chief of the butlers did not keep Joseph in mind; he forgot him."* (Genesis 40:23) For two more years Joseph's character was purged in the fiery furnace of trying circumstances. He continued to be faithful in work, less and less selfish in motives, more sensitive to others in their needs. God was preparing His man for another day - a right and prosperous tomorrow. But only Joseph first underwent the trial of adversity would he be prepared to be God's men during prosperity.

There were doubtless times when Joseph had to fight against despair that sought to creep into his soul as he thought about the unfairness of his treatment. It is hard to trust God when one is going through adversities that seem to deny understanding. It is easy to ask 'Why' and to let bitterness harden the soul. Joseph trusted God while in prison. Let us trust God when life's circumstances seem to imprison us.

### C. In Pharaoh's Presence

When Pharaoh dreamed strange dreams and could find none to interpret them, the Pharaoh's butler suddenly remembered Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. In Pharaoh's dreams, seven lean cows devoured seven fat cows and seven heads of shriveled grain swallowed seven heads of full grain. Said Pharaoh, *"I have had a dream and none is interpreting it; but I have heard it said of you that you interpret a dream when you hear it told."* Joseph answered, *"Not by myself. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response."* (Genesis 41:15,16)

Joseph's faithfulness and loyalty to God that had seemed only to land him in jail, now paid off! Because God was with Joseph, Joseph retained the power to interpret dreams.

Faithfulness in small matters now led to an opportunity of a lifetime. Said our Lord, "Be thou faithful in little things, and I will make you ruler over many things." How true of Joseph!

From a prison to a throne, from a humble abode of dishonor to a place of great honor - that was the reward of Joseph. *"Then Pharaoh pulled his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger; he dressed him in fine, linen garments, put the gold chain around his neck and had him ride in his second chariot. Ahead of him they proclaimed, 'Bow the knee!' Pharaoh appointed him over all Egypt and said to Joseph, 'I remain the Pharaoh, but without acknowledging you not one person in all Egypt shall stir hand or foot.'* Pharaoh also gave Joseph the name Zaphenath Paneah and wedded him to Asenath, daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of On." (Genesis 41:42-45)

Joseph had gone through the tests of Potipher's house, prison, and Pharaoh's request. Now he was prepared to rule and to save thousands.

### III. JOSEPH THE RULER

#### A. In Organization

Joseph's leadership compares favorably with the leadership of any great man in history. Organization was one of the keys to his success. Organization was the result of vision, however. When one takes God's Word seriously, then organization becomes necessary and natural. God works out his plans through the hands of men, and God is not a God of confusion. Therefore, organization which brings about order is necessary to accomplish God's will. Joseph's foresight led to intelligent planning for the future which resulted in saving alive thousands of people. When the famine came, Joseph expanded Pharaoh's treasury many fold by selling grain to the population. When the people no longer had money to buy the grain, Joseph took their land in exchange for grain. When there was no more land to give in exchange for grain, the people sold themselves to Pharaoh in order to purchase grain to stay alive. As a young administrator, Joseph was a wise organizer. He saved thousands from starvation, and greatly increased Pharaoh's power, prestige, and riches.

#### B. In Sensitivity

Joseph was sensitive to the needs of people. The Joseph in Egypt was a different Joseph than the Joseph in Canaan. Not only in terms of his position and power, but, more important, in terms of his concern for others and sensitivity to their

feelings. No longer was Joseph the spoiled braggart of youth, but he was now the mature administrator of men's needs.

Joseph was sensitive to his family. He did not forget his background. Prosperity is the downfall of many. Prosperity causes many to be proud, hard, and selfish, forgetful of their former humble background, and forgetful of God. Because Joseph had not forgotten God, he could not forget his family. He longed to know about them and to care for their needs. "Joseph was an exile from home, but splendor dazzled him in vain. No; Joseph had never forgotten his father's house." (Trials of Great Men of The Bible, page 52)

#### C. In Wisdom

When Joseph's brothers came to him for food, he disguised himself in gruffness and severe treatment of his brothers. This response of Joseph was not motivated by revenge, but rather motivated by wisdom. Joseph wanted to test his brothers to determine if their characters had changed. Joseph loved his brothers so much that he could not immediately respond to their needs. True love called for a test of his brothers' true character, despite the agony that it caused them and Joseph's father. Simeon was retained by Joseph as a ransom while the other brothers returned to Jacob to plead with him to let Benjamin go back with them, as Joseph demanded. After much hesitation, Jacob was finally persuaded to let Benjamin go to Egypt, with Judah having special responsibility for his welfare. (On their return trip, the brothers were stopped by Joseph's Egyptian envoy and accused of stealing Joseph's cup. The brothers were horrified when the envoy discovered the cup in Benjamin's sack of grain, the cup being placed there as part of Joseph's scheme of testing. Returning to Joseph, Judah made a humble and urgent request, to mercifully take himself (Judah) as slave in place of Benjamin, Jacob's well-beloved and youngest son. Joseph's whole scheme of testing his brothers was for the purpose of determining the true quality of their character. Joseph now knew that his brothers had changed.

#### D. In Tenderness And Forgiveness

Joseph's heart was not made hardened by prosperity, but he remained tender and compassionate. When Joseph heard his brothers confessing among themselves their guilt and former mistreatment of Joseph, the brothers *"had no idea Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. He (Joseph) withdrew a moment and wept."* (Genesis 42:23,24a) When the brothers later returned with Benjamin, Joseph asked his brothers: *"Is this your youngest brother of whom you told me?"* And Joseph then said, *"God be gracious to you, my son!"* The account then says, *"Then Joseph hurried away, for he was*

deeply moved over his brother; so he stepped into a room and wept. Then he washed his face, came out and mastered his emotions." (Genesis 43:29b-31)

After Judah's intercession to Joseph to have mercy upon them, following the discovery of the cup in Benjamin's sack, "Joseph was not able any longer to control his emotions before all the bystanders; he shouted, 'Have everyone withdraw!' So there were no others present when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. So loudly did he weep that the Egyptians and Pharaoh's household heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' His brothers were so confounded, they could not answer him. Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please, come close to me'; so they came nearer. He said, 'I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt; be not disheartened or vexed with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to save your life.'" (Genesis 45:1-5)

Joseph was not weeping with mere sentimentality over memories of the past, but he was weeping in love for his brothers. The tears Joseph wept were tears of forgiveness. Joseph held no grudges and sought no revenge. Joseph forgave his loved ones, a difficult but noble thing to do. Joseph did not minimize their wrong - 'you planned evil against me' - but he forgave their wrong.

#### E. In Humility

After Jacob and the brothers and their relatives had lived some time in Egypt, Jacob died. The brothers were very fearful that now, since Jacob had died, Joseph would reap vengeance upon them. Joseph, however, reassured them that he had forgiven them. "Joseph said to them, 'Have no fear; for am I in God's place? True enough you planned evil against me, but God planned it for good, to bring about what today is fact, the keeping alive of much people. So, have no fear; I will take care of you and of your little ones' Thus he put them at ease as he spoke to their hearts." (Genesis 50:19-21)

In this statement is expressed Joseph's confidence in God's providence. Joseph, humbled and contrite before God, acknowledged that he was merely an instrument which God was using to work out his purposes. God had used man's evil plots to accomplish His purposes! Clarence E. McCartney describes well the providence of God in Joseph's life: "When he left his father's home at Hebron, Jacob told Joseph to visit his brothers in Shechem; but when he got to Shechem he could not find them. A man who found him wandering in the fields told him that they had left some time before and that he heard them saying they were going to Dothan. If they had remained in Shechem, or had gone to some other section, all would have

been different. But they went to Dothan, which lay on the caravan route to Egypt. Reuben, the oldest of the brothers, and apparently the most tenderhearted, tried to save the life of Joseph. 'Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit,' he urged, giving his brothers the impression that they could get rid of him that way without actually shedding blood. But his plan was, when the chance came, to save the life of Joseph. When they had cast him into the pit, the hardhearted brothers sat down to eat as if nothing had happened, and Reuben went off to attend to some business with his flock. But while he was absent, the caravan of the Ishmaelites drove in sight, and at the suggestion of Judah Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites. The caravan was hardly out of sight before Reuben returned, only to find that Joseph was gone. If Reuben had come back a half-hour sooner than he did, or if the caravan had come a half-hour later, or if it had been bound northward instead of southward toward Egypt, then Joseph would not have been carried down into Egypt, and the whole history would have been different. If in Egypt he had been sold as a slave to some one other than Potipher, an officer of Pharaoh's household, or had been tempted by some woman other than Potipher's wife, his whole history would have been different. Again, if he had been cast into prison a month earlier or a month later, he would not have met that chief butler, whose dream he interpreted and who finally spoke for him to Pharaoh, and might have stayed in the prison for the rest of his life. When Joseph looked back upon that whole wonderful history, he said to his brothers, 'It was not you that sent me hither, but God.'" (Trials Of Great Men Of The Bible; page 44,45)

All things did work together for good. Joseph found the best through the worst. Joseph thought there could be no worse punishment than slavery. It was a living death. However, that slavery became God's mold to shape character. Man's extremity (Joseph's slavery and imprisonment) became God's opportunity (to perfect character and prepare Joseph for his future mission). Thus, in many ways, Joseph's Day of Slavery became Joseph's Day of Freedom. Why? For several reasons: (1) Joseph was made to look at himself more realistically without his dotting father around, (2) Joseph was made to depend on God as never before, (3) Joseph was made to face tests which perfected his character and prepared him for his real life's mission. Truly, "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform."

#### **CONCLUSION:**

What lesson can we draw from a study of Joseph's life? Perhaps above all else, Joseph's life gives us a great appreciation of God's providence. Joseph's tests resulted in Joseph's triumph. God providentially planned it that way.

And Joseph's triumph was God's triumph, for God uses human instruments to carry out His plan.

"My times are in Thy Hands,  
Whatever they may be,  
Pleasing or painful, sad or glad,  
As best may seem to Thee."

## FAITH

### JOSEPH - PROVIDENTIAL FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why can one conclude, from a careful study of Jacob's life, that it was inexcusable for Jacob to treat Joseph with great favoritism, as evidenced by Jacob's gift to Joseph of a many-colored coat?
2. What attitudes and actions, on the part of Joseph, incited envy in the lives of Joseph's older brothers? Can Joseph's older brothers be held entirely responsible for their envious and bitter feelings towards Joseph? Why or why not? (Note Galatians 5:25-26)
3. At what point in Joseph's life do you believe Joseph experienced (from a Christian viewpoint) a 'genuine conversion'?
4. How do you believe God used Joseph's mistreatment by his brothers to produce a more godly character in the person of young Joseph? Is humility and brokenness of spirit an indispensable quality in the life of a person whom God is able greatly to use in His service? (Note Proverbs 22:4; 29:23; Isaiah 57:15; Micah 6:18; James 4:10; I Peter 5:5)
5. What feeling do you think Joseph experienced as he was mistreated by his brothers (Genesis 37:12-25), and when he was sold to the Midianite merchants (Genesis 37:26-28), and when he was sold as a slave in Egypt to Potipher (Genesis 37:36)?
6. Have you known of people who, like Joseph, turned to God with greater determination during times of poverty, suffering, and loneliness?
7. What severe test did Joseph face while he served as steward in the household of Potipher, and what do you believe are the reasons why Joseph so successfully 'passed' this test? In a sensual society, what motivations can young people today depend on to enable them to resist the temptations to immorality? Can young people, committed to morality and chastity, expect to suffer (like Joseph) for their commitments to purity?
8. What 'rewards' can one, committed to moral purity, expect to enjoy?

9. Is the 'fear of the Lord' a great motivation for a believer to remain morally pure? Why or why not? (Read the following Scriptures in 'The Living Bible' - Proverbs 4:23-5:23; 6:24-7:27; II Timothy 2:22)
10. In spite of the 'high price' that Joseph had to pay because he was morally pure (Genesis 39:6-20), how did God reward Joseph during his unjust punishment? (Note Genesis 39:21-23).
11. What purposes do you believe God had 'in mind' when He allowed Joseph to suffer in the Egyptian prison?
12. What temptations do you believe Joseph had to undergo, while he was in the Egyptian prison, suffering unjustly? When a modern-day believer suffers because of his commitment to God, what should he remember in order to motivate him to remain faithful? (Note I Peter 4:12-19)
13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Only as Joseph first underwent the trial of adversity (in prison) would he be prepared to be God's special servant during prosperity (as ruler of Egypt)."
14. How does Jesus' statement "Be thou faithful in little things, and I will make you ruler over many things," apply to the life of Joseph? (Note Genesis 41:42-45)
15. Why can it be said that "organization is necessary to accomplish God's will"?
16. As ruler of Egypt, how did Joseph show his true greatness, in terms of 'sensitivity' to others? What is meant by the statement: "Prosperity is the downfall of many"?
17. When Joseph's brothers came to him for food, why did Joseph disguise himself in gruffness and why did he treat his brothers so severely? How does Jesus' statement "Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16), apply to Joseph's treatment of his brothers?
18. What lessons in forgiveness can one learn, as a result of studying the reactions of Joseph to his brothers (Genesis 42:23,24, 29-31; 45:1-5; 50:19-21)?
19. Can it be said that God pre-determined (or foreordained) the earlier hostile reactions of Joseph's brothers towards Joseph, or is it better to conclude that, even though God did not 'determine' the complex and 'evil' events, he wonderfully used those events to accomplish great good?

20. If there is such a thing as 'coincidence', how would you distinguish between 'coincidental circumstances' and 'divine providence'?
21. Can you share from your personal experiences, times when you felt that God providentially guided your life? How do you interpret the following phrase: "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform"? (Note Genesis 45:4-8; 50:19-21)
22. Share from your personal life an event or an experience that illustrates the truth of the following scripture - "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans" (Romans 8:28).
23. What is meant by the statement: "The believer's extremity is God's opportunity"? Why can it be said that "Joseph's Day of Slavery became Joseph's Day of Freedom"?
24. If God is able, because of His sovereign power, to make even "the wrath of men to praise Him", then is not God able to use every part of your life (including your past mistakes, failure, and sins) to accomplish ultimate good for you and total glory for God?
25. Does the following 'prayer' express the desire of your heart?

"My times are in Thy Hands,  
Whatever they may be,  
Pleasing or painful, sad or glad,  
As best may seem to Thee."

**CHAPTER 9**

**FAITH**

**MOSES - PERSEVERING FAITH**

## FAITH

### MOSES - PERSEVERING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:23-29

INTRODUCTION: From the birth to the death of Moses, Moses' life is seen as a series of dramatic episodes.

PROPOSITION: The faith of Moses is the same kind of faith that we need today - a faith that adapts itself to every changing situation of life.

I. DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation (Verse 23)

II. LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty To God) - No Compromise (Verse 24)

III. SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People Of God) - No Abandonment (Verses 25-26)

IV. BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises Of God) - No Distrust (Verses 27-28)

V. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon The Power Of God) - No Cowardice (Verse 29)

CONCLUSION: Look again at the five-act drama of faith as seen in the life of Moses:

No intimidation, but instead courage to take risks for God!

No compromise, but instead steadfastness to maintain loyalty to God!

No abandonment, but instead identification with the people of God!

No distrust, but instead confidence to believe in the promises of God!

No cowardice, but instead courage to depend upon the power of God!

Faith meets the challenge of every situation of life! Be, like Moses, a man of Faith.

## FAITH

### MOSES - PERSEVERING FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:23-29

**INTRODUCTION:** Moses was a child of providence. To understand this, one must recognize the background of the Hebrews who had resided in Egypt for almost 400 years at the time of Moses' birth. Jacob's descendants grew and a nation of people resulted. Fear that the Israelites would overcome the Egyptians, caused the Pharaoh to take drastic steps to eliminate the Israelite children. A decree went out that all Hebrew boy babies were to be thrown into the Nile River. Such was the decree when Moses was born. But the God of providence arranged circumstances such that the Nile became, not the destruction of Israel, but the saving of Israel! How? Through a baby's cry - the cry of the baby Moses which touched and wooed the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, who was probably childless and desirous to have a boy baby.

From the birth to the death of Moses, Moses' life is seen as a series of dramatic episodes. Of course, much of Moses' life was lived rather routinely, especially as we view Moses herding sheep for 40 years during his middle life, following his early life in Egypt and before his dramatic leadership of the Israelites across the desert for 40 years. But even though Moses knew the every-dayness of living routinely, he also experienced many dramatic episodes in his life. The writer to the Hebrews, in writing about Moses (Hebrews 11:23-29), describes at least five main dramas of faith in Moses' life.

In looking at the life of Moses, we can see that faith meets the challenge of every changing circumstances of life. We may look at Moses' life as a "Five-Act Drama of Faith". Moses' faith was a 'tough' faith - a 'persevering faith'!

**PROPOSITION:** The faith of Moses is the same kind of faith that we need today - a faith that adapts itself to every changing situation of life.

There is a daring faith (verse 23), a loyal faith (verse 24), a suffering faith (verses 25,26), a believing faith (verses 27,28), a courageous faith (verse 29).

Let's look at the five-act drama of faith, as exemplified in the life of Moses.

I. DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation  
(verse 23)

*"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (Hebrews 11:23)*

Here is a picture of daring faith on the part of Moses' parents. They feared and respected Almighty God more than they feared the Egyptian king. "They were not afraid of the king's edict."

Every Christian must respect man made laws if those laws are compatible with the laws of God. Romans 13 commands Christians to obey the laws of the land. *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."* (Romans 13:1,2)

However, there may be times, as in the case of Moses' parents, when believers must obey the laws of God rather than the laws of the land. The Egyptian king's edict was to kill all the male Israelite children. Moses was saved from such a cruel death because Moses' parents refused to be intimidated by the king's edict.

Intimidation! What is that? It is humiliation of a person or a group as a result of pressure or persecution by a real or imagined power. That power which seeks to intimidate is in the form of a powerful person or a powerful institution.

A man of faith refuses to be intimidated by the godless pressure or persecution of another.

While Christians are commanded in the Bible to obey civil authorities (Matthew 22:21; I Peter 2:13-15; Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1-7), believers are also expected to obey the laws of God instead of the laws of men if the latter are formed against the former. The Egyptian midwives who were commanded by the king to kill all Israelite male babies *"feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."* (Exodus 1:17)

Daniel refused to obey the king's decree that none should pray to any God for thirty days except to the king. As a result of his deliberate disobedience, Daniel was cast into the lion's den. In the New Testament days, Peter and John were commanded by the civil authorities not "to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto

them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20) They disobeyed the civil authorities and continued to preach and teach about Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem. The civil authorities cast the apostles in jail because of their activities of witnessing, but the apostles refused to be silenced or intimidated. They continued to evangelize. They had a daring faith, a faith that was willing to take risks for God.

Martin Luther King Jr. said in his famous 'Letters from Birmingham Jail', "...there are two types of laws. One has not only legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all'. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of his community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law." (Facing the Issues; page 62)

What does a daring faith mean for us today? It probably will not mean that we will have to risk our life to be a Christian (although that is always a possibility, even in America). A daring faith means that we are willing, like Moses' parents, to take some kinds of risks for God without being intimidated by unbelievers or by an unbelieving society.

Humanism is a godless philosophy which permeates our society today. It is basically atheistic. It centers on man instead of on God. It denies everything that Christians hold dear. A Christian with a daring faith must be willing to stand up against the attacks of humanism and do so without intimidation.

Having a daring faith means that we will take our stand for God within a society that is often not sensitive to or obedient to the laws of God.

## II. LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty for God) - No Compromise (Verse 24)

*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter." (Hebrews 11:24)*

Even though Moses was brought up in the palace of Egypt, and was considered by Egyptians to be the son of Pharaoh's

daughter, Moses knew his true identity as a Hebrew and never forgot his early training at the feet of his own godly mother. In the disguise of a handmaiden, Moses' own mother was paid by Pharaoh's daughter to raise Moses! Moses received not only physical bread but also spiritual instruction from his own mother who was viewed as a handmaiden by the Egyptians! Moses received a fine education in the best schools of Egypt, but knowledge of the living God which Moses received from his mother far outweighed the knowledge he received from Egyptian schools.

What a tribute to Moses' mother that she taught Moses so well about the true and living God that Moses forever identified with his own people and his people's God rather than with the Egyptian people and the Egyptian gods! Moses was trained in the ways of his God and he never departed from that training. He never compromised with sin, but remained true to his God.

In a secular, humanistic society today, true Christians must maintain loyalty to God and never succumb to the pressures of sin. The 'in' thing may not, and usually is not, the Christian thing to do. A believer must stand against the tide of popular ideas and be truly Christian in the way he thinks and feels and acts and reacts.

A loyal faith is a faith which refuses to compromise with sin. Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and money. Ye cannot serve two masters."

*"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."  
(Romans 6:16-18.)*

*"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' Therefore come out from them and be separate. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father*

*to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18.)*

III. SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People of God) - No Abandonment (Verses 25,26)

*"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." (Hebrews 11:25)*

There is pleasure in sin for a short time, but only for a short time. The temporary pleasures of sin are soon replaced by the permanent pains of sin. The temporary pains caused from serving God will soon be replaced by the pleasures of an abundant life with Christ on earth and the eternal life with Christ in heaven. To choose God may mean to choose pain and persecution for a short time, but the pain of the world's persecution and rejection is more than compensated for by Christ's comfort and companionship which are lasting.

Moses 'counted the cost' in serving the true God and, as a result, turned his back on Egypt and accepted the suffering which his identification with the people of God brought.

To be a Christian may mean rejection or persecution, as in the case of Moses. However, the Christian is wise, for the Christian is a person with a long view. He knows, as Moses knew, that to identify with God's people might bring the scorn of unbelievers, but he knows also that it will always bring the smile of God's approval upon his life. To walk alone in sweet communion with God is infinitely more wonderful than to walk in popularity with a crowd of unbelievers. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" It is important, as the woman who was voted Miss Texas and the runner-up for Miss America said, that every young girl should "do what is right and don't succumb to peer pressure. Remember, God and the individual who is doing right is always a majority!"

The believer with the long view knows that, whatever Christians have to suffer now for their faith, their future is bright. The way of the transgressor is hard. The way of the Christian is easy in comparison, for the Christian alone has peace of mind and the promise of eternal life with God in heaven.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a man of the twentieth century who, like Moses, closely identified with his fellow

German Christians during World War II in Germany in spite of Hitler's strong opposition against Christians. Although a brilliant German scholar who taught at the University of Berlin, he left the university and worked to help his fellow Germans who were oppressed by Hitler. "Forbidden by the Gestapo to preach or speak, he directed an illegal church training school in which he endeavored to have a community life embodying genuine Christian brotherhood. The school was closed by the Gestapo in 1940. For a short time, through the kindness of American friends, he was in the United States, but he felt constrained to return to Germany. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1943, he was in various prisons and concentration camps and was executed on April 9, 1945, shortly before the Allied victory would have brought him release. In the months of confinement he was a tower of strength to his fellow prisoners. Sustained by his faith and love of God, he had a poise and a radiance which brought solace to many." (The 20th Century In Europe; Volume IV; Kenneth Scott Latourette; page 268)

"There were three driving forces in his (Bonhoeffer's) life. There was the conviction of the right. 'If we claim to be Christians,' he said, 'there is no room for expediency.' There was the sense of destiny. He might well have stayed safe out of Germany; he went back. 'I know what I have chosen', he said. Supremely he was a man of faith. As he walked out to die on 9th April 1945, he whispered to a fellow prisoner: 'This is the end. But for me it is the beginning of life.'" (Men and Affairs; by William Barclay; page 39)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's faith was a suffering faith. He chose to suffer with his fellow German Christians rather than to abandon them or to compromise his Christian convictions. Of Bonhoeffer it could be said, as it was said of Moses in Hebrews 11:26, "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

When our faith calls us to suffer for God, let us remember what Jesus said, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" (Matthew 5:11,12)

IV. BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises of God)  
- No Distrust (Verses 27,28)

*"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel." (Hebrews 11:27,28)*

Moses took God at His Word. Faith is believing that what God says, He means, and obeying God explicitly, knowing that God will fulfill His promises.

Doubt will sometimes assail the true believer. Circumstances will sometimes be adverse. But faith takes hold of God's Word and claims victory over adverse circumstances.

Faith means believing that God is trustworthy in His character, that His promises are reliable. Moses believed that God would rescue the Israelites out of the cruel hand of Egyptian bondage through a miraculous deliverance. To believe God's promises implicitly means to obey God's commands explicitly. Moses was given careful instructions regarding the Passover observance. If Moses and the Israelites would have failed to smear blood on the doorposts of their homes, the death angel would surely have struck down the firstborn children in the Israelite homes as he did in the homes of the Egyptians.

Believing faith is inseparably connected with obedient faith. There can be no real faith in God without obedience to God. Faith is not a mere assent of the mind to God, but faith is an active obedience of the human will to the revealed will of God. Faith involves decisive action on the part of man. A believing faith is a faith that knows God will act on man's behalf in a saving way because man acts in an obedient way towards God!

"Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
Listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
Standing on the promises of God."

One will never fall, when he stands on God's promises, as long as one will remain obedient to the Spirit's call.

Faith is not some kind of 'deposit' that God gives to man once-and-for-all that guarantees automatic security to man. Rather, faith is a dynamic relationship of love between God and man which must always be maintained by man's obedient response to God's call. Moses obeyed God's call and, as a result, received God's promises -

miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery, as commemorated annually in the Passover celebration.

V. COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon the Power of God)  
- No Cowardice (Verse 29)

*"By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."* (Hebrews 11:29)

"Here we have the faith of a leader and of a people who were prepared to attempt the impossible at the command of God, who realized that the greatest barrier in the world is no barrier if God be there to help us to overpass it." (Barclay's Hebrews; page 180)

"God specializes in things thought impossible,  
He can do what no one else can do."

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Moses and the Israelites, with the pursuing hostile Egyptians on one side and the Red Sea on the other side, were totally dependent upon God at that moment. But it was Moses' strong faith in a powerful God that held steady the faltering and fearful Israelites.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:10-14.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. Exodus 14:29-31.

CONCLUSION: Look again at the five-act Drama of Faith as seen in the life of Moses:

- (1) DARING FAITH (Takes Risks For God) - No Intimidation
- (2) LOYAL FAITH (Maintains Loyalty To God) - No Compromise
- (3) SUFFERING FAITH (Identifies With People Of God) - No Abandonment
- (4) BELIEVING FAITH (Confidence In the Promises Of God) - No Distrust
- (5) COURAGEOUS FAITH (Dependence Upon The Power Of God) - No Cowardice

No intimidation, but instead courage to take risks for God!

No compromise, but instead steadfastness to maintain loyalty to God!

No abandonment, but instead identification with the people of God!

No distrust, but instead confidence to believe in the promises of God!

No cowardice, but instead courage to depend upon the power of God!

Faith meets the challenge of every situation of life! Be, like Moses, a man of Faith!

## FAITH

### MOSES - FAITH AND OURS

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. As a conscientious believer who seeks properly to respect man-made laws and to submit to God-ordained civil authorities (Roman 13), can you think of situations (as in the case of Moses' parents) when you (for conscience' sake) would have to obey 'God's higher laws' rather than conform to unjust laws of men? (Note Exodus 2:1-4; Hebrews 11:23; Acts 4:18-20)
2. How would you define 'intimidation' and why is 'intimidation' so hurtful to a believer's personal spiritual life and witness? (Note Romans 1:16 and Acts 4:5-30 and especially Acts 4:29)
3. Name as many examples, both from Bible times and from contemporary times, when God honored 'civil disobedience.' If a believer conscientiously disobeys a man-made law (or edict) which is unjust (evil), should the believer be expected to accept and to endure the consequences (such as imprisonment for such 'civil disobedience')? Do you agree with the following statement by Martin Luther King Jr; "One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly and with a willingness to accept the penalty"?
4. What is your response to the following statement by Martin Luther King Jr. - a statement that expressed his 'daring faith' in the face of the widespread evil of racial discrimination: "I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of his community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law"?
5. What does a 'daring faith' mean for a believer in our modern-world today? Can you share some specific illustrations?
6. Is it possible, as in the case of Moses, for parents to have a greater influence on their children than the godless influence of humanistic teachers in public schools? Is it not an unusual tribute to Moses' mother that she taught Moses so well about the true and the living God, that Moses forever identified with the people of God and with the truth of God rather than succumbing to the false teaching of Egyptian paganism to which Moses was exposed during his educational training in Egypt?

7. What kind of suffering can the person of faith expect, as he seeks to be loyal to God amidst a secular-oriented society? (Notes Hebrews 11:25-26) Do you agree with the following statement? "To choose God may mean to choose pain and persecution for a short time, but the pain of the world's persecution and rejection is more than compensated for by Christ's comfort and companionship which are lasting".
8. Considering the life of Moses, give your interpretation of the following statement: "The Christian is wise, for the Christian is a person with a long view."
9. Can you think of examples from the Bible or from modern history which illustrate the nobility of heroic Christians who were willing (in spite of great suffering) to identify with the people of God and with the truth of Christ rather than to succumb to the pressures of evil?
10. Give your interpretation of the following statement made by the Christian martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "If we claim to be Christians, there is no room for expediency."
11. Regarding those who suffer greatly for their faith in God and for their righteous stand against evil, what did Jesus say would be their future destiny? (Note Matthew 5:11,12)
12. Why is faith in God's promises always inseparably connected with careful obedience to God's command? (Note Hebrews 11:27,28). Is it not true to say that a believing faith is inseparably connected with an obedient faith? Do you agree with the following statement: "A believing faith is a faith that knows God will act on man's behalf in a saving way because man acts in an obedient way towards God"?
13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith is not some kind of 'deposit' that God gives to man once-and-for-all that guarantees automatic security to man. Rather, faith is a dynamic relationship of love between God and man which must always be maintained by man's obedient response to God's call."
14. In light of the miracle at the Red Sea (Hebrews 11:29), what is your interpretation of the following statement: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"?

15. Share an experience in your life when your faith in God's power resulted in a `parting of the Red Sea' - in the accomplishment of a humanly-impossible feat! Do you firmly believe that:

"God specializes in things thought impossible,  
He can do what no one else can do"?

**CHAPTER 10**

**FAITH**

**JOSHUA - DARING FAITH**

## FAITH

### JOSHUA - DARING FAITH

#### OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 1:1-9

TEXT: "This book of the Law must never depart from your mouth; you must meditate on it day and night, so that you may keep living in accord with all that is written in it; for then you will make your way successful, and then you will prosper."  
(Joshua 1:8)

INTRODUCTION: The life of Joshua is not merely a series of events, but it is a storehouse of truths on how to live and how to keep living spiritually. Joshua's leadership of Israel is compared to a type of Jesus' leadership of a Christian.

PROPOSITION: Before pointing out several spiritual lessons in this comparison, let us briefly note the basic events in Joshua's life. Using these events as a foundation, we will draw spiritual lessons that apply to the Christian's pilgrimage in life.

#### OUTLINE:

I. SUMMARY OF JOSHUA'S LIFE

II. LESSONS FROM JOSHUA'S LIFE

CONCLUSION: In seeking to find spiritual lessons from Joshua's life, the following can be said, by way of summary:

(1) The Christian must never take a retreatist position in facing the threat of sin. He must rather advance, fight, resist, and win.

(2) The Christian must be willing to be in the minority and even suffer persecution in his stand for faith in God.

(3) With every commission that God gives to the Christian, God also provides the courage and the strength of His presence to carry out the commission.

(4) When the Christian faces a severe test in his life (as represented by the Jordan) this test gives opportunity for the strengthening of faith and demonstration of God's power to deliver.

(5) Throughout the Christian's life, memorial stones should be set as reminders of God's answers to prayer.

(6) God sends his heavenly Messenger in a special way to the Christian when the Christian needs help, grace, and instructions in facing the challenge of a hard task.

(7) The price of victory is explicit obedience to God's instructions; hidden sin always brings defeat to the Christian and temporary frustration to God's purpose. Only when the Christian confesses hidden sin can a proper relationship be restored and victory guaranteed.

(8) The Word of God is the sure guide in waging a successful campaign in a hostile environment.

(9) Through the strength, strategy, and confidence which God inspires in the Christian, ultimate victory will be achieved.

(10) A vital and victorious relationship with God must be daily maintained through undivided loyalty to and worship of God.

## FAITH

### JOSHUA - DARING FAITH

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PROPOSITION: Before pointing out several spiritual lessons in this comparison, let us briefly note the basic events in Joshua's life. Using these events as a foundation, we will draw spiritual lessons that apply to the Christian's pilgrimage in life.

#### I. SUMMARY OF JOSHUA'S LIFE

We know little about Joshua's early life. He was born to an obscure Israelite named Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim. Little did the neighbors and friends of Nun know that someday this child Joshua would grow up to become the successor of the great Moses and leader of the entire nation of Israel. Joshua must have had a good beginning with godly training from a devoted mother. Few in the Old Testament have a taller spiritual stature than Joshua. Like the one who bore the Greek counterpart of his name (Jesus), Joshua "grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man."

The first mention we have of Joshua, other than brief facts of his background, is at the battle with Amalekites, where he led the forces of Israel. Joshua fought courageously against Amalekites while Moses held up his hands in intercession to God for victory. *"And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalekites prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy: and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands...And Joshua discomfited Amalekites."* (Exodus 17:11,12a,13a)

In Exodus 24:12,13;33:11 we find out that Joshua became the servant of Moses and accompanied him part way up Mt. Sinai when the Law was given, and that Joshua attended upon Moses at the tent of meeting.

It was Joshua and Caleb who brought back an optimistic report concerning the land of Canaan, and who exhorted the Israelites to go in to conquer the Canaanites, regardless of the giants who dwelt in the land. Joshua was a progressive man of faith and courage. Because Joshua and Caleb were such men of faith, God rewarded them by granting them to enter the Promised Land, while all the other adults of their generation perished in the wilderness.

Joshua proved himself faithful as a follower, therefore God saw fit to make him a strong leader. Joshua was appointed and ordained as successor of Moses. *"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him and set him before Eleazer the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight...and at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation."* (Numbers 27:18,19,21b)

Before the congregation of Israel, Moses gave a solemn charge to Joshua, and predicted that God would bring Israel into Canaan, the land promised to the ancient patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. *"And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed."* (Deuteronomy 31:7,8) God promised to help Joshua and to give him courage.

Early in Joshua's career as leader, God dramatically demonstrated His power to Joshua, just as God had dramatically demonstrated His power to Moses, early in Moses' career as leader of Israel. Moses, you remember, was given power to change his rod into a serpent before Pharaoh, and power to inflict the plagues upon the Egyptians. Upon Joshua's entry as leader, three supernatural events occurred which indicated God's presence with Joshua. (1) the river Jordan at flood tide divided (Joshua 3:14-17). Jordan represented death. The ark of the Covenant represented the presence and power of God. *"And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark were come into Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap."* (Joshua 3:14), (2) A heavenly messenger appeared to Joshua near Jericho, to encourage and to give directions for victory,

(3) The city of Jericho was miraculously destroyed by the power of God.

After taking Jericho so easily, Israel felt there would be no trouble at all in destroying the city of Ai. However, Achan had disobeyed the explicit demand not to selfishly plunder any of the spoils from Jericho. Israel was flatly defeated at Ai. As Joshua rent his clothes, and "fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide," God revealed to Joshua that there was transgression in the camp of Israel. Finally Achan was found and he confessed his sin of concealing a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold. Achan and his household were destroyed and God's favor again rested upon Israel.

Joshua then read before all the people the Law of Moses, with both its blessings and cursings. Joshua made it clear to Israel that victory and fulfillment could come only if Israel would obey the words of the Law. Success was conditional upon obedience.

Joshua made a mistake early in his career as leader. He was still young and inexperienced and therefore he cannot be blamed too harshly. The Gibeonites were fearful of Joshua's power and therefore disguised themselves and pled for mercy under the pretense of being sojourners from a far country in desperate need of help. The Gibeonites said they were willing to become the servants of Israel in payment for mercy and protection from Israel. With the skill of great deception, they talked Joshua into making a covenant of peace with them. After finding out that the Gibeonites were pagan neighbors of Israel, Joshua was shocked that he had to honor his covenant of peace with the Gibeonites. *"And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them."* (Joshua 9:21)

The latter half of the book of Joshua is a record of military strategy and victories for Israel over pagan kings, both in the South and in the North. It is a record of outstanding courage and brilliant strategy. Thirty-one kings were dethroned by Joshua and the greater part of the land was subdued. This section also records the portioning of the land among the tribes.

## II. LESSONS FROM JOSHUA'S LIFE

Joshua's leadership of Israel is a type of Jesus' leadership of a Christian. Let us note some spiritual applications, keeping this comparison in mind.

1. Exodus 17:8-16. Joshua led Israel in a battle against the fierce Amalekites. This required considerable courage. Jesus leads the Christian in a battle against sin. This too involves much courage. The Amalekites were a threat to Israel. *"At Rephidim, Amalekites came and fought Israel."* (Exodus 17:8a) Satan in many disguises, fights against the Christian. What did Israel do when Amalekites came to fight? Israel did not retreat, but Israel fought a bitter battle. What should the Christian do when Satan seeks to defeat the Christian? Never retreat or submit, but resist and fight. *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"*. (James 4:7) Submit to God, never to the Enemy. That is what Israel did. Israel submitted to God through intercessory prayer. Moses lifted up his hands to God. The battle against sin is the Lord's, but the Christian must cooperate. Lack of intercessory prayer gives victory to the enemy just like Moses' drooping arms (representing prayer) gave temporary victory to the Amalekites. The battle was the Lord's, and so, while human cooperation is important, the victory in the Christian's life is the Lord's. *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit"*, saith the Lord.

(2) Numbers 13:26-33 - Possibility Thinkers! We can do it! Joshua and Caleb were in the minority when they exhorted Israel to go into Canaan to conquer the land. The price of faith at this time was persecution and near martyrdom. Says the record, *"The entire nation of Israel began to complain against Moses and Aaron to such a degree that the whole concourse said to them, 'Oh, that we had perished in the land of Egypt or even had died in this wilderness. They said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and go back to Egypt. ...But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, two of those who had gone to find out what the land was like, tore their clothes and told the whole gathering of Israel, 'The land through which we passed as spies is an extremely fertile land. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will bring us in and give us this land which is flowing with milk and honey. Above all, neither rebel against the Lord nor have fear of the native population; they shall be as bread to us. Their defense is as a vanishing shadow, for the Lord is with us; do not fear them.' At these words the whole crowd was on the verge of hurling stones at them when suddenly the glory of the Lord appeared to the entire nation of Israel in the tent of meeting."* (Numbers 14:2,4,6-10) Needless to say, Joshua's faith in God caused him to be most unpopular with the people. Just like Joshua, so Jesus too was in the minority. He was both a verbal and silent rebuke to sinners. His light of faith revealed the darkness of

doubt and hate in the lives of many. As a result, they hated Jesus and finally killed him. Said Jesus to his followers: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Wrote John to Christians: "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" (I John 3:13) The world is not a friend to grace. Christians have always been the object of hate by sinners who are not willing to walk in the light of life and truth. Joshua is a type of Jesus, and all who will walk the way of Joshua or Jesus, will find themselves a member of a minority group.

(3) Men of Faith look at problems as little, because God is Mighty. God commissioned Joshua to be a leader of the potential kingdom of Israel. God commissioned Jesus to be the leader of the spiritual kingdom of God, potentially opened for membership to all men. God showed Joshua favor and promised courage and strength to Joshua for his commission. "*I will never fail you, and I will not forsake you. Be resolute and strong; for you will enable this people to inherit the land which I vowed to their fathers to give them. Only be very resolute and strong, to keep practicing the whole Law which Moses my servant commanded you; do not depart from it to the right or to the left, so that you may prosper everywhere you go.*" (Joshua 1:5b-7; Berkeley) God showed favor on Jesus at the time of His inauguration into His public ministry, and gave strength to Jesus. "*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:16,17) All who take the way of Joshua and Jesus receive a commission. Just as Joshua and Jesus were shown favor and given strength and courage to enter into their life's work, so every Christian will be given courage to match his commission.

(4) The Israelites, led by Joshua, facing the flood tide of the Jordan river, represents the Christian facing a severe test to his faith, whether that test be in the form of disappointment, loss, or death. Jordan represents death, the ultimate threat to the Israelites. The ark of the covenant represents the presence and power of God which, when it touched the deathly waters of Jordan, subdued the waters and gave a path of life for Israel through the Jordan. The Christian, who has the presence of God in his life, is guaranteed victory over

tests and temptations. God will make a way of escape, and in the process strengthen one's faith. God asks us to obey and to exercise faith even in the face of great obstacles (Crossing Jordan).

(5) Joshua established memorial stones on the bank of the Jordan River, *"At Gilgal Joshua set up the twelve stones, which they had taken from the Jordan. Then he said to the Israelites, 'In the future when your children ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' inform them by saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground'".* (Joshua 4:20-22) Further, the Israelites engaged in the ceremony of circumcision and the Passover - the two ceremonies that reminded them of their historical covenant with God. God wants Christians to establish memorials to great victories, and to recall God's great power and victory. Verbal and formal testimonies are for recalling and reporting personal or corporate episodes of God's mercy and power. Partaking of the Lord's Supper reminds us of God's great love and mercy, expressed through his death. Worship on each Sunday morning is for the purpose of recalling the greatest of all Christian events - the Resurrection of our Lord on the first day of the week, now called the Lord's Day.

(6) *Joshua was met by a heavenly visitor, preceeding his conquest of Jericho.* (Joshua 5:13-15) Joshua prostrated himself before his heavenly visitor, called "The Captain of the Lord's host." Before confronting the first pagan city in Canaan, the angel strengthened Joshua and gave him directions in taking the city. Likewise, God visits the Christian in special ways occasionally to reassure the Christian of God's support and to reassure the Christian of his eventual victory and the means whereby to achieve that victory. Faith and obedience are the means of victory in any spiritual campaign, the same as it was in the physical campaign against Jericho.

(7) The defeat at Ai shows that the Christian's effort and plans are all in vain if he has hidden sin in his life. Obedience is always better than sacrifice. Regardless of how much one strives for victory, if he does not explicitly carry out God's orders, defeat and disappointment will be his lot. Only when the sin is confessed and destroyed can there be victory. The harsh treatment of Achan and his family represents the harsh treatment that the Christian must afford any sin in his life. Sin must be abhorred and severed completely from one's life. Only then can the Christian know victory.

The lesson at Ai is a lesson in the tragedy of disobedience. To exercise power without obedience spells defeat. (Joshua 7:1-12)

(8) Joshua read the Law of Moses to the people. *"Afterwards he read all the words of the Law, both the blessings and the curses, according to all that was written in the book of the Law. There was nothing of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before the whole assembly of Israel, including the women, the children, and the foreigners who went with them."* (Joshua 8:32,35) Before engaging in the many battles in Canaan, Joshua wanted all the people to realize that victory was conditional upon understanding and applying the Law of Moses, with both its blessings and its curses. The Christian's guide, as he battles and campaigns in this world of relative values and sinful influences, is the Word of God, the Bible. The Christian must know it well. Victory in the midst of Canaan's paganism depends upon knowledge and application of God's absolute standards of righteousness.

(9) Through a series of battles and campaigns, Joshua dethroned many pagan kings and subdued the greater part of the land. The enemy may be strong but it can always be overcome through the strength, strategy, and confidence which God inspires. Israel possessed the land and enjoyed a rich heritage. God's promises were wonderfully fulfilled to Israel. The Promised Land became a reality. So it can be in the Christian's life. Victory over the enemy can be a reality to the Christian, whether that victory be victory over the enemy of secularism, or materialism, or one of the many other 'isms'. What 'Territory' must you take for God? What victories must you win for God?

(10) In Joshua's farewell speech, he made it very clear to Israel that Israel must maintain a vital relationship to God through obedience. *"If you forsake the Lord and serve other gods, He will turn away and punish you and destroy you, despite the fact that He has been good to you."* (Joshua 24:20) The Christian must maintain a vital relationship with God through obedience. The eternal security of the Christian is a conditional security, conditional upon the obedience of the Christian to God's commands.

Faith must be maintained. Faith is not a deposit from God which automatically keeps a Christian secure; faith is a dynamic response of love and obedience to God by which a Christian maintains salvation.

**CONCLUSION:** In seeking to find spiritual lessons from Joshua's life, the following can be said, by way of summary:

(1) The Christian must never take a retreatist position in facing the threat of sin. He must rather advance, fight, resist, and win.

(2) The Christian must be willing to be in the minority and even suffer persecution in his stand for faith in God.

(3) With every commission that God gives to the Christian, God also provides the courage and the strength of His presence to carry out the commission.

(4) When the Christian faces a severe test in his life (as represented by the Jordan) this test gives opportunity for the strengthening of faith and demonstration of God's power to deliver.

(5) Throughout the Christian's life, memorial stones should be set as reminders of God's answers to prayer.

(6) God sends his heavenly Messenger in a special way to the Christian when the Christian needs help, grace, and instructions in facing the challenge of a hard task.

(7) The price of victory is explicit obedience to God's instructions; hidden sin always brings defeat to the Christian and temporary frustration to God's purpose. Only when the Christian confesses hidden sin can a proper relationship be restored and victory guaranteed.

(8) The Word of God is the sure guide in waging a successful campaign in a hostile environment.

(9) Through the strength, strategy, and confidence which God inspires in the Christian, ultimate victory will be achieved.

(10) A vital and victorious relationship with God must be daily maintained through undivided loyalty to and worship of God.

## FAITH

### JOSHUA - DARING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What spiritual significance does Joshua's victorious battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16) have for the believer today who is in spiritual warfare against sin and Satan? If it is true that spiritual victory comes from the Lord's mighty power, then what responsibility does the believer have in cooperating with God in assuring victory over evil?
2. How did Joshua and Caleb demonstrate their faith in God when they 'scouted out' the land of Canaan and when they returned to the camp of Israel to encourage the army of Israel to go quickly into Canaan to conquer their enemy and to possess the land (Numbers 13:26-33)?

What is the attitude of men of faith today who face seemingly insurmountable problems and challenges in life?

If Joshua and Caleb represent all persons who face obstacles in life with great faith in God's power, then who do the people of Israel that sought to stone Joshua and Caleb represent? Should persons of faith today be surprised when they discover that they are the objects of hate and persecution from a world of godless men who despise the (foolish) ideas of praying Christians? (Note John 15:18-19; I John 3:13)

3. As in the case of Joshua (Joshua 1:5-7), can believers today expect to receive a specific call and a definite commission from God? When God gives an assignment that seems to the believer to be bigger than what the believer can handle, what divinely-given assurance (which God gave to Joshua) can believers claim today (Joshua 1:5-9)?
4. When Christians face a severe test to their faith (as represented by the flood tide of the Jordan River (Joshua 3:7-17), what resources (as represented by the 'Ark of the Covenant') does the believer have available to appropriate which will guarantee victory over tests and temptations?

5. Spiritually-speaking, in learning to live a vital Christian life, what activities should a sincere believer engage in, as represented by Joshua's establishment of memorial stones on the bank of the Jordan River (Joshua 4:20-22) and as represented by Israel's engagement in the ceremony of circumcision (Joshua 5:1-9) and the observance of the Passover (Joshua 5:10-12)?
6. As applied to the believer today who is facing an awesome spiritual challenge (similar to the challenge that Joshua faced at Jericho), what is the significance of the appearance of the heavenly visitor ("The Captain of the Lord's Host") to Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15)?
7. When Christians face their challenging problems today - their towering 'walls of Jericho' - what must they do (as Joshua did) in order to see the 'walls come tumbling down'? (Joshua 6:1-5,15-21)
8. As applied to the living of a successful Christian life, what lessons can a sincere believer learn from a study of Israel's defeat at the city of Ai (Joshua 7:1-12)?
9. What was the significance of Joshua reading the Law of Moses to the people (Joshua 8:30-35), previous to Israel engaging in multiple battles in the land of Canaan? What significance does the Bible have in the life of the person of faith, especially during times when his faith is being challenged on the battlefields of worldly philosophies? Do you agree with the following statement: "Victory in the midst of Canaan's paganism depends upon knowledge and application of God's absolute standards of righteousness"?
10. As Joshua led Israel into many battles, resulting in the dethroning of many pagan kings and in the subduing of the greater part of the land of Canaan, so (in a spiritual sense) is it possible for believers today to 'conquer every territory' and to win great victories for God? What are the 'weapons' of our spiritual warfare, and how can these 'weapons' be successfully used to assure us spiritual victory over the enemy? (Note Ephesians 6:10-20; II Corinthians 10:3-6; I John 5:4)
11. Study Joshua's farewell speech to Israel in Joshua 24:14-24 and make a list of each of the following: (a) Blessings to be enjoyed, (b) Conditions to be met, (c) Warnings to be heeded. Using these three words - 'Blessings', 'Conditions', 'Warnings' - as a guide to your thinking, share the importance of living the 'balanced Christian life' with the believer giving proper attention to each of these three areas of concern.



**CHAPTER 11**

**FAITH**

**GIDEON - CONQUERING FAITH**

## FAITH

### GIDEON - CONQUERING FAITH

#### OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: JUDGES 6:1-12

TEXT: "When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, *'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior'*." (Judges 6:12 NIV)

INTRODUCTION: The confederation of the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the east, and the domestication of the camel, posed a great threat to Israel and caused Israel to fall into great despair. *"They (the enemy) came in crowds thick as grasshoppers, with their cattle, their camels, and their tents to destroy the land; so that the Israelites were impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."* (Judges 6:5-6) It was in the face of this awesome threat that God called Gideon to lead Israel to victory over the Midianites.

PROPOSITION: Like Gideon, every follower of God is called to perform a certain task, in the face of certain threats, and must respond in a similar way as Gideon responded, if victory is guaranteed.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. THE CALL OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DESPAIR
  - A. Despair Amidst Adverse Circumstances
  - B. Call of Faith Amidst Adverse Circumstances
- II. THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DANGER
- III. THE CONQUEST OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DELIVERANCE

CONCLUSION: Do you want to be truly successful in life? Then take the way of faith! Faith is the way to victory. God does not win the battle for you, but instead God wins the battle with you.

Gideon provided willing cooperation and explicit obedience to God's instructions, and God provided mighty power and miraculous deliverance from the enemy. Do you have enemies which attack you as you seek to live the Christian life? External enemies in the form of disapproving peers who despise everything you stand for?

Personal enemies in the form of hurtful and harmful habits which you cannot seem to break? Internal enemies in the form

of wrong attitudes or wrong desires from which you need deliverance? Do you have any Midianites in your life which are causing oppression or depression? Then allow God to bring great victory in your life. Your faith coupled with God's power will bring conclusive victory and total deliverance. God can vanquish the 'Midianites' in your life. Surrender totally to Christ and exercise faith in God's power to deliver you. Enjoy the conquest of faith!

## FAITH

### GIDEON - CONQUERING FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** JUDGES 6:1-12

**TEXT:** "When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, *'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior'*." (Judges 6:12 NIV)

**INTRODUCTION:** After Joshua's death, God raised up several Judges to meet the challenges and threats of internal corruption and external oppression. Such Judges as Samson, Gideon, Deborah, and Barak rallied their people together to form a united front in the wake of a national emergency.

These Judges were not hereditary leaders but received a special call from God to unite Israel's tribes against a common enemy. "None, so far as we know, ever led a united Israel into battle. All, however, seem to have had this in common: they were men who, stepping to the fore in times of danger, by virtue only of those personal qualities (charisma) which gave evidence to their fellows that Yahweh's spirit was upon them, rallied the clans against a foe." (A History of Israel; John Bright; page 156)

"The writer of the Book of Judges carries a kind of oft-recurring formula, describing conditions which found frequent repetition, as follows: (1) the Children of Israel fell into sin and idolatry; (2) God gave them into the hands of their enemies to be oppressed; (3) they cried unto the Lord; (4) the Lord raised up a deliverer to throw off the hated yoke." (Old Testament Studies; P.E. Burroughs; page 58) (Cycle: oppression - repentance - deliverance - complacency [sin])

The confederation of the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the east, and the domestication of the camel, posed a great threat to Israel and caused Israel to fall into great despair.

*"They (the enemy) came in crowds thick as grasshoppers, with their cattle, their camels, and their tents to destroy the land; so that the Israelites were impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."* (Judges 6:5,6)

**PROPOSITION:** It was in the face of this awesome threat that God called Gideon to lead Israel to victory over the Midianites. Like Gideon, every follower of God is called to perform a certain task, in the face of certain threats, and must respond in a similar way as Gideon responded, if victory is guaranteed.

In looking at the life of Gideon, we can see three things about Faith. (1) The Call of Faith in the Midst of Despair, (2) The Certainty of Faith in the Midst of Danger, (3) The Conquest of Faith in the Midst of Deliverance.

#### I. THE CALL OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DESPAIR

##### A. Despair Amidst Adverse Circumstances

When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, He said to Gideon, "*The Lord is with you, you mighty hero!*" (Judges 6:12). Gideon said to Him, "My Master, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His wondrous works, which our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has rejected us; He has delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.'" (v. 13) Gideon is frank and open with God. He pours out his honest thoughts and sincere feelings to God. Gideon sees a contradiction between God's assurance of His presence and the despairing circumstances that are so real to Israel. How is Israel to believe in their fathers' mighty God - the God who delivered the Israelites out of Egypt under Moses - when Israel is presently tormented by oppressors in the form of the pagan Midianites?

You may have times in your life when circumstances defy your reason and challenge your faith - times when God seems to be deaf to your prayers and times when your faithfulness seems to go unrewarded. There may be times, as in the case of Gideon, when you wonder if the power of your fathers' God is still operative. (One time Martin Luther's wife came to breakfast dressed in black during a time when Luther was deeply depressed. He asked her who had died and she replied, "Haven't you heard? God has died. The way you have been acting lately would indicate to me that you believe God has died.") (God is actively involved in the midst of man's problems and society's sins.)

Perhaps you have had physical or financial reverses and your faith has been severely challenged. Perhaps the sinful plots of evil men around you (as in the case of Luther) seem to be stronger than the good works of godly men around you. Perhaps you have found yourself fretting because of evil doers who are prospering while you seem to be suffering. As a result, your faith wavers as doubt assails and despair threatens to take hold of your heart. That is the way David felt when his own righteous cause was threatened by the evil schemes of evil men. But God reassured David in Psalms 37. "*Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like*

*the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away." (Psalms 37:1,2)*

Gideon was fretting himself because of the evil oppression of the pagan Midianites. His faith in his fathers' God was severely challenged. *"Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has rejected us; He has delivered us into the hand of the Midianites."* (Judges 6:13)

Judges 6:5,6 tells us that *"they (the enemy of the Midianites) came in crowds thick as grasshoppers, with their cattle, their camels, and their tents to destroy the land; so that the Israelites were impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."*

Gideon, in the midst of these despairing circumstances nearly lost his faith in his God. Gideon's despair was the result of his faulty reasoning. Here is Gideon's false reasoning: *"Either God is not the kind of God that he has been taught to believe He is, or, for some reason, He is no longer with and for His people."* (Old Testament Characters; Clovis Chappell; page 112)

*"Where he made his mistake was this: He failed to see that the fault was not with God, but was with himself and with his people. He was entirely correct in concluding that God was not showing His might as in other days. Where he went wrong was in failing to see that they were making it impossible for God to do what He was able and eager and willing to do. Instead of their waiting on God, God was having to wait on them. Gideon did not understand this, hence his doubt and perplexity."* (Ibid; pages 113, 114)

We must not conclude in studying the life of Gideon, that dark circumstances in life are always the result of sin and disobedience, although in the case of Israel during the time of Gideon this was the case.

When you are facing adversity in your life, leading you to despairing feelings, first of all do not blame God. Look at your own life and ask yourself if your adverse circumstances are due to your own disobedience and sin (as was true in the case of Israel during Gideon's time). Disobedience to God often leads to adversity in circumstances. (This was also true in the case of the Israelite nation when Israel failed to tithe - Malachi 3:8-11).

If your adversity has been caused by disobedience, then, as in the case of Israel, cry unto the Lord in repentance ("Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help." Judges 6:6) Why had the Midianites been oppressing the Israelites? Because "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites." (v. 1) Some adversity in life is allowed by God in order to bring backslidden believers back to God!

However, at this point, we must point out that adversity is not always a result of a lack of faith or as a result of unconfessed sin in ones life. There may be times in life when circumstances would seem to indicate that God is far away, that He has forsaken us even though we have faith in God and even though we know we have confessed all sin to God. Joseph felt despair when he was forsaken by his brothers and when he was carried off into Egypt by slave traders. Perhaps Moses too felt forsaken by God when he had to run away from Egypt to a desert where he herded sheep for forty years. Perhaps Naomi felt forsaken by the Lord when her husband and two sons all died in a foreign land. Job felt totally forsaken by God when all kinds of adverse circumstances caused his world to crumble. He lost his children, his livestock, his health, and even lost the comfort and understanding of his wife!

When Jeremiah prophesied for His God to unrepentant Judah, Jeremiah was persecuted and cruelly mistreated. He is called the "weeping prophet". There were times that he must have wondered if God had forsaken him. Jesus Himself, on the cross, cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." All of these persons were persons of faith, and yet circumstances were very adverse for them.

#### B. Call of Faith Amidst Adverse Circumstances

It is true that Gideon was fearful and intimidated. It is also true that Gideon had a low personal self-esteem ("my family ranks lowest in Manasseh and I am the youngest in my father's house." v. 15). It is true that Gideon was assailed by doubts regarding the power of God, or if not the power of God, at least the willingness of God to use His power to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Gideon had psychological, personal, philosophical and spiritual problems.

But, in spite of Gideon's great inadequacies and doubts, "Gideon did not allow his doubt to interfere with his

duty. Most of Gideon's fellows had lost heart. They said: 'God has cast us off. He has forgotten us. He has left us to our enemies. Therefore, we might as well give over our efforts and let things drift.

What is the use of raising a flock if the Midianites drive it away as soon as it is ready for the slaughter? What is the use of sowing wheat and harvesting the same only to feed our enemies? What is the use in keeping up the fight under these discouraging and hope-killing circumstances?' So they left off the struggle. But not Gideon. He kept to his task, and when God spoke to him He had to make His voice sound above the sound of his flying flail". (Old Testament Characters; Chappell; page 117) In times of stress, continue to be faithful to your task (means of grace).

In the midst of despairing circumstances, God challenged Gideon to renewed faith, and commissioned Gideon to deliver the oppressed Israelites from the Midianites.

After Gideon had expressed his dismal doubts to the Lord, the Lord challenged Gideon to faith action. "Go in this your strength and save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent you?" (v. 14) God is telling Gideon that He (God) is still the Mighty Deliverer, that He still hears the cry of His oppressed people, that He has not forgotten His own. God still has a purpose to accomplish and this Gideon is to be the select instrument to accomplish that purpose.

Gideon's response to the call: "O Lord, with what shall I save Israel, considering that my family ranks lowest in Manasseh and I am the youngest in my father's house?" (v. 15) Reminiscent of Moses who also pled to God to call someone else since he was personally deficient. Gideon reminds God that he does not have honor and fame, but comes from a very lowly background. It was this very quality of humility that equipped Gideon for the job. Does not God always choose a humble man, a man who feels personally inadequate and unworthy, for a big job? The proud, self-sufficient, and boastful are turned away.

God is not overcome with adverse circumstances or with a person's low self-esteem. God works in the midst of difficult problems, and He works through "weak" people to accomplish His mighty purposes.

God's assurance: "I am with you, and shall destroy the Midianites one and all." (v. 16) A man may not have fame, fortune, position, or power, but if God is for him,

then he will succeed. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" If God backs a man, how can he fail?

Gideon's quest for double assurance: "If I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who talkest with me. Do not leave here, please, till I come back, bring out my gift, and lay it before Thee." (v. 18) Gideon wanted to make sure that it was really God who was speaking to him, that this seeming call was not a result merely of his own impressions or feelings.

There is no sin in a conscientious man making doubly sure that God has really called him to a certain task. Gideon proceeds to bring an offering to his heavenly visitor. The Angel of the Lord performed a miracle before Gideon to further authenticate Gideon's call: *"Then the Angel of the Lord held out the end of the staff in His hand, touched the meat and the unleavened cakes, and fire went up out of the rock that consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. Then the Angel of the Lord vanished from his sight."* (Judges 6:21) Gideon then was assured, and in gratitude built an altar to the Lord. (v. 24)

Many have received a call to rally a person or a group of persons to exercise faith in the living God, during a dark time in history. When you most feel like despairing, God is most ready to work a great miracle in your life! When all seems hopeless (as in the case of Israel during the time of Gideon) it is then that God wishes to work His miracles of deliverance. For instance, during the darkest days of England during the eighteenth century when corruption and crime were rampant, God sent his healing and holiness and health to sickened England through the revival preaching of the Wesley Brothers - John and Charles Wesley - and through hundreds of dedicated lay preachers whom God raised up to spread the Good News of God's salvation!

If circumstances around you seem hopeless and you are ~~tempted~~ <sup>tempted</sup> to despair, as in the case of Gideon, then look up. It is then that God will likely come to you, as He did to Gideon, and bring to you a most hopeful message.

The call to renewed faith often comes in the midst of despairing circumstances!

## II. THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DANGER

Faith usually operates best in the presence of threatening circumstances and dangerous experiences. This is true in the case of Gideon.

The Israelites had themselves fallen into Baal worship, and even Gideon's father and neighbors were engaging in idolatry. If Gideon is to destroy external corruption, he must begin to clean up internal corruption. God commanded Gideon to tear down his father's pagan altar, and in its place build an altar to the true God. Although Gideon was filled with fear, he did not succumb to his fear. He was obedient, despite his fear, and so must every true man of God be obedient. Because of his fear, he destroyed the altar at night instead of during the day, but at least he obeyed.

When the townspeople found out the next morning who had destroyed their sacred altar, they said to Gideon's father, "Bring your son outdoors that he may die; because he has broken down Baal's altar and has cut down the shame images beside it." (verse 30) Any man who obeys God will have to have great courage at times, and be willing to face the threats and persecutions of opponents. Answered Gideon's father: "Will you strive for Baal? Will you champion his cause? Whoever takes up for him shall be put to death this morning; if he is a god, let him strive for himself because someone has broken down his altar." (v. 31) It is as if Joash were saying: "I'll admit I've gone casually and nominally along with Baal worship, but I'm fed up with Baal. If Baal is any god, worthy of the importance that you give to him, then he is at least strong enough to defend himself without you coming to his defense. If he is a god, let him reap vengeance upon my son. From now on, I identify with my courageous son who is a worshipper of the true and living God."

Oh! For more Gideons! He was an inspirer of courage and faith, willing to stand all alone. As a result, his own father was converted and the Baal worshippers were shamed. Jehovah proved to be the true God and Baal proved to be only a lifeless god of stone.

The truth was tested and the truth stood. Do we not need mighty men of valour who will put the modern gods of materialism, secularism, and cultism to the test?

As a courageous soldier, Gideon then rallied an army together. He was one who inspired faith and courage and action, in the face of dangerous threats and amidst a people of desponding spirits. As a final test to see if God was still approving his actions, Gideon put out the fleece. *"Gideon then said to God, 'If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast said, look, I will put a fleece of wool on the thrashing floor; and if there is dew on the fleece only and the surrounding ground is dry, then I will know that Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, even as Thou hast spoken.'* And it was so. When he got up early next morning, he pressed the fleece together and

*wrung a bowlful of water out of it. Then Gideon said to God, 'Let not Thine anger be kindled against me, and I will speak but this once; let me make another test, I pray Thee, once more with the fleece; let it alone be dry, and let there be dew upon all the ground around it.' And God did so that night; for the fleece was dry and all the surrounding ground was wet with dew." (Judges 6: 36-40)*

We are greatly indebted to Gideon for this episode. Many a man throughout the ages has followed Gideon's example at a time of pressing circumstances and serious decisions. God favorably and mercifully disposes Himself to man and allows him to "put out the fleece."

Faith, in the case of Gideon, operated in the presence of danger.

It was dangerous for Gideon to tear down his father's pagan altar and in its place to build an altar to the true God, thus inciting the anger of the entire city.

But, while faith is often confronted by evil forces seeking to destroy it, faith is the surest and the safest way to live. To live a life of easy conformity to evil amidst a pagan environment is to live a life that will surely and eventually reap the judgement of Almighty God (as happened when God brought ultimate judgment to the pagan Baal worshippers among the Midianites). To live for God by faith is the way of certainty and assurance and salvation, regardless of the kind or the degree of threats to faith!

Faith is not foolhardiness, however. Faith is not throwing ones self thoughtlessly and carelessly into the jaws of death. There are those who are daring but whose daring is not the daring of faith. Gideon was not by nature a daring person. Before God called Gideon, Gideon was fearful, intimidated, and lacking in self esteem. Gideon even felt his need to be reassured that God was going to be with him during his dangerous exploits. The certainty and reassurance which God gives is the basis for launching out into dangerous exploits for God. Before Gideon challenged the false gods and endangered his life in his confrontation with his pagan society, he first double-checked his communication with the true and living God! The faith which challenges the evil in society is first the faith which has communicated with the God whose power can control that evil society.

### III. THE CONQUEST OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DELIVERANCE

*Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of*

Moreh. The Lord said to Gideon. "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go: but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." Three ~~thousand~~ <sup>hundred</sup> men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. (Judges 7: 1-8, NIV)

Gideon obeyed God by reducing the size of the army from 32,000 men to 10,000 men. This was yet too many and therefore God had Gideon reduce it to only 300 men. It is interesting how this reduction was accomplished. The first 22,000 who left, left because they were fearful. There were only 300 of the remaining who lapped water like dogs, "thus evincing their eagerness for battle and their indifference to their own comfort." (Old Testament Studies; P. E. Burroughs; page 60) The other 9,700 bent down upon their knees to drink. Apparently showing too much love for comfort. God wanted all the glory for the victory, thus He reduced the army to such a small number that all Israel must acknowledge the victory as God-wrought and not man-accomplished.

Gideon's faith was sorely tested by this drastic reduction in the army. Again, he had to be reassured that this undertaking was really of God. Gideon needed his courage inspired. Said the Lord to Gideon, "If you are afraid (and who wouldn't be?) to invade it (the enemy camp), go down to the camp with your servant Purah. There you will hear what they are saying, and after that you will have the courage to go down against the camp." (7:10,11) Gideon overheard a Midianite guard relating a dream to his comrade: "See! I dreamed that a loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the camp of Midian and bounced so hard against the tent that it collapsed." (7:13) The comrade's response to this dream, which Gideon overheard was very heartening to Gideon: "This is nothing other than the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, a man of Israel: God has delivered Midian and the whole camp into his hand." (7:14)

When hearing this, Gideon was fired with renewed courage in God and "divided the 300 men into three companies and gave trumpets and empty pitchers, with torches inside each of them. He told them, 'Watch me, and do as I do. When I reach the edge of the camp and blow my trumpet, see that you do as I do; when I and all my men blow our trumpets, you, too, must blow your trumpets all around the camp and shout,: For the Lord and for Gideon!" (7:16-18)

Gideon reduced his army to such a small number that he had to trust God for victory. He did not put his trust in the weapons of man, but trusted in the might of God to deliver.

After he received assurance of victory, he went into action to carry out God's plan for victory. This seems like a very strange method of warfare, but, because it was in God's plan, it produced marvellous victory. "When the 300 trumpets were blown, the Lord set every man fighting the man next to him throughout the camp, and the army fled." (7:22) Israel "routed the entire army." (8:12)

Men who, like Gideon, take God at His word and put their complete trust in God, will always be victorious, regardless of the odds against them. One who is on God's side is always on the winning side.

**CONCLUSION:** Do you want to be truly successful in life? Then take the way of faith! Faith is the way to victory. God does not win the battle for you, but instead God wins the battle with you. Gideon provided willing cooperation and explicit obedience to God's instructions, and God provided mighty power and miraculous deliverance from the enemy.

Do you have enemies which attack you as you seek to live the Christian life? External enemies in the form of disapproving peers who despise everything you stand for? Personal enemies in the form of hurtful and harmful habits which you can't seem to break? Internal enemies in the form of wrong attitudes or wrong desires from which you need deliverance? Do you have any Midianites in your life which are causing oppression or depression? Then allow God to bring great victory and total deliverance. God can vanquish the 'Midianites' in your life.

Surrender totally to Christ and exercise faith in God's power to deliver you. Enjoy the conquest of faith!

Remember the lessons from the life of Gideon:

- (1) The Call of Faith in the Midst of Despair
- (2) The Certainty of Faith in the Midst of Danger
- (3) The Conquest of Faith In the Midst of Deliverance

## FAITH

### GIDEON - CONQUERING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What is the oft-recurring cycle that is repeated several times in the Book of Judges? What was the immediate setting and the specific set of circumstances in Israel at the time when God called Gideon to become a special kind of leader (Judge)?
2. In the midst of despairing circumstances, is it legitimate (as in the case of Gideon) for the believer to 'question God' (Judges 6:13) regarding the reasons for oppression from the 'enemy'? Can you be a 'person of faith' and, at the same time, be a person who asks honest questions and who expresses despairing feelings and doubts to God? Have you ever felt that there was a contraction between God's assurance of His presence and the despairing circumstances that are so real around you?
3. During those times when God seems to be deaf to your prayers, what is the bases for your continuing faith in God's sovereignty and in His power to defend the righteous and to punish the wicked?
4. Do you ever find yourself, like Gideon, besieged by doubts and full of fretting and worrying, all because of the evil oppression of wicked men whose evil forces seems to go 'unchecked'? Do you ever find yourself as discouraged as Gideon was when he questioned the ways of God (in Judges 6:13)?
5. Describe the false reasoning (as seen in the words of Gideon in Judges 6:13) which is the cause of most despair.
6. Should we conclude, from a study of the life of Gideon (Judges:1-10) that all dark circumstances in life are always the result of sin and disobedience? Why or why not?
7. When one is personally facing adverse circumstances in his life, why is it so unwise and hurtful to blame God for one's adversities and troubles?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Some adversity in life is allowed by God in order to bring backslidden believers back to God." (Note Judges 6:1 and Corinthians 7:8-12)

9. Can you cite examples from the Bible (or from your own experience or from the experience of close friends) when sincere believers felt for from God during adversity, in spite of the fact that they were strong in their faith and righteous in their lifestyle.
10. Describe the weakness of Gideon, in terms of his psychological, personal, philosophical, and spiritual problems, and describe how that in spite of his great inadequacies and doubts, Gideon did not allow his doubts to interfere with his duty. (Note Judges 6:11) In times of stress and discouragement, is it an act of great faith for believers to continue to labor and to serve, rather than to 'lay down' their work in despair? (I Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 12:1-8) Someone said, "When it is hardest to pray, pray hardest; when it is hardest to work, work hardest." Do you agree that most 'burn-out' (quitting) in ministry is caused by the harboring of bitterness because of discouraging circumstances, and that consistent laboring (at one's daily tasks) is 'therapeutic' in the restoration of hope?
11. How significant is it to you that God selected Gideon - a man who was discouraged in his spirit, and who was limited in his natural gifts and talents, and who was timid in his temperament - to be God's special instrument to accomplish a miraculous deliverance of Israel from its enemy? Is there evidence from Scripture and from history that God is pleased many times to use 'weak men' to serve 'mighty causes'? (Note I Corinthians 1:26-29; II Corinthians 12:7-10) Does not God always choose humble men - men who feel personally inadequate and unworthy - for His 'big' jobs?
12. Can you cite any examples (from your personal life or from your personal observations) that can document the truth of the following statement: "God works in the midst of difficult problems, and He works through 'weak' people to accomplish His mighty purposes"?
13. To avoid engaging in activities that might be the results of one's own impression or ambitions, is it not wise (as in the case of Gideon - Judges 6:17-22) to ask God for a 'sign' that He is really speaking to one? Is asking for such a 'sign' and evidence of a lack of faith in God? Why or why not?
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "When you most feel like despairing, God is most ready to work a miracle in your life!"

15. Do you believe, as in the case of Gideon, that God's call to renewed faith often comes in the midst of very despairing circumstances? Is there evidence, from a study of history, that during the darkest days of a nation, often it is then that the greatest spiritual revivals 'break out'?
16. What action, on the part of Gideon, shows his great courage in the face of threatening circumstances (Judges 6:25-30)? As it relates to a believer's challenge of the 'false gods' in our society today, why is the reply of Gideon's father to the would-be assassins of Gideon, such a significant reply? Do we not need 'mighty men of valor' today who will honor the truth of God by putting the modern gods of materialism, secularism, and cultism to the test?
17. As in the case of Gideon, do you believe that God favorably and mercifully accommodates Himself to man by allowing man to "put out the fleece", in order to validate what seems to be God's will in a specific situation? (Notes Judges 6:36-40).
18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There are those who are daring but whose daring is not the daring of faith."
19. From the viewpoint of 'Faith', what do you think is the significance of God's drastic reduction of Gideon's army from 32,000 to a mere 300? (Note Judges 7:1-8) What did God do to reassure Gideon and to alleviate the understandable fear which was evoked in Gideon, following the drastic reduction in size of his army? (Judges 7:9-15) Can you think of ways that God uses to reassure us when our fears in the face of an overpowering enemy) seek to paralyze us into inactivity?
20. As in the case of Gideon, are the 'methods of faith' which God commands us to use to accomplish spiritual victories, sometimes very 'strange' and 'unusual'? (Notes Judges 7:15-25) Can you think of some 'unusual ways' that God has used to bring deliverance and healing and restoration in your life? Do you believe in the following popular 'saying': "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform"?
21. With what degree of conviction do you believe in the following statement: "Men who, like Gideon, take God at His word and put their complete trust in God, will always be victorious, regardless of the odds against them"? (Note: "If God be for us, who can be against us?")

22. With your study of Gideon in mind, give your interpretation of the following statement: "God does not win the battle for you, but instead God wins the battle with you." (What is your part and what is God's part, in the accomplishing of spiritual victories?)
23. Do you have an 'Midianites' in your life which are causing you to be oppressed or depressed? How do you propose to overcome your 'Midianites'?



CHAPTER 12

FAITH

SAMSON - WAVERING FAITH

## FAITH

### SAMSON - WAVERING FAITH

#### OUTLINE:

SCRIPTURE: Judges 13 - 16

INTRODUCTION: Why is Samson considered a hero of faith in Hebrews 11? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that, although Samson's early radiant faith was miserably ruined by sin, Samson's faith was finally restored because Samson repented and trusted God again in the latter part of his life.

PROPOSITION: The lesson from Samson's life is this: A Radiant Faith can be Ruined by sin, but a person ruined by sin can be Re-stored to Faith in God through genuine repentance and total surrender to God. A lost faith can be recovered!

#### OUTLINE:

##### I. RADIANT FAITH

- A. Radiant in his Natural Endowments
  - (1) Positive Personality - (Popular in the eyes of his peers)
  - (2) Powerful Physique (Chosen in the eyes of God)
  - (3) Personal Poise (Courage in the face of the enemy)
- B. Radiant in his Unique Consecration
  - (1) The Vow of his Consecration (Nazarite)
  - (2) The Victory from his Consecration

##### II. RUINED FAITH

- A. Cause of His Fall
  - (1) Lack of Dedication (Tired of the disciplines of the good life because he was not fully dedicated to the good and holy life of full consecration).
  - (2) Lack of Discretion (overconfident in the presence of sin)
  - (3) Lack of Discipline (Self-indulgence in the presence of seductive ones)
- B. Results of His Fall
  - (1) Loss of Spiritual Relationship
  - (2) Loss of Strength
  - (3) Loss of Vision
  - (4) Loss of Freedom

### III. RESTORED FAITH

- A. God's Mercy
- B. Samson's Shame - Awakening (to the consequences of his sin)
- C. Samson's Broken Spirit and Fervent Prayer - Repentance and Faith
- D. God's Vindication of Samson (Samson's full surrender involved his self-sacrifice in death to fulfill God's purpose in destroying Israel's enemies, the Philistines. - Full Surrender

**CONCLUSION:** A Radiant Faith can be ruined by Sinning. A lack of dedication, a lack of discretion, and a lack of discipline (self-control) caused Samson's downfall. This resulted in a loss of spiritual relationship, a loss of strength, a loss of vision, and a loss of freedom. Samson's lost faith was restored because he was starkly awakened to the consequences of his sinning, because he genuinely repented of his sin and called upon God in humility and faith, and because he was willing to make a full surrender of himself to God - which, in this case, involved his own self-imposed death in order to defeat and to destroy God's enemies.

## FAITH

### SAMSON - WAVERING FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Judges 13 - 16

If I were to construct a list of 'Faith Heroes' from the Old testament, I would not be inclined to include the name of Samson in that list. His life was far from exemplary. He was flippant, conceited, impulsive, vindictive, and licentious. What character traits in Samson's life were noteworthy enough to include him in a list of 'Faith Heroes' in Hebrews 11? (Note: Hebrews 11: 32)

In studying the life of Samson (Judges 13-16), one is intrigued, cunning, and curious. He is boisterous, impulsive, activist, macho-type of man, lacking in caution, sensitivity, discretion, and wisdom. He tends to 'play around' with the sacred things of life, and seems to be oblivious to the reality of temptation and the pitfalls of sin.

This is all true until he falls with a resounding fall into sin!

How are the mighty fallen? Great is the fall of Samson! His lack of dedication, his lack of discretion, his lack of self-discipline result finally in a terrible fall into sin. Sinning against his God by breaking his covenant vow with God (not to cut his hair), Samson loses his relationship with his God, and he loses his strength and his vision and his freedom. Great is the fall of Samson and great are the consequences of that fall.

But the glory of Samson is seen in the fact that, although Samson lost his physical life because of sin, Samson was restored to his relationship with God to become God's instrument for a mighty victory over God's enemies. Samson "killed many more (of God's enemies—the Philistines) when he died than while he lived." (Judges 16:30)

Why is Samson considered a hero of faith in Hebrews 11? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that, although Samson's early radiant faith was miserably ruined by sin, Samson's faith was finally restored because Samson repented and trusted God again in the latter part of his life.

**PROPOSITION:** The lesson from Samson's life is this: A Radiant Faith can be Ruined by sin, but a person ruined by sin can be Restored to Faith in God through genuine repentance and total surrender to God. A lost faith can be recovered!

## I. RADIANT FAITH

(1) Positive Personality - (Popular in the eyes of his peers)

Note Judges 14:12-14. "He was gifted with a happy disposition. He enjoyed a joke. He was full of amusing pranks. He had a ringing laugh in the presence of which the blues somehow vanished. He had a sparkling eye and a cheerful face, at the approach of which gloom had a way of taking to its heels. So cheerful and jolly was he that they could find no name so fitting as Samson, which simply means sunny." (Old Testament Characters; Chappell; page 121)

(2) Powerful Physique (Chosen in the eyes of God)

Note Judges 14:6. The athletic-type tends to draw attention from the crowds, and it was so with Samson. He is remembered as the strongest man in the world. This was part of his natural endowment, which inspired faith in other people.

(3) Personal Poise (Courage in the face of the enemy)  
Note 14:19 - 15:17.

### B. Radiant in his Unique Consecration

(1) The Vow of his Consecration (Nazarite ) - Note 13:1-5

(2) The Victory from his Consecration

(a) Lord blessed him (13:24 - 25)

(b) "Spirit of the Lord came upon him", giving victory over the enemy (note 14:19 and 15:14-17)

(c) "Samson led Israel" (Note 15:20)

## II. RUINED FAITH

### A. The Causes of His Fall (16: 4-19)

Most, if not all, fall into sin because of either a faulty consecration, or an incomplete consecration or an unguarded consecration. It was so with Samson.

(1) Lack of dedication ( Tired of the disciplines of the good life because he was not fully dedicated to the good and holy life of full consecration.

I believe Samson failed to be fully dedicated to god in his early life. A faulty or incomplete consecration is

sure to cause problems in one's relationship with God eventually. There is no substitute for a complete consecration.

Is your all on the altar of consecration laid,  
Your heart and soul does the Spirit control?  
You can never be blessed and have peace and sweet rest,  
Until you all on the altar is laid!

I don't believe that Samson had ever made a full and personal consecration of himself to the Lord. The fact that he wanted to marry a Philistine woman shows this. (14: 1-2)

I think Samson began to live life on his own energy rather than depending upon the energy of Almighty God. He fell from the life of delight to one of mere duty; from the life of grace to a life of law. When that happens, eventually the law-oriented person does not even attempt any longer to keep laws.

(2) Lack of Discretion (Overconfident in the presence of sin) Samson had no wholesome respect or fear of the enemy. No caution! He did not avoid temptation but threw himself into the trap of temptation. He was careless and insensitive to the perils of life. He found his pleasure in the wrong places among the wrong influences. To flirt with evil is eventually to fall into evil!

This is what happened to Samson! He failed to flee youthful lusts. He played around with fire and eventually got burned and burned badly! God is not obligated to take you through temptation if you have within you ability the strength to go around temptation. Samson did not avoid the appearance of evil. Samson did not even avoid evil itself but courted evil and eventually fell terribly into sin.

Samson failed to separate himself from the evil ways of this evil world. The Bible says, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord. And I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The Bible further says, "*Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love these things you show that you do not really love God; for all these worldly things, these evil desires - the craze for sex, the ambition to buy everything that appeals to you, and the pride that comes from wealth and importance - these are not from God. They are from this evil world itself. And this world is fading away, and these evil, forbidden things will go*

*with it, but whoever keeps doing the will of God will live forever." (I John 2: 15 - 17 Living Bible)*

Samson partied with pagan people and eventually fell into bondage to pagan power. *"Bad company corrupts good character" (ICorinthians 15:33)*

As believers, we too are to separate ourselves from worldly practices. Note question 2 of the series of questions which are asked of new Christians who are candidates for holy Baptism. *"Do you renounce the devil and his works, that you will not follow nor be led by them?"*

It is one thing for Christians to witness to non-believers; it is another thing to compromise your standards in the presence of non-believers. To be in the world to witness for Christ to worldly people is God's will; but to be in the world of worldly people and begin to become worldly in attitudes and in practices is Satan's trick. We are to be in the world but not of the world.

We can never win the world through compromise -by lowering our standards to make our Christianity more appealing to non-believers! Samson failed to have a proper humility before God and a proper fear in the face of sin. Satan is like a roaring lion, prowling around seeking whom he may devour. Samson was nearly devoured by Satan. Never forget, Satan may be a defeated foe but he is not yet a destroyed foe. He is still on the loose in the world seeking to destroy believers. We must watch and pray that we do not enter into temptation. As in the case of Simon Peter, Satan is seeking to sift us like wheat. We must be on our guard against his tactics. Do not see how close to the world you can live and still be a Christian; see how far away from sin you can live and how close you can live to Christ. (Illustration of the various chariot drivers who sought to be hired by the king to drive his coach; the king hired the chariot driver who did not risk driving closest to the cliff but the one who stayed further away from the cliff.)

When Jesus was taken from the garden of Gethsemane to the court to be tried, his disciples followed him 'afar off'. Let us not follow Christ afar off, but seek to follow him closely. In contrast to Samson, let us separate ourselves from worldly practices; let us follow Christ closely, in holiness and purity and in godly fear.

I want a principle within of jealous, godly fear. A sensibility of sin, A pain to feel it near. I want the first approach to feel of pride or fond desire; to catch the wandering of my will, and quench the kindling fire.

Samson lacked sensitivity to the threat of sin; he lacked discretion and wisdom. He was overconfident and proud. He depended upon his own strength rather than upon the strength of God.

Samson derived his pleasure and excitement from the wrong sources.

Today, every believer - not just teenagers - need to be very careful in choosing their playmates (companions), in choosing their pleasures, and in choosing their places of entertainment.

Note that Mary Alice Tenney said about guidelines in choosing leisure: Principles derived from Wesley's writings: "(1) The amusement must be kept secondary as a source of happiness. It must not rival the Christian's love of God. (2) The amusement must be a means, directly or indirectly, of building love of God and others; that is, the amusement must contribute to Christian personality, must not contain an intermixture with evil. "(Living In Two Worlds; page 80, 81)

Samson was indiscreet! He grew careless in the persons he companied with, in the places where he went, and in the pleasures he pursued. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. When Samson let down his guard, he lost his freedom. He finally buckled under the persuasive, evil, nagging influence of Deliah! (Note Judges 16:15-17a) To put yourself needlessly into the enemy's territory is eventually to buckle under the evil pressure of the enemy! Stay in God's country. Stay out of the enemy's territory!

Overconfidence and pride lead to destruction! "A haughty spirit goes before a fall, and pride goes before destruction. "

(3) Lack of Discipline (Self-indulgence in the presence of seductive ones) Chuck Swindall says that Samson was "a he-man with a she-weakness" If a lack of dedication and a lack of discretion were two reasons for Samson's downfall, lust was a third reason. Note Judges 16:1,4. Samson lacked self-control in his sexual and romantic passions.

There is nothing wrong with dating, or romanticism, or marriage, or sex - as long as these experiences are experienced at the right time in the right way.

Sin is a perversion of legitimate desire. Sin is taking something beautiful and turning it into something ugly; taking the sacred and turning it into the profane.

Notice the call to self-discipline which is given to the young man in the seventh chapter of Proverbs (Proverbs 7: 1-27)

## B. Results of His Fall

### (1) Loss of Spiritual Relationship (16:20)

There is no greater tragedy in life than the tragedy of sinning the Lord out of our lives. To flirt with sin is eventually to fall into sin, and falling into sin can lead to a practice of sin that results in grieving the Holy Spirit out of our lives. Sin is serious because it immediately breaks our fellowship with God and because it can eventually even sever our relationship with God. Samson grievously broke his covenant with God by allowing his hair to be cut. His long hair symbolized his covenant with God. When his hair was shaved off, his covenant with God was broken. To break a solemn covenant with God always has serious consequences. The Lord departed from Samson when Samson broke his covenant with God.

### (2) Loss of Strength (16:20)

When the Lord departed, the Lord's mighty imparted strength in Samson's life also departed.

When the Lord leaves a man's life, all moral power and strength is also gone! (Chappell: page 127)

### (3) Loss of Vision (16:21a)

When Samson broke his covenant with the Lord, he not only lost his fellowship with God and his physical strength, but he also lost his eyesight. The Philistines captured him and put out his eyes!

Among the many serious consequences of sin is the consequence of moral blindness. Only those who are pure in heart see God. Only those who walk in the light of God's truth enjoy fellowship with the Heavenly Father. To sin is to lose your vision of God, and to lose your vision is to lose your direction in life.

(4) Loss of Freedom (16:21b)

"This sin cost Samson his freedom. It bound him with fetters of brass. It set him doing the work of slave. That is not what Samson expected. He thought when he left Israel and set out to Gazahe was going to find a larger life and a fuller freedom. That is the promise that sin has made to its votaries all through the centuries. But it is a promise that it has never kept. Sin never means freedom. It means slavery. The truth of the matter is, there is no freedom except in conformity to law...Now, the same rule held for Samson. He also fails to find freedom in the violation of law. He must obey the law of his own being, which is the law of God. ..The very moment you step aside from the path of righteousness, you begin to dress your soul in chains. Every sin you commit is a new thread in the cords that bind you. Samson went into the ways of wrong doing to find a larger liberty and a larger life. But he did not succeed. He only found fetters and a prison house and a slave's task. It is ever so. For 'whosoever committeth sin is the bond slave of sin.' Samson's fatal blunders, then was that he allowed himself to be duped into believing that the way of consecration to God was a way of impoverishment, while the way of rebellion was a way of enrichment....Christ is not come to rob. "He gives light and power. He sets at liberty those who are bound. If you want freedom in the highest sense, you will find it in obedience to him. If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. ' All other courses end in slavery. " (Chappell; page 128-130)

III. RESTORED FAITH (16:22-30)

A. The growth of Samson's hair symbolized the gradual restoration of Samson's lost strength. Samson grievously sinned against the Lord, but God in mercy continued to look after Samson.

B. Samson's Shame (16:23-25) - Awakening (to the consequences of his sin)

C. Samson's Broken Spirit and Fervent Pray - Repentance and Faith (16:26-28)

D. God's Vindication of Samson (Samson's full surrender involved his self sacrifice in death to fulfill God's purpose in destroying Israel's enemies, the Philistines!) - Full Surrender - (16:29-30)

**CONCLUSION:** A Radiant Faith can be ruined by Sinning. A lack of dedication, a lack of discretion, and a lack of discipline

(self-control) caused Samson's downfall. This resulted in a loss of spiritual relationship, a loss of strength, a loss of vision, and a loss of freedom. Samson's lost faith was restored because he was starkly awakened to the consequences of his sinning, because he genuinely repented of his sin and called upon God in humility and faith, and because he was willing to make a full surrender of himself to God - which, in this case, involved his own self-imposed death in order to defeat and to destroy God's enemies.

Why is Samson considered a hero of faith in Hebrews 11? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that, although Samson's early radiant faith was miserably ruined by sin, Samson's faith was finally restored because Samson repented and trusted God again in the latter part of his life.

The lesson from Samson's life is important: A Radiant Faith can be ruined by sin, but a person ruined by sin can be Restored to Faith in God through genuine repentance and total surrender to God. A lost faith can be recovered!

As believers, we too are to separate ourselves from worldly practices. Note question 2 of the series of questions which are asked of new Christians who are candidates for holy Baptism. "Do you renounce the devil and his works, that you will not follow nor be led by them?"

It is one thing for Christians to witness to non-believers; it is another thing to compromise your standards in the presence of non-believers. To be in the world to witness for Christ to worldly people is God's will; but to be in the world of worldly people and begin to become worldly in attitudes and in practices is Satan's trick. We are to be in the world but not of the world.

## FAITH

### SAMSON - WAVERING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Considering the many character flaws and moral failures in Samson's life, what rationale is there for the writer of Hebrews to include Samson in the list of 'Faith Heroes' in Hebrews 11?
2. From a careful study of Samson's life (Judges 13-16), would you agree with the following conclusion: "A Radiant Faith can be Ruined by sin, but a person ruined by sin can be Restored to Faith in God through genuine repentance and total surrender to God"?
3. List several of Samson's positive 'natural endowments' which made him a 'favorite' among men and a 'chosen vessel' by God. (Note Judges 14:12 and 15:17)
4. Describe Samson's 'Nazarite' vow of consecration (Judges 13:1-5), and note the victories that God granted to Samson as a result of his consecration (Judges 13:24-25; 14:19; 15:14-17, 20).
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Most, if not all, fall into sin because of either a faulty consecration, or an incomplete consecration or an unguarded consecration."
6. Does the fact that Samson was boisterous and impulsive in his behavior, and that he lacked proper caution and sensitivity and discretion and wisdom in his relationships with people, indicate that Samson probably failed to make a full and complete dedication of his life to God during his youth? Do you agree with the following statement: "A faulty or incomplete consecration is sure to cause problems in one's relationship to God eventually"?
7. Considering the fact that Samson fell terribly into sin, partly because he was too careless and because he was overconfident in the presence of sin, would you agree with the following statement: "To 'flirt' with evil is eventually to fall into evil"? (Note I Corinthians 10:12)
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is not obligated to take you through temptation if you have within your ability the strength to go around temptation."

9. How would you define and describe 'worldliness', and what does it mean for a believer to separate himself from 'worldliness'? (Note 2 Corinthians 6:17; I John 2:15-17) What specific practices and activities and attitudes do you consider to be 'worldly' and wrong for a dedicated believer to be involved in? Are these areas of 'personal conviction' ('gray areas') where sincere Christians differ? How do you resolve your doubts regarding 'questionable' areas of conduct?
10. What is meant by the statement: "Bad company corrupts good character" (I Corinthians 15:33)? Is it accurate to say that, because Samson partied with pagan people, he eventually fell into bondage to pagan power? What is your response (or reaction) to James statement: "The Christian who is pure and without fault, from God the Father's point of view, is the one...whose soul remains true to the Lord - not soiled and dirtied by its contacts with the world" (James 1:27, Living Bible)? Do you think it is possible for believers to be 'in the world' of human activity (associating with non-believers), and at the same time not be 'of the world' (i.e., keeping oneself from being morally polluted by the world - James 1:27b)? Why or why not? Do you believe that too many young people today - like Samson - tend to 'court' evil places and activities, and tend to associate too closely with 'bad company'? How do you respond to Paul's advice to young Timothy: "Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts" (II Timothy 2:22, Living Bible)?
11. Is it possible to be like Jesus, 'a friend of publicans and sinners' (Luke 7:34), and, at the same time, maintain a vital testimony and a pure heart? Why or why not? Do you agree with the following statement: "We can never win the world through compromise - by lowering our standards to make our Christianity more appealing to non-believers"?
12. Share your response (or reaction) to the following statement: "Although Satan is a defeated foe, he is nevertheless a dangerous foe."
13. What does it mean to follow Christ "afar off", in contrast to following Christ closely?
14. Why, in the presence of temptation and sin, is it dangerous to become overly - confident and unguarded?

15. Why should believers (including Christian teens) be most careful in the choice of playmates (companions), in their choice of pleasures, and in their choice of their places of entertainment?
16. As it relates to spiritual victory in one's life, how would you interpret the following statement: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance"? Do you agree with the following statement: "To put yourself needlessly into the enemy's territory is eventually to buckle under the evil pressure of the enemy"?
17. Share specific illustration to demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "Sin is perversion of a legitimate desire."
18. Why, according to Proverbs 7:1-27 in the Living Bible, is self-discipline in the life of a young man so very important?
19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To flirt with sin is eventually to fall into sin, and falling into sin can lead to a practice of sin that results in grieving the Holy Spirit out of our lives."
20. Considering the terrible 'fall' of Samson, do you believe following statement accurately reflects reality, as it relates to modern-day believers: "Power in our lives remains as long as our obedience to the Lord is maintained."
21. What affect does sin have in the life of a believer, in terms of his spiritual vision and his sense of direction in life? (Judges 16:21)
22. Do you agree with the following statement: "The very moment you step aside from the path of righteousness, you begin to dress your soul in chains"? (Note Galatians 6:7-8; Romans 6:15-23)
23. What three conditions must a backslidden believer meet, if he is to be restored to a vital relationship with God?

**CHAPTER 13**

**FAITH**

**JEPHTHAH - COSTLY FAITH**

## FAITH

### JEPHTHAH - COSTLY FAITH

#### OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:32-34 and Judges 11

INTRODUCTION: We must not evaluate Jephthah against the ethical background of the twentieth century. Sacrificing was not uncommon in the pagan world of Jephthah's day, and the sacrificial system - sacrificing animals - was an integral part of Israelite worship. In spite of all our moral and ethical questions, it is still true that Jephthah made God's honor roll of faith, as recorded in Hebrews 11:32. Why was Jephthah such a great man of faith? Because he was a man of integrity. Integrity means 'being true'. First, Jephthah was true to himself (v. 1-3). Second, Jephthah was true to others (v. 4-11). Third, Jephthah was true to his God (v. 12-29). Fourth, Jephthah was true to his commitments to God (v. 30-40).

PROPOSITION: Faith is inseparably connected with Integrity. To be a man of faith is to be a man of integrity - being true to yourself, being true to others, being true to your God, and being true to your covenants and vows.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. FAITH - in being true to himself, in spite of his tragic background. (Integrity to Self - Judges 11:1-3)
- II. FAITH - in accepting the challenge of duty, in spite of previous rejection. (Integrity Towards Others - Judges 11:4-11)
- III. FAITH - in claiming his God-given promises regarding Israel, in spite of pagan opposition. (Integrity Towards God - Judges 11:12-29)
- IV. FAITH - in keeping his vow to God, in spite of the price of its fulfillment. (Integrity In Covenant-keeping - Judges 11:30-40)

CONCLUSION: Why is Jephthah considered a man of such great faith? Because he was a man of great integrity, and faith is inseparably connected with integrity. Integrity means 'being true'. (1) Jephthah was true to himself (he kept faith in himself at a time when he was rejected by his family); (2) Jephthah was true to others (he refused to nurse any resentment and bitterness toward his family, but instead offered his services of leadership when he was asked to lead

the Israelite army against the Ammonites); (3) Jephthah was true to his God (he maintained faith in God and in God's promises to Israel; he stood his ground against the pagan opposition of the Ammonites who contended and fought for Israelite territory); (4) Jephthah was true to his commitment and vow which he made to God, in spite of the high cost to him personally to fulfill his vow. A renewed commitment to Integrity is the way to spiritual renewal!

## FAITH

### JEPHTHAH - COSTLY FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:32-34 and Judges 11

**INTRODUCTION:** Jephthah is a little known personality in the Old Testament who served as one of the Judges of Israel (approximately 1300 B.C.) His greatness as a man of faith is unfortunately overshadowed by his harsh vow which he made. (Perhaps 'rash' would be better than 'harsh', since at the time he made the vow he did not know the severe measure that would have to be taken to fulfill the vow). Note Judges 11:30, "And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: 'If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.'"

Who should meet Jephthah as he was returning from his victory over the Ammonites but his only and beloved daughter! As difficult as it was for Jephthah to keep his vow to God, the Bible tells us that "He did to her as he had vowed." (Judges 11:39)

We must not evaluate Jephthah against the ethical background of the twentieth century. Sacrificing was not uncommon in the pagan world of Jephthah's day, and the sacrificial system - sacrificing animals - was an integral part of Israelite worship.

In spite of all our moral and ethical questions, it is still true that Jephthah made God's honor roll of faith, as recorded in Hebrews 11:32. Why was Jephthah such a great man of faith? Because he was a man of integrity. Integrity means 'being true'. First, Jephthah was true to himself (v. 1-3). Second, Jephthah was true to others (v. 4-11). Third, Jephthah was true to his God (v. 12-29). Fourth, Jephthah was true to his commitments to God (v. 30-40).

**PROPOSITION:** Faith is inseparably connected with Integrity. To be a man of faith is to be a man of integrity - being true to yourself, being true to others, being true to your God, and being true to your covenants and vows.

I. FAITH - in being true to himself, in spite of his tragic background. (Integrity to Self) - Judges 11:1-3)

"Jephthah...was wronged in his very birth. He was the son of a father who was unfaithful to his marriage vows. Jephthah was a child of shame...Not only did Jephthah have as part of his life tragedy an unclean father, but he had an unclean

mother as well....She was a woman who made it her business day by day to sell herself over the counters of iniquity...His father was unfaithful. His mother was an unclean woman...He was a child of sin, a child of blackness and of night, a child bereft of the inspiration of a good mother's life and the sweet uplift of a pious home...And not only was this man wronged in what he missed, he was equally wronged in what he suffered. Early he was branded with a shame not his own...By and by youthhood comes, and early manhood. The parental estate is to be divided. Jephthah is disinherited. He is driven from among his people. He is forced to flee for his life. And he goes to take refuge in Tob with its mountain fastness and with its rude heathens who are less unkind than those kinsmen of his who claim to be worshippers of Jehovah." (Sermons of Biblical Characters; Chappell; pg. 106-108)

Why is Jephthah listed on the honor roll of faith in Hebrews 11? Probably for many reasons, but for one thing, Jephthah remained true to himself - continued to believe in himself and in his potential - in spite of the fact that all the odds were against him - he had an unfaithful man for his father, he had an unclean woman (a prostitute) for his mother, he had hardhearted siblings for his brothers. His was a poor background - morally, spiritually, and socially, and even materially (for he was disinherited by his family, and, because he was illegitimately born, he received none of the family inheritance).

Family rejection is hard to bear. How can a child who is abused, rejected, forsaken, and shamed have any chance to make it in his future life? When no one else believes in you, how can you find a basis to believe in yourself? When you have no godly models to follow, how can you become a godly person? When you are unloved, how can you learn to love yourself, let alone learn to love others?

"It is not at all difficult to go down when everybody expects you to go down. It is a great thing to have somebody to trust you. That is a tremendous help. As long as you feel that there is somebody who counts on you, who believes in you, you are not without an anchor." (Ibid; 109)

Someone said, "You are what you think other people think you are!" For instance, a child who is told that he is stupid has a hard time, when he is an adult, believing that he is intelligent and capable. A child tends to either live up or to live down to people's expectations

Why is Jephthah so outstanding? Because he refused to allow his poor background to destroy his personal self-esteem and his personal drive towards accomplishment. "He said, 'If nobody else will believe in me I will believe in myself.

Since nobody else will help me, I will help myself. If I am to be robbed of my inheritance I will make a way of my own.'" (Ibid; pg.109)

There is no indication from Scripture that Jephthah took the way of his father and mother and brothers - all of whom lived lives devoid of integrity. All lived immoral lives - the father was immoral in being untrue to his marriage vows; the mother was immoral in her promiscuous way of life; the brothers were immoral in that they hardheartedly rejected their brother and refused to give him his proper inheritance. But, in spite of the negative influence of his family which treated him in such loveless ways, Jephthah took bold positive steps forward - into a new territory and into new challenges. Continuing to believe in himself - in spite of all the odds against him - Jephthah developed his abilities and he became known as a 'mighty warrior'. (v.1)

Honorable is the child or teen who can continue to believe in himself and continue to develop himself, in spite of the fact that he is the object of abuse and rejection. I am amazed how well some children turn out when I know the kind of homes from which they came. There have been great men in history who have come from wretched homes. It is a miracle that they turned out so well.

Think, for instance, of Lord Shaftesbury. "Shaftesbury forced more important social enactments upon the Statute Books than any other British statesman." (Faith and Freedom; pg.107; Bready) "Lord Shaftesbury, oldest son of the sixth Earl of Shaftesbury, was raised in a pagan home. His father, for forty years chairman of various committees in the House of Lords, was a surviving incarnation of eighteenth century materialism and drunkenness. His mother, a descendant of the Duke of Marlborough, was a society gad-about. Once Shaftesbury confided: 'The history of our father and mother would be incredible to most men, and perhaps it would do no good if such facts were recorded.' In the Shaftesbury mansion, however, was a Christian nurse, Maria Millis, a choice product of the Evangelical Revival. She was the reformer's spiritual mother; she taught him his first prayers and literally molded his character. Later, when his name, the Christian world over, was a household word, he, on occasion, would draw from his pocket a lady's watch which always he carried, and exclaim: 'That was given me by the best friend I ever had, my wonderful nurse, Maria Millis.'" (Faith and Freedom; by Bready; pg. 104-105)

Was there someone outside of Jephthah's household who wielded a positive and godly influence on Jephthah? Scripture is silent in giving an answer to this. But today, if you know of a child who is the object of hatred, abuse and rejection, then

use your positive influence to build that child's self-esteem. Believe in that child, guide that child, love that child, help that child to develop his potential as you apply the salve of love on his raw wounds caused by rejection and abuse!

Jephthah is a great hero of faith because he remained faithful to himself in an environment where others were faithless to him. He continued to believe in himself when no one else would believe in him. (By the way, remember it is not a sign of pride to believe in yourself, for until you can believe in yourself as a person greatly loved by God, you cannot really believe in others as persons created with worth and dignity!

II. FAITH - in accepting the challenge of duty, in spite of previous rejection. (Integrity Towards Others - Judges 11:4-11)

Jephthah was a man of great faith because he first maintained confidence in himself at a time when everyone else rejected him.

Secondly, Jephthah was a man of great faith because he did not nurse a grudge against his brothers or father or mother or country. Rejected by his family, he fled to the land of Tob (a heathen country), but his flight away from Israel was not a flight away from Israel's God. Even though he lived for years among heathens, Jephthah did not become heathen in his attitudes or in his religious practices. He stood true to his God amidst a pagan nation. The memory of God's historical miraculous dealings with the Israelites during the time of the Exodus from Egypt remained clear and vivid to Jephthah (as shown by his excellent recall of history in Judges 11:12-19).

Jephthah did not compromise his faith while living in a pagan environment. What a young man does and how he reacts to his pagan environment, after he leaves his home, is a test of the character of the young man. Jephthah remained true to his God, even though he was in a pagan environment and even though he did not initially have the advantage of a loving home! "Your test, as one has said, is not how good you can be if you have a devoted saint on either side of you down at the office. Your test is what your religion can do for you in the midst of a godless crowd." (Ibid;pg.112)

Not only was Jephthah true to himself and true to his God, while in a foreign land, but Jephthah determined to develop his abilities and talents while away from his country and his family. "He set to work. He did not spend his time hunting up his neighbors to tell them of his misfortunes. He did not put in his time boasting of what he would do if he were as well off as his half brothers down in Israel. He went to work

to build his fortune in the here and now. And little by little he won." (Ibid:109)

How easy it is, if we have been abused, rejected, slighted, or ignored by someone, to spend time feeling sorry for ourselves, to spend time licking our wounds, to spend time brooding or plotting to get even.

Jephthah did not preoccupy himself with his past wounds; rather, he preoccupied himself with the opportunities of the present. He did not let his past problems jeopardize his present potential and his future possibilities! He was forward-moving, industrious, creative, hard-working.

It is still true that revenge and bitterness can destroy people. Jephthah did not allow his past bitter treatment to make him bitter.

Jephthah is great because his faith kept him confident towards himself when everyone sought to shame him. Also, Jephthah is great because his faith enabled him to forgive his past offenders and to develop his present opportunities. Faith enabled him, not only to believe in himself, but also to continue to believe in people - in spite of adverse circumstances and in spite of unfair treatment. He could have grown sour towards people in general, but he didn't.

The real test of his faith and of his ability to forgive his past came in the form of the request of the elders of Gilead.

*Some time later, when the Ammonites made war on Isreel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. "Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" The elders of Gilead said to him, "Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be our head over all who live in Gilead." Jephthah answered, "Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me - will I really be your head?" The elders of Gilead replied, "The Lord is our witness; we will certainly do as you say." So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the Lord in Mizpah. Judges 11:4-11*

"Jephthah heard their request and promised to help them. I think that was fine of him. It would have been so easy for him to have said, 'Oh, yes, you kicked me out when I was a little helpless waif. When I needed help you would not give it. When I needed help you laughed at my

childish tears. Now you need help, I will laugh at you.' But there was nothing of revenge in him. Wronged as he had been, he would not nurse his wrongs. He would not allow his bitter treatment to make him bitter." (Ibid;111)

What lesson in faith do we learn from Jephthah? The lesson of forgiveness! Jephthah chose to believe in his family and in his nation, and to use his present abilities to meet their needs, in spite of the fact of his family's past rejection of him! He chose to act redemptively - to defend and to help them in an hour of their crisis - rather than to act vindictively and revengefully! Instead of growing bitter through afflictions, he grew better!

Have we learned truly to forgive those who have socially rejected us, or do we hold grudges and nurse bitterness in our heart? The Bible warns us against having a bitter spirit: "*See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile man.*" (Hebrews 12:15)

III. FAITH - in claiming his God given promises regarding Israel, in spite of pagan opposition. (Integrity Towards God) - Judges 11:12-29.

When the pagan Ammonites contended for the land which Israel claimed as its own, Jephthah stood firm against the Ammonite king. Jephthah stood upon the promise of Israel's God in face of the threats and attempted intimidation of the pagan king: "Whatever the Lord our God has given us, we will possess." (v.24)

Jephthah stood his ground theologically and kept Israel's ground geographically - even though it cost Jephthah and Israel a war. ("Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands." v.32)

Jephthah maintained faith in the faithfulness of God's promises, even though outside evil forces sought to take away from Israel what God had promised to Israel.

God has given every Christian today certain promises and a rich inheritance. We have every right as children of God - as members of the Church of Christ, the New Israel - to claim our inheritance and enjoy our God-given blessings.

Therefore, in the face of cynical attacks, or active persecution, or passive indifference, stand your ground as children of God. Do not let any unbeliever intimidate you or take away your confidence, or confuse your mind, or rob you of your God-given blessings, Cast not away your confidence in

God. Great is your reward. The promised land belongs to you:  
Don't let the Ammonites have it!

"Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God."

Paul exhorts us to 'fight the good fight of faith'. Keep the faith. The Ammonites today are those who would try to rob us of our rightful territory - our territory of confidence in ourselves, our territory of assurance of salvation, our territory of trust in God, our territory of faith in the infallible Word of God, our territory of belief in a future in heaven.

We must stand our ground against any force - human or demonic - that seeks to take away our faith in ourselves, our God, our Bible, our mission, our future in heaven. *"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes....Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."* (Ephesians 6:11-13) *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you!"* (James 4:7)

Jephthah was a man of great faith because he claimed God's promises, stood his ground against the enemy, and fought against the enemy until he won the battle. He put his trust in his God. The results? *"The Lord gave them into his hands....Thus Israel subdued Ammon."* (Judges 11:32,33)

Faith maintains confidence in God and in God's promises, regardless of the oppression of the enemy!

Thus far we have noted Jephthah's integrity in three ways: integrity towards himself; integrity towards others (forgiving his family instead of holding grudges and nursing hurts); integrity towards his God (believing and claiming God's promises regardless of opposition from the enemy.)

Fourthly, we will look at Jephthah's integrity in keeping his commitments to God, regardless of the difficulty of keeping his vow.

IV. FAITH - in keeping his vow to God, in spite of the price of its fulfillment. (Integrity In Covenant-keeping) - Judges 11:30-40

"Jephthah went to battle from the altar of prayer. As he went he made a vow. It is the vow for which he has been most severely criticized. It is a vow that has caused his name

among some to be branded with shame. He vowed that if God would give him the victory he would offer to Him whatever first came out of the door of his house to meet him on his return. It was a rash vow, I am ready to admit. Yet rash as it was, I do not find it in my heart to be severely critical of him...Do not judge him in the light of the twentieth century. Judge him in the light of the day in which he lived. And remember this, that he had the manhood to keep his promise. Remember that he had the sturdy courage to pay his vow. `I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.'" (Ibid;pg. 112,114)

What can we learn from Jephthah regarding the making of vows? First, guard against making rash vows. *"It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of God."* (Ecclesiastes 5:5-7)

Second, be committed enough to God to make decisive vows to God. Jephthah admittedly made a rash vow to God. He might be faulted for his impulsiveness, but he cannot be faulted for his zeal, enthusiasm, commitment, and wholeheartedness! The Bible warns against double-mindedness ("A double-minded man is unstable in all his way"). The Bible warns against lukewarmness (To the Church at Laodicea a warning was issued, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth."* (Revelations 3:15,16)

Jephthah was not lukewarm in his devotion to God; he was 'on fire' with zeal for the cause of God and wished to show his devotion to God by offering a sacrifice to his God. Notes Clovis Chappell regarding many modern-day church members: "We are so prudent. We have such admirable possession of all our faculties. We are in danger of dying of self-control. This man (Jephthah) in the white heat of his enthusiasm made a solemn pledge to the Lord of that which was destined to be infinitely the most precious thing in his life. But some of us in our prudence will not even make a pledge of a few dollars. We say we do not know how well we will be fixed next week or next month or next year." (Ibid;pg.113)

Third, be sure decisively to keep your vows to God and to others, when once the vows are made. *"When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow."* (Ecclesiastics 5:4)

"A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
A neverdying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill;  
O may it all my pow'rs engage  
To do my Master's will!

#### A Charge To Keep I Have

Faith is inseparably connected with integrity in keeping the vows and promises we have made to God. Jephthah was a hero of faith because he fulfilled his vow to God, in spite of the fact that he had to give up the most precious person in his world in order to keep his promise to God! "His promise involves measureless sacrifice. To keep it is to put out every star in his sky. It is to pluck up every flower in his garden. It is to change life's music into discord. It is to take from him the one he loves far better than he loves his own life. But even though the price is big, he will not refuse to pay it. Even though his promise is hard, he will keep it. 'I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back.' (Ibid:pg.105)

What should we do as a result of studying the life of Jephthah? We should renew our commitments to God and to one another in all the various relationships of life.

This involves, most importantly, a renewed commitment to follow God. (Revelations 21:8) Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) We must renew our vow to follow Christ, regardless of the price involved.

We must renew our commitment to our vows to the Church. We need to renew our commitments to our Baptismal covenant and to the covenant we made with God and the church when we dedicated our children to the Lord. We must renew our commitments to our marriage vows, etc. etc.

**CONCLUSION:** Why is Jephthah considered a man of such great faith? Because he was a man of great integrity, and faith is inseparable connected with integrity. Integrity means 'being true'. (1) Jephthah was true to himself (he kept faith in himself at a time when he was rejected by his family), (2) Jephthah was true to others (he refused to nurse any resentment and bitterness toward his family, but instead offered his services of leadership when he was asked to lead the Israelite army against the Ammonites); (3) Jephthah was true to his God (he maintained faith in God and in God's

promises to Israel; he stood his ground against the pagan opposition of the Ammonites who contended and fought for Israelite territory); (4) Jephthah was true to his commitment and vow which he made to God, in spite of the high cost to him personally to fulfill his vow. Let us follow the example of Jephthah:

- (1) Integrity towards one's self (v.1-3)
- (2) Integrity towards others (v.4-11)
- (3) Integrity towards God (v.12-29)
- (4) Integrity towards covenant commitments (v.30-40)

A renewed commitment to Integrity is the way to spiritual renewal!

## FAITH

### JEPHTHAH - COSTLY FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Briefly stated, in what four ways did Jephthah demonstrate that he was a man of unusual integrity? Is it possible to be a person of true faith without, at the same time, being a man of genuine integrity?
2. According to Judges 11:1-3, in what ways was Jephthah wronged by others. What can a teen, who is terribly mistreated and rejected by his family, learn from a study of Jephthah, as it relates to faith?
3. Have you ever known a person who, like Jephthah, continued to believe in himself and who chose to respond positively, in spite of the fact that he came from a very 'poor background' (morally, spiritually, socially, and materially)?
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "You are what you think other people think you are!" Is it not hard for one to become a godly person if he has no godly models to follow? Would you agree that Jephthah proved himself to be an outstanding example of a person of faith because he refused to allow his 'poor' background to destroy his personal self-esteem and his personal drive towards accomplishment?
5. Is a child 'destined' to be a failure in life, simply because he was raised by parents who were devoid of integrity and who were immoral in their lifestyle? Why or why not? Can you think of children or teens who have continued to believe in themselves and who have continued to develop themselves, in spite of the fact that they were the objects of cruel abuse and parental rejection? Can you think of a rejected child or teen whom you could personally befriend and encourage and support (materially or spiritually)?
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is not a sign of pride to believe in yourself, for until you can believe in yourself as a person greatly loved by God, you cannot really believe in others as persons created with worth and dignity." Do you believe that many problems in life and in human relationships ultimately find their cause in persons having a low self-esteem? Why or why not? What is the difference between 'pride' and 'self-esteem', between 'humility' and 'humiliation'?

7. What lessons, from a study of Jephthah's life, can one learn that will help him to cope with his pagan environment? (Note Judges 11:4-11) What is your response to the following statement: "What a young man does and how he reacts to his pagan environment, after he leaves his home, is a test of the character of the young man"?
8. What lessons, from a study of Jephthah's life, can one learn that will help him effectively to deal with his past bitter experiences? How does faith in God enable one to forgive his past offenders and to maintain confidence in himself in spite of cruel rejection?
9. What event in Jephthah's life allowed him to demonstrate his spirit of forgiveness rather than a spirit of revenge? (Note Judges 11:4-11) Can you think of a time in your life when you were able to demonstrate forgiveness rather than revenge? (Note Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:17-21) Do you believe, as a result of studying the reactions of Jephthah to his persecutors, that one characteristic of a 'great faith' is a great ability to forgive offenders? Can an unforgiving spirit destroy faith and sever one's relationship with God? (Note Hebrews 12:15; Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25)
10. What does Jephthah's confrontation with the Ammonites, and his battle against them, teach us regarding our confrontation with cynical critics who would like to dispossess us of our spiritual heritage? What do our spiritual enemies - our 'Ammonites' - attempt to 'steal' from us today? In what ways can we 'stand our ground against our foes' today? (Ephesians 6:10-17; James 4:7)
11. As seen from a study of Jephthah's actions and reactions in the face of opposition is 'faith' active or passive, aggressive or retreatist? Do you agree with the following statement: "Jephthah was a man of great faith because he claimed God's promises, stood his ground against the enemy, and fought against the enemy until he won the battle"? Are determination and persistence and perseverance basic ingredients of true Biblical faith?
12. How does a study of Jephthah's life dramatically demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith is measured by one's integrity in keeping one's vows which he has made to God and to one's fellowman, regardless of the sacrifice involved in keeping those vows"?

13. Why, according to Ecclesiastes 5:5-7, is the taking of a vow such a serious matter?
14. Is the failure to take a vow before God an indication of wise caution or is it an indication of spiritual lukewarmness and double-mindedness? (Note Ecclesiastes 5:5; Revelation 3:15,16; James 1:6-8)
15. In what ways does Jephthah's zeal and enthusiasm and passion for God, (imperfectly expressed through making a 'rash' vow) judge and condemn our modern-day tendencies to be passionless, calculating, prudent, and indifferent in our response to God's work and His will? (Note Revelation 3:15,16)
16. What does Ecclesiastes 5:4 teach us regarding the fulfillment of vows? Do you agree with the following statement: "Faith is inseparably connected with integrity in keeping the vows and promises we have made to God, regardless of how hard those vows are to keep"? (Notes Psalms 15:4b; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21)
17. Do you agree with the following conclusion regarding Jephthah: "Jephthah was a hero of faith because he fulfilled his vow to God, in spite of the fact that he had to give up the most precious person in the world in order to keep his promise to God"?
18. From your own experience and from your observation of others, which one of the following would you consider to be the biggest reason why persons are so reticent to make vows to God: (a) Wholesome fear of making 'rash' vows to God, (b) Ignorance of God's will, (c) Indifference to spiritual matters, (d) Lack of total commitment to God?
19. What are some of the vows (commitments) which God calls modern-day, faith-oriented people to make? Do these vows, which you have made to God or to your church or to specific persons, need to be reaffirmed or to be renewed today?
20. With what degree of conviction do you believe in the truth of the following statement: "A renewed commitment to integrity is the way to spiritual renewal"?

**CHAPTER 14**

**FAITH**

**SAMUEL (HIS CHILDHOOD) - CULTIVATED FAITH**

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHILDHOOD) - CULTIVATED FAITH

#### OUTLINE

**SCRIPTURE:** I Samuel 1:1-2;10

**INTRODUCTION:** What does it mean to train up a child in a godly home? It means to train him up in a home where faith in God is exemplified and where the way of faith is easily accepted and followed by the child. Samuel grew up in such a home. The context in which Samuel's faith was developed involved some wise responses on the part of at least three persons. Samuel's faith was born in an atmosphere where he had a worshipping father, a humble mother, and an understanding pastor.

**PROPOSITION:** Cultivating faith in your children is no accident. It is the result of prayerful and diligent and loving labor. The faithful child is the result of the loving labors of faithful parents.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. CONTENT OF FAITH
  - A. A Worshipping Father
  - B. A Humble Mother
  - C. An Understanding Pastor
  
- II. CULTIVATION OF FAITH
  - A. A God-Blessed Conception
  - B. A Private Nurture
  - C. A Public Dedication
  - D. A Prayer of Praise

**CONCLUSION:** What are the elements in the cultivation of faith in a young child's life: (1) Godly parents who believe the conception of their child was the direct result of God's answer to prayer, (2) Godly training of the small child in the loving atmosphere of a God-fearing home, which training makes it easy for the young child to make an early surrender of his life to God; (3) Public dedication of the child within the sanctuary of the Lord, for special service to God; (4) Joyful parents whose surrender of their child to God is done in a spirit of gratitude and praise to God.

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## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHILDHOOD) - CULTIVATED FAITH

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 1:1-2:10

INTRODUCTION: Why do some children turn out so well and other children turn out so poorly? That is not an easy question to answer! It is easy to say that when a child turns out poorly, it is really the parents' fault! It can't be denied that many permissive-type parents fail properly to discipline their children when they are young, and thus these parents create an atmosphere in which their children fail to curb their willful tendencies. Susanna Wesley, the great mother of John Wesley, believed that the first responsibility of parents was to subdue and to mold the will of their children to obey their parents. But some children go astray morally and spiritually in spite of the fact that they were reared in godly homes by wise parents. Ultimately all human beings, including children, adolescents, and adults are responsible for the outcome of their lives!

However, after recognizing the possibility of children going astray morally, in spite of their godly training in the home, it can be said with assurance that the likelihood of a child going astray morally is not nearly as great if he is raised in a godly home. Train up a child in the way that he should go, and the likelihood of him going astray when he is an adult is not very great!

But what does it mean to train up a child in a godly home? It means to train him up in a home where faith in God is exemplified and where the way of faith is easily accepted and followed by the child.

Samuel grew up in such a home. Parents, if you wish to learn how to cultivate faith in your child's life, then study the early life of Samuel.

The context in which Samuel's faith was developed involved some wise responses on the part of at least three persons. Samuel's faith was born in an atmosphere where he had a worshipping father, a humble mother, and an understanding pastor.

The cultivation of Samuel's early faith began with godly parents who believed that Samuel's birth was the result of a direct answer to prayer. The cultivation of Samuel's early faith was made possible because of the godly training which Samuel received in the loving atmosphere of a God-fearing home which enabled Samuel early to put his trust in his parents's God. The cultivation of his faith was greatly enhanced

because Samuel was raised by a grateful mother whose praise of God, following her public dedication of Samuel, found expression in her hymn of praise as recorded in I Samuel 2:1-10.

**PROPOSITION:** Cultivating faith in your children is no accident. It is the result of prayerful and diligent and loving labor. The faithful child is the result of the loving labors of faithful parents. Let us then look at both the context and the cultivation of faith as it relates to raising children who are enabled to become strong in their personal faith in God.

## I. CONTEXT OF FAITH

Samuel was destined to become one of Israel's greatest leaders. He is considered to have been one of the greatest men of faith in the Old Testament. What was the context that gave birth to this great faith?

### A. A Worshipping Father (1:3)

Samuel was born to godly parents who were regular worshippers in the House of God! No greater heritage can a child have than this! "In terms of today we would say they stand out as loyal members and supporters of the local church." (Andrew Blackwood; Preaching From Samuel; pg.19)

Fortunate is the child who is born to parents that regularly attend Church, for such a child has the opportunity to develop early in his life the habit of regular church attendance. The influence of parents on children is great! The father who habitually attends church is likely to produce a child who regularly attends Church.

The father who regularly worships the Lord and faithfully sacrifices unto the Lord (1:3) is the father whose example his children are likely to follow. Many a great spiritual leader can look back to the days of his childhood and remember the Godly influence of a devout father whose worship of God was intense and consistent. 'Year after year' Samuel's father worshipped and sacrificed to the Lord. Fathers, the greatest gift you can give your sons and daughters is the example of a consistent and wholehearted worship of God! Will your children someday look back upon their childhood and remember you as a father who faithfully worshipped the Lord daily in the home and weekly in the local Church? Or will they remember you as a father who was inconsistent in your devotions to God?

There are many children who remember their father as a man who was inconsistent in his devotions and unfaithful in his attendance at the local church. Will your children have the sweet memories of their father attentively worshipping God in His holy sanctuary with God's people, or will they remember you as a father who gave them many flimsy excuses for not attending the local church?

What are some of the flimsy excuses which half-hearted fathers offer their children today for not attending Church regularly? Here are some of them: (a) "I need to relax on Sunday mornings and therefore I don't have time to attend Church services." (b) "I need to be with my family and relatives on Sunday. If I am enjoying my family rather than attending Church services, God will surely understand." (c) "I need to work and therefore I can't come to Church services on Sunday." (d) "I need to take vacations occasionally and don't have time to worship God in Church on Sundays." (e) "I am ill and therefore I can't go to Church." (f) "I have business pursuits that I am involved in which take me out of town on weekends. Therefore, I can't come to Church." (g) "I don't understand what is being said at Church, so I simply study my Bible at Home." (h) "I am discouraged because of my circumstances and therefore I don't feel like going to Church." (i) "I am 'trying out' several churches before I settle on attending one church regularly."

Samuel's father "year after year went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh." (1 Samuel 1:3). Do you as a father, or as a father-to-be, worship God day-by-day in your home, and week-by-week in your local church? Remember, the religious activities that you as a father practice are likely to be the same activities that your sons and daughters practice! Seldom have I seen a teenage son continue faithfully to attend Church if his father does not faithfully attend church. Like father - like son!

One of the reasons why Samuel became a great man of faith was because he had a faithful father - a father who faithfully worshipped God in God's House at Shiloh!

#### B. A Humble Mother (1:10)

Samuel's mother was a godly woman. Having no children was a great disgrace to her. With a broken heart and an empty hand, she cried out to the Lord for mercy and for favor. Fervent was the prayer of Hannah: "In bitterness

of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord." (v.10)  
The Scriptures tell us that God will not despise a broken  
and a contrite spirit.

Is it any wonder that Samuel turned out to be such a  
great and godly man, when one considers that he was the  
product of earnest and humble prayer? Also, Samuel was  
dedicated to the Lord, ever before he was conceived:  
"And she made a vow, saying, `O Lord Almighty, if you  
will only look upon your servant's misery and remember  
me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then  
I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life,  
and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Mothers, what will your children most remember you for?  
For having dressed beautifully, cooked wonderfully,  
worked diligently, earned bountifully? It is not wrong  
for a mother to have a nice wardrobe, or to put a nice  
spread of food on a table, or to present a spotless and  
well-decorated household to her friends, or to be  
productive in her world of commerce. But, if these are  
the best things you can offer your present child or your  
child-to-be, then your gifts to your children are  
inadequate! What should your children most remember you  
for? The same thing that Samuel most remembered his  
mother for! A humble, praying, mother! Do your children  
often see you in a quiet corner of your home reading your  
Bible or on your knees beside your bed praying?

The great men of history often recall memories of their  
godly mothers who lived humbly and who prayed often!

#### C. An Understanding Pastor (1:17)

Fortunate is the child whose mother was shepherded by a  
godly pastor. Eli, the priest, was not without his  
faults as we shall see. In fact, some of his faults were  
very serious faults, so serious that they eventually  
incurred the judgement of God! But in I Samuel 1:15-17  
we see that, although Eli, in viewing Hannah's moving  
lips and anguished appearance, at first thought Hannah  
was drunk, he soon realized the true spiritual condition  
of Hannah. He soon became the comforter and sustainer of  
a brokenhearted woman. When he learned of the anguish  
and grief of Hannah, Eli spoke words of hope and cheer to  
Hannah: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant  
you what you have asked of him." (2:17)

"Eli concerned himself with the burdens of a single  
breaking heart...he took time to deal with the sorrows  
of a childless wife. How else could he have done so much

to assure the coming of better days for the fatherland?"  
(Ibid:23)

The place where Hannah poured out her anguished soul to God is significant! It was near the doorposts of the Temple. Hannah brought her burden to both the Lord and to the Lord's Temple where she received not only divine help but also human help! Indeed, she received divine help through human consolation.

Her burden was not kept from her priest! We are to cast our burdens upon the Lord, but we are also to share our burdens with God's shepherds - the ministers in the sanctuary.

Is it any wonder that Samuel was so free later to work in God's temple when one considers how Samuel's mother was open to share her life concerns with the priest of God's Temple, ever before Samuel was born?

What is the soil (the context) in which faith can germinate and grow? A worshipping father, a humble mother, an understanding pastor these are the persons whose actions, previous to the birth of Samuel, help make possible the growth of Samuel's faith after Samuel is born. These persons, with their wise responses, provide the context for the healthy development of faith in the early life of Samuel.

## II. CULTIVATION OF FAITH

### A. A God-Blessed Conception (1:19-20)

Blessed is the child whose very conception is the result of God's blessing! "Where some other desolate waif seems to be 'damned into the world', because of the godless passions that attend his conception and birth, wee baby Samuel was blessed of God before he was born."  
(Blackwood; pg.24)

It is true that each child must personally exercise his positive volition to surrender to God's will, but the child whose conception is the result of a direct answer to a godly mother's earnest prayer surely is a most blessed child!

### B. A Private Nurture (1:21-23)

Although it is not explicitly stated, I am convinced that Hannah's physical nursing and weaning was only a small, though significant, part of her nurturing of Samuel. Knowing the kind of woman Hannah was, and knowing the

kind of man that Samuel turned out to be, it is certain that Samuel received much spiritual nurturing during his young childhood in the home of his parents. During the most formative period of young Samuel's life, he was daily learning to love and to trust his parents' God.

Fortunate is the child who never remembers not loving God, who never sowed his 'wild oats' of sin, who always had a tender heart for the things of God.

The younger a child is when he truly repents of his sins, the better. Valerie Channel shared with me the occasion when her youngest son, Chad, accepted Jesus as his Savior. It was after he had watched a Billy Graham evangelistic service on T.V. when he was just four years old. After he saw many coming forward during Billy Graham's invitation to the crowd to accept Christ, little Chad got up and quickly asked his mother to walk with him down the hall way of their house into his bedroom. When his mother asked why, he said he wanted her to kneel with him beside his bed in order that he might pray to be saved! A four year old - saved!

My wife has a cousin - Myra Adamson, who is a famous Free Methodist missionary in Africa - who is a daughter of missionary parents. She was taught to love Jesus from the time she was born. She never remembers when she was not a Christian!

There are many young children who enjoyed the saving benefits of Christ's atonement when they were incapable of refusing it, and who gladly received the saving benefits of the atonement when they were first barely able to exercise personal saving faith in Jesus Christ! Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14 NIV)

A young man who was raised in a Christian home and who early in his life had accepted Christ as Savior, heard a famous evangelist vividly describe the marvelous transformation of dope addicts and other great sinners. The Christian youth began to bemoan the fact that he was not saved from such a terrible life of sin. The Christian youth, as it were, felt that God's grace in saving him from sin was not as greatly or dramatically demonstrated as when God saved the drug addicts.

It is true that God's grace is marvelously demonstrated when sin abounds. When sin abounds, God's grace much more abounds! Praise God! God can save the foulest! There is no stain of sin that has gone so deep but what

Christ's blood can go deeper yet! But let us also remember that the grace that prevents one from becoming a great sinner is as great as the grace that saves a great sinner. Sin is never a virtue. We need not become a great sinner to prove that there is a great Savior!

I have never heard an individual say that he regretted that he was a Christian, but I have heard scores say that they regretted that they did not become a Christian earlier in life! God forgives sin, but the scars of sin (sin's consequences) often remain long after the sin has been forgiven! The preventing grace of God is as great as the healing grace of God!

### C. A Public Dedication (1:24-28)

Samuel, the one whose birth was the result of God's answer to prayer, and the one whose early childhood was attended with godly training, is the one who is publicly dedicated to the Lord in the Lord's House at Shiloh. Said Hannah, as she turned over the boy Samuel into the case and keeping of Eli the priest, "*So now I give him to the Lord, for his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.*" (Samuel 1:28)

The boy Samuel served well and long in the House of the Lord, under the supervision of Eli, the High Priest. Hannah literally gave her child to the Lord.

Wise is the parent who realizes that his child is a gift from God, loaned to him for a few short years, to be surrendered to so-called 'full-time Christian service' if the Lord should choose.

"These glowing words stand out still more boldly in one of our most interesting current books, the autobiography of Bishop Edwin Hughes. When his eldest son and namesake was being set apart as a deacon, the father represented the family. Afterward when the son was being ordained as a Methodist clergyman, his mother delivered the charge. In words of tenderness and charm she told about the 'Mother's Bible within our larger Bible.' She said that with the coming of their first-born son both she and the bishop had dedicated the infant to the service of God. All the while she must have been thinking in terms of Hannah. Here follows a portion of the charge by Mother Hughes:

"In essence, this story is our own...We gave you to God. We have never taken our gift away from him...We have not felt that in giving you to God we have taken you away from ourselves. Rather have we

felt that since the day when you concluded to preach the gospel of his grace and love, you have been ours more than ever - because our parenthood is itself from God, with whom we reverently and gladly share his own gift.

It does not seem long since that morning when God placed you in my arms. I had no feeling then that you left his arms when you came to mine. Again tonight, as I have so often done, I place you in the arms of God. I have no feeling now that you leave my arms when I place you in his. You are my son the more because you are his son the more. I gladly give you to Christ utterly and forever. You are to be the Savior's minister. He will keep you, guide you, comfort you, strengthen you. If by his providence I go to the Heavenly Home before you do, I shall wait for your coming in the proud confidence that, even as once you came back to me with the decoration of honor on the worn coat of a young soldier, so then you will come to me with the badge of the Lord Jesus upon your heart, and may its inscription be, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Blackwood, pg 27)

Faith in Samuel was carefully cultivated from the very beginning of his life. He was conceived in the atmosphere of tender love and strong faith. He was trained in his early childhood by a godly mother whose faith in God was vital and whose faithfulness to God was demonstrated when she kept her vow to God and publicly presented her son to Eli for temple service. Samuel's faith was cultivated as he obediently served Eli in performing his daily tasks in God's House at Shiloh during his growing, childhood years.

#### D. A Prayer of Praise (2:1-10)

Faith grows in the atmosphere of praise and gratitude! Samuel became a man of great faith because he was raised by a mother whose life overflowed with great gratitude. The tender plants of faith grow well in the rich soil of gratitude! Hannah did not go back on her word of promise to God. After she had physically weaned and spiritually nurtured her son in the private atmosphere of her home, she gladly presented her son for public dedication in the House of the Lord at Shiloh. No sour spirit in Hannah! She gladly and joyously relinquished her child to Eli and to the Lord's service.

Fortunate is the child who has a mother who is humble enough to cry out to God in her distress (as Hannah did

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHILDHOOD) - CULTIVATED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why do you think that some children, when they grow up, turn out so well and other children, when they grow up, turn out so poorly? Do you believe that all human beings, including children and youth, are ultimately responsible for the outcome of their lives?
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and the likelihood of him going astray when he is an adult is not very great!"
3. How important do you think it is for the parents of a child to regularly to attend Church with their child? (Note I Samuel 1:3; Hebrews 10:25)
4. With what degree of conviction do you agree with the following statement: "The greatest gift that parents can give their sons and daughters is the example of a consistent and wholehearted worship of God"?
5. What are some of the flimsy excuses which half-hearted fathers offer their children today for not attending church regularly?
6. What, according to the example of Hannah, should children most remember their mother for?
7. What characteristic in the life of Eli marked him as a truly great 'pastor'? (Note I Samuel 1:12-17)
8. When believers are heavily burdened with troubles, should they bear these burdens alone or should they openly share these burdens with others? (Note I Samuel 1:15-17) What does it mean for you to be your 'brother's keeper'? (Note Galatians 6:2) Can you think of someone that "needs your shoulder to cry on"? Are people of great faith always characterized as people of great compassion and understanding, eager to serve and to help carry other people's burdens? Does God often bring consolation to broken-hearted persons without using other people (like Eli) as His 'instrument' of comfort? (Note 2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

9. Considering the circumstances surrounding Samuel's birth and early childhood, what do you believe is the best context in which faith can germinate and grow in the life of a small child?
10. Why can it be said that a child whose conception is the result of a direct answer to a godly mother in earnest prayer, is a most blessed child? (Note I Samuel 1:19-20)
11. Tell why you agree with the following statement: "Fortunate is the child who never remembers not loving God, who never sowed his 'wild oats' of sin, who always had a tender heart for the things of God." Is it possible for a very young child to become a Christian? What is Jesus' attitude toward young children?
12. Do you believe that the grace of God that prevents a child from becoming a great sinner is as great as the grace of God that saves a man who has gone deeply into sin? Why or why not? Is it true that, while God is able to forgive great sins, often the 'moral scars' (social and physical consequences of sin) remain for a lifetime, even after the sins themselves have been forgiven? Share an illustration that demonstrates the truth of this latter statement.
13. Are children both a 'gift from God' and 'an offering to God'? Do you agree with the following statement: "Wise is the parent who realizes that his child is a gift from God, loaned to him for a few short years, to be surrendered to so-called 'full-time Christian service' if the Lord should choose"? Is there a tendency, on the part of most parents, to be 'possessive' with their children?
14. Share a notable example, from your personal experience or from your reading, of parents who gladly surrendered their child to the Lord for "full-time Christian service", and who, like Hannah, rejoiced exceedingly (I Samuel 2:1-10) as a result of obedience to the Lord.
15. What is the emphasis and the theme in Hannah's hymn, as recorded in I Samuel 2:1-10? Does Hannah's example of exalting God point out the importance of being more God-centered and God-conscious, rather than being so self-centered and self-conscious? Do you agree that true faith grows best in the atmosphere of praise and gratitude?

16. With what degree of conviction do you agree with the following statement: "Fortunate is the child who has a mother who is humble enough to cry out to God in her distress (as Hannah did when she prayed for a child), and who is grateful enough to sing a hymn of praise to her God because of answered prayers"? Can great faith in the life of a woman always be measured by great humility and by great gratitude?
  
17. In summary, what are the elements in cultivation of faith in a young child's life?

**CHAPTER 15**

**FAITH**

**SAMUEL (HIS CHALLENGES) - CHALLENGED FAITH**

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHALLENGES) - CHALLENGED FAITH

#### OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 2:12-26

INTRODUCTION: Samuel served the Lord daily in the House of the Lord at Shiloh, under the supervision of Eli the priest. It is no wonder that his service to the Lord was so joyous, for he was reared in his early years by a mother whose praise to God was spontaneous and whose prayers to God were filled with gratitude (I Samuel 2:1-10). A grateful mother produced a grateful son!

PROPOSITION: What made Samuel such a great person? Samuel was great because Samuel obeyed the call of God in the midst of circumstances which challenged his faith. A great faith is a faith which accepts the call of God in spite of the challenges of the world! A great faith can only be maintained when there is a stubborn resistance against sin and a humble submission to God! In looking at the young life of Samuel, we may learn how to maintain a vital faith in the face of certain challenges from the world. Faith does not grow in a vacuum! Rather, faith grows in the 'rough and tumble' of every-day living, as we are confronted with the world's evil.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST GREED
- II. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST IRREVERENCE
- III. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST LICENTIOUSNESS

CONCLUSION: "There is no way to victory except a walk of carefulness under the constant guidance and in instant obedience to the Holy Spirit. Whether this seems hard or not, depends largely on whether we have made the great committal or not. If we love Jesus Christ as we ought to love Him, with all there is of us and without reservation, then this will seem not arduous but a glorious, victorious life of love and service for Him. To the unsundered it will seem irksome and dreary indeed." (Everett Lewis Cattell)

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHALLENGES) - CHALLENGED FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** I Samuel 2:12-26

**INTRODUCTION:** Samuel was a most blessed child who grew up to be a most effective servant of the living God! He was fortunate to have a worshipping father, a praying mother, and a faithful pastor. His was a God-blessed conception, for his birth was the result of a direct answer to prayer. As a small child, he received godly training in the loving atmosphere of a God-fearing home, which training made it easy for him to make an early surrender of his life to God. He was publicly dedicated by his parents to the Lord at the House of the Lord at Shiloh where he "*grew up in the presence of the Lord.*" (I Samuel 2:21) He served the Lord daily in the House of the Lord at Shiloh, under the supervision of Eli the priest. It is no wonder that his service to the Lord was so joyous, for he was reared in his early years by a mother whose praise to God was spontaneous and whose prayers to God were filled with gratitude (I Samuel 2:1-10). A grateful mother produced a grateful son!

**PROPOSITION:** What made Samuel such a great person? Samuel was great because Samuel obeyed the call of God in the midst of circumstances which challenged his faith. A great faith is a faith which accepts the call of God in spite of the challenges of the world! A great faith can only be maintained when there is a stubborn resistance against sin and a humble submission to God! In looking at the young life of Samuel, we may learn how to maintain a vital faith in the face of certain challenges from the world.

Samuel came from a great home. His father worshipped the Lord faithfully and his mother prayed to the Lord earnestly. After Samuel's mother dedicated him to the Lord at Shiloh, "*each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, 'May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.'* Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord." (I Samuel 2:19-21)

Samuel was a God-blessed child because he came from a God-blessed home. The Scriptures tell us that "*Samuel was ministering before the Lord...the boy Samuel grew up in the*

*presence of the Lord...the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men." (I Samuel 2:18,21b,26)*

The Scriptures say nothing about the boy Samuel spending a lot of his time playing games, or recreating, or pursuing pleasure, or lazily leisuring. Probably Samuel did have time to relax and to enjoy the legitimate pleasures of life which every boy should have time to enjoy. Boys are young only once and they should have time to laugh and to play. That is part of a child's normal development. But the chief occupation of Samuel's life as a boy was not fun and frolic; rather, his time was preoccupied with "ministering before the Lord - a boy wearing a linen ephod."

Young children today, brought up in the godly atmosphere of a godly home and church should spend much time ministering before the Lord. This means that childhood and adolescent years should be filled with productive activities that have lasting benefits. Such productive activities as faithfully helping parents with household tasks, joyfully visiting older people who are lonely, diligently working around the church - mowing lawns, cleaning floors, trimming shrubs, diligently reading the Bible and praying, memorizing Scripture, raising money for missions through participation in a Bike-A-Thon-For Missions, collecting cans of food door-to-door to distribute to the poor and needy, witnessing faithfully to friends and bringing friends to the Church, helping older people with difficult tasks without expecting pay, faithfully tithing their money to the Lord's work, and other love projects which demonstrate a desire to "minister before the Lord."

A young person who grows up in the presence of the Lord (2:21b), is one whom God will mightily use in Christian service.

Samuel grew in stature (physical growth), and in favor with the Lord (spiritual growth), and with men (social growth). (I Samuel 2:26). Samuel grew in the same way that the Savior grew: "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*" (Luke 2:52)

Every young person, like Samuel and Jesus, should seek to be balanced in his growth - physical growth, intellectual growth, spiritual growth, social growth.

Samuel's cultivation in the faith of the true God took place in the House of the Lord at Shiloh as he ministered before the Lord under the supervision of Eli the priest. One would think this place to be the safest place in which faith could be cultivated. But the Scriptural account tells us of Eli's two wicked sons whose presence was also felt in the House of the

Lord at Shiloh (I Samuel 2:12-25). In other words, Samuel's faith was at times challenged by the evil influence of evil men whose presence was felt in the very place that one would think was the safest place in the world - the place where Samuel was seeking to cultivate his faith, the House of the Lord!

Faith does not grow in a vacuum! Rather, faith grows in the 'rough and tumble' of the every-day living, as we are confronted with the world's evil.

Samuel, a boy who wanted to grow in faith, was regularly confronted by the two evil sons of the priest. The faith in Samuel had to be strong enough to confront and to combat the evil forces of evil men whose hypocritical ministry in the temple was an abomination to the Lord. Samuel had to learn to carry on a daily spiritual ministry in the temple in spite of the evil attitudes and practices of Eli's sons.

I. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST GREED (2:12-16)

The Sons of Eli were filled with greed. Their spirit was not a giving spirit but it was a greedy spirit, not an open hand of service but a grasping hand of exploitation. They did not look upon their sacred office as an opportunity to serve men, but they went into their lifework "for what they could get out of it in the way of gain." (Preaching From Samuel; Blackwood; pg 32)

Faith in Samuel could only grow as long as he kept his life free from greed, free from the love of money. Samuel always remembered that godliness is not a means to financial gain (I Timothy 6:5).

It is still true today that we Christians live in a world that is materialistic. To succumb to greed is to put a death blow to your faith in God! Listen to this reminder from the Scriptures: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* (I Timothy 6:6-10)

As Christians, we are not to despise material things, for God made material things for us to enjoy. But we are never to worship what money can buy. *"The ambition to buy everything that appeals to you" is the attitude of the materialistically*

- minded person, and this attitude is condemned in Scripture (I John 2:16).

Billy Graham relates an interesting experience which he had. "A couple of years ago (about 1968) my wife and I, with Cliff Barrows and his wife, were on an island in the beautiful Caribbean. We visited a very wealthy man, 70 years of age. He was terribly depressed, lonely, uncertain; all the assurance in his life was gone. I watched him in his depression. I felt sorry for him, tried to help him, prayed with him. Two hours later we met a happy little preacher who was the same age - 70 years. He cared for two invalid sisters. He did all the washing and all the cooking. He had a tiny church, with hardly any income at all. Yet he was jumping about and exclaiming, 'I'm the happiest man on the island.' Now I want to ask you, Who was the richer? Which one would you rather be at the age of 70 - the man who had lived for God and invested his life for God, or the man who had spent his lifetime building a fortune but without much time for God? Who was the richer?" (Decision Magazine; July 1970;pg.14)" *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'*" (Hebrews 13:5)

## II. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST IRREVERENCE

To treat the Lord's offering with contempt (v.17) is to treat the Lord's offering with indifference and irreverence. Eli's sons had lost the sense of the sacred. Work in the temple for them had become commonplace and mechanical. They began to look on their work "as a racket or a farce." (Ibid;pg.32) They were not filled with wonder and awe as they carried out their priestly tasks. Familiarity with their tasks had bred contempt in their hearts. They had no fear of God in their hearts. Instead, they were light-hearted, feeling no weight of responsibility in the sacred tasks to which they were called.

Instead of zeal for the House of the Lord consuming their time in holy pursuits, indifference in their cold souls in the dull performance of their religious activities was destroying them!

Irreverence will always kill faith and it will eventually lead one to spiritual death. Irreverence and indifference always harden the heart and close the ears to the instruction of the Lord and to the advice of the godly counsellor. *"His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death."* (I Samuel 2:25) Indifferently to reject godly counsel is to invite divine judgment!

A contemptuous, indifferent, irreverent attitude towards the sacred things of life is always considered to be a great sin against the Lord and a great killer of faith! When Moses was on Holy Ground before the burning bush, he took off his sandals and he hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:6) Moses had a fine sense of the sacred and responded appropriately! When Isaiah was in the presence of the Holy One, he cried out in terror and godly fear, "Woe is me!" He was humbled in the presence of holiness. His response was the response, not of an indifferent man, but of a God-fearing man!

Indifference or irreverence is an attitude of flippancy. A flippant person is one who does not take seriously the sacred things of life. It is a 'shrug-of-the-shoulders' attitude towards life. Flippancy is being light-hearted when one should be heavy-hearted, is laughing at things that one should cry about, is being insensitive to the things that one should be most sensitive to, is "seeing the funny side of things that have no funny side." (Little Foxes That Spoil the Vines; W.B.J. Martin; pg 49)

"But let me be quick to point out that flippancy is not the same as humor. 'Anything for a laugh' is not the same as 'seeing the funny side of things.'...A flippant person is frivolous, a man who is determined to make a joke of everything, even when there is no joke." (Ibid;pg.49,51)

Samuel grew in faith because he maintained a sense of the sacred. He remained reverent in the presence of the Lord and in the daily performance of his duties in the House of the Lord. Let us too be careful to nurture our faith by remaining serious-minded in the midst of a light-hearted society, by maintaining the 'fear of the Lord' in the midst of a cynical society. We are not at all suggesting that Christians should not laugh at a good joke or that Christians should not have a sense of humor. "A sense of humor is nothing more or less than a sense of proportion - especially a sense of proportion about oneself." (Ibid;49)

There is a place for laughter, fun, and even joking, but there is never a place for treating the sacred things of life with lightness or indifference or irreverence.

"One of the most effective weapons in the devil's armory is to instill into people a misplaced sense of humor. Two people have recently become converted to Christianity. Naturally the devil is disturbed about this, but he sees hope on the horizon, for he notes that they have fallen in with a set who are great comics, who will do anything to get a laugh. As long as they are consorting with flippant people, he says, there is still hope of their damnation. For flippancy is

essentially a way of evading the truth and of covering up the unpleasant and unpalatable. When a man makes a joke of everything, he manages to cover up the shame of what is shameful." (Ibid;pg 51)

Faith can only be cultivated in the atmosphere of reverence and respect and godly fear. To treat as unholy what God considers holy is to invite the judgment of God, as what happened in the case of Eli's sons.

*"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of Grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews:10:28-31)

Samuel carried on a spiritual ministry in the midst of greed (I Samuel 2:12-16) and in the midst of irreverence (I Samuel 2:17). We too live in a greedy age where money is elevated to a position of a god - and in an irreverent age - where the holy things of life are degraded to a position of irrelevance. If our faith is to grow, as Samuel's faith grew, we must maintain a focus on the spiritual instead of on the material, and we must maintain a sense of the sacred in the midst of the profane.

### III. THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY AMIDST LICENTIOUSNESS (2:22-25)

If greed and irreverence are both enemies of faith, licentiousness is also an enemy of our faith.

Samuel - a growing boy with normal adolescent desires - guarded his faith against the onslaughts of lusts as seen in the lives of Eli's sons. Eli's sons were lust-filled, pleasure-obsessed men who bowed so low to evil that *"they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting."* (I Samuel 2:22) "Perhaps only one (minister) in five hundred stoops to deeds of infamy like those of Eli's sons. Mayhap only one in a thousand brings public disgrace on the name of Christ and His Church." (Preaching From Samuel; page 33)

But even though very few ministers succumb to gross sins of immorality as Eli's sons did, nevertheless there are temptations to lust which every minister and every Christian must rigidly resist.

If to yield to the spirit of greed or to the spirit of irreverence is to deal a death blow to faith, it is also equally true that to yield to the temptation of lust is to deal a death blow to faith. Young Samuel, in the midst of these licentious sons of Eli, learned to "flee youthful lusts." He was a self-controlled youth, because he was a God-controlled youth. He learned to keep full control of his natural youthful passions, and to restrain himself against every evil desire. He did not allow his God-given sexual instincts to become the dictator of his actions of his life. He kept himself pure in mind and in body, in contrast to the evil sons of Eli who practiced gross immorality.

Mastery over internal instincts and mastery over external allurements is greatly needed in our society. We are living in an hedonistic age. A hedonist is one who lives by his passions and who equates happiness with pleasures of the flesh. The hedonist makes no attempt to curb the desires of his flesh.

Paul warned the early Christians against pleasure-obsessed people. *"For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, whose lives make them the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction - their god is their own appetite, they glory in their shame, and this world is the limit of their horizon."* (Philippians 3:18,19; Phillips)

Too many today live by their appetites and desires - totally undisciplined, unrestrained, unchaste. *"These men mock and curse at anything they do not understand, and, like animals, they do whatever they feel like, thereby ruining their souls."* (Jude 10; Living Bible)

What is the secret of self-control in one's life? Cultivating the mind of Christ! Learning to think Christ's thoughts! Submitting to Christ's lordship!

Remember, whatever gets your attention, gets you! "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny!" It all starts with the way a person thinks!

As a man thinks, so is he! You are the product of your thoughts! What you imagine, you will become! "What you hold in the mind passes automatically into act, if you hold it there long enough....Your secret meditations become you, for good or ill." (Growing Spiritually; pg. 201; Stanley Jones)

A moral landslide is preceded by a mental landslide. What you focus your thoughts upon, you eventually become! "If therefore you dally with sex thoughts and imaginations, that

dallying will become a doing. And that doing will become you." (Ibid;pg.201)

*When lust hath conceived it eventually bringeth forth death!* (James 1:15) How is lust conceived? By failing to control the thought life! You cannot help it if birds fly above your head, but you are responsible if you allow birds to make nests in your hair! You cannot help it if Satan suggests evil thoughts to you, but you are responsible if you entertain evil thoughts, resulting in developing patterns of evil thinking! You are not responsible for having temptations, but you are responsible for yielding to temptations. You may not be responsible for the first look, but you are responsible for the second look! If you can go around temptation, you cannot expect God to take you through temptation. If you put yourself in the very trap of temptation, don't be surprised if you are trapped in sin!

We cannot 'play with fire' and not expect to be burned. We cannot engage in lustful thinking and not expect to become lustful in action. We must guard our affections, for our affections guide our lives. We must focus our attention on the Holy One in order to become men and women of holiness!

How do you win the sex battle in a world that is saturated with licentiousness? The victory is won in the mind. The secret to sex-control is mind-control, and the secret of mind-control is focusing one's mind on Christ! We are to "*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" (II Corinthians 10:5;NIV) *We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.* (Romans 12:1)

Do you make your thoughts obedient to Christ? If you struggle with evil or lustful thoughts, don't try to fight these thoughts! To fight such thoughts is to give more attention to these thoughts. Rather than fighting evil thoughts, replace evil thoughts with pure thoughts! Fill your mind with the Scriptures! (Remember, 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop'!) Fill your eyes with the beauty of nature! Fill your time with love projects! Seek and find good companions! (Remember, "Evil company corrupts good manners.") Turn your back on evil companions!

Wrote Paul to young Timothy, "*Flee youthful lusts.*" *Keep away from lustful thoughts! Run from evil companions! Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right.*" (II Timothy 2:22; Living Bible)

Christian young people (and adults, for that matter) have no business watching T.V. programs or movies which lead to lustful thinking! Christian young people have no business

flirting with sin! Discipline of desires is the price of moral freedom!

Mastery over lust - what is the secret? "You can expel one desire only by a higher desire. Let the love of Christ be the fire that eats up these lesser loves. All the prohibitions against the wrong use of the sex urge will not save you unless the love of Christ be at the center - then the sex urge becomes marginal and right." (Abundant Living;pg.133; Jones)

In talking about cultivating faith and carrying on a spiritual ministry, in the midst of a licentious society, it is important to understand the need for self-control (as we have been noting). If we are to maintain and develop an effective spiritual ministry within the context of a sensually-oriented society, it is also important for us to understand the difference between wholesome and natural sexual attraction and unholy sexual lust.

"Sexual attraction works pretty generally as a biological fact, and because this is true married couples who have plighted their troth must exercise discipline as well as the unmarried. In our modern pagan civilization these biological urges have been accepted as masters, and our modern pagans expect neither to give or receive faithfulness for any length of time. When the newness wears off there is an increasing number of new attractions. This is a fact. Pagans yield to it. Christians discipline themselves in the Lord....We do not feel it necessary to hang a veil over a pretty woman's face in order to keep men from being tempted to immorality. We assume that there is a place where a man in Christ may see, admire, and feel pleasure in such a face, having the doors of his mind closed to further satisfactions of the sexual attraction which lies implicit in the experience. From the pretty face it is a short step to notice the beautiful form. To women this same element of sexual attraction is present but in altered form. A dashing personality may be just as devastating to a woman as a beautiful form to a man. Women may be in more danger because personality is so much more subtle than physical form. Now the important fact to bear in mind is that this attraction in itself is not sin; it is not carnal; it is definitely present in the Spirit-filled. But while it is a thing of real beauty which puts zest in life without jeopardizing marital faithfulness or real holiness, yet sexual attraction is as dangerous as it is subtle, and it calls for rigid discipline.....The fact of attraction, appreciation and pleasure regarding a woman's beauty is not sin or carnal in itself. But it is extremely easy to cross the line where this legitimate exercise of God-given impulse becomes an occasion for self to slip out into independence again, and for the look to become carnal. Probably when one becomes aware of his look taking on aspects of improper desire he is crossing over and

must exercise discipline. But this question of crossing the line, in this as in so many other areas which we have set forth, leaves us utterly dependent upon the still small voice of the Holy Spirit for its answer.....It must be clear by now that the sanctified life is basically life lived utterly under the control, moment by moment, of the Holy Spirit." (The Spirit Of Holiness;pg.49,50,51 by Everett Lewis Cattell)

**CONCLUSION:** "There is no way to victory except a walk of carefulness under the constant guidance and in instant obedience to the Holy Spirit. Whether this seems hard or not, depends largely on whether we have made the great committal or not. If we love Jesus Christ as we ought to love Him, with all there is of us and without reservation, then this will seem not arduous but a glorious, victorious life of love and service for Him. To the unsundered it will seem irksome and dreary indeed." (Ibid:pg.53)

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CHALLENGES) - CHALLENGED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What were some of the circumstances and events to which the young Samuel positively responded, which resulted in Samuel becoming a child of great faith?
2. What responses in the life of young Samuel served to demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "A great faith can only be maintained when there is a stubborn resistance against sin and a humble submission to God"?
3. After Hannah dedicated young Samuel to the Lord at Shiloh, how did God richly reward Hannah for her faithfulness? (Note 1 Samuel 2:19-21)
4. What does Scripture (1 Samuel 2:18, 21b, 18) indicate was young Samuel's chief preoccupation while he lived with Eli the priest, at the House of The Lord at Shiloh?
5. What, according to your perspective, are some worthy and creative 'love projects' which children can be involved in that demonstrate that they are earnest in their desire (as young Samuel) was to "minister before the Lord"?
6. What, according to 1 Samuel 2:26 and Luke 2:52, is involved in 'balanced growth', and what can the local church and the home and the school specifically do to help accomplish such 'balanced growth' in the lives of our children today?
7. Is it possible today that a Christian young person (as in the case of young Samuel) will be challenged by the evil influence of evil persons whose presence is felt in the very place that one would least expect it (like a Christian College campus or a local church youth group, etc)?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith does not grow in a vacuum! Rather, faith grows in the 'rough and tumble' of everyday living, as one is confronted with the world's evil." Is it not the responsibility of Christian parents to protect their children from the evil influences of the 'world'? Tell what your response is to the following question that is asked of Christian parents at the time when their small children are publicly dedicated (baptized) in a local church: "Do you, so far as you are able on his or her

behalf, renounce the devil and his works, the lure of the world and the sinful desires of fallen man, so that in the training of this child you will not be led by them and so that, so far as you are able, you will keep this child from following them?"

Does the fact that young Samuel was taken to the House of The Lord at Shiloh (to be raised by a godly priest) a good argument for Christian parents to put their children into a 'protected' and 'godly' environment - like a Christian Day School or Christian College, etc?

9. What evidence, from a study of I Samuel 2:12-16, indicates that Eli's sons were greedy persons who looked upon their sacred office, not as an opportunity to serve but as a chance to exploit others? Are there still 'false prophets' and leaders today who use religion as a 'means to financial gain' (I Timothy 6:5)? Is it not a great travesty of faith for a religious leader to accumulate great financial wealth, through the offerings of sincere people to whom the religious leader offers false or exaggerated promises of 'financial returns' for their giving? Is not the 'love of money' (greed) most destructive, even if such greed is concealed behind a 'religious practice'? (I Samuel 2:12-16; I Timothy 3:3,8;6:6-10)
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To succumb to greed is to put a death blow to your faith in God." (I Timothy 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5; James 5:3; Proverbs 15:27; Ecclesiastes 5:10).
11. What should be a Christian's attitude regarding money? How would you characterize the attitude of the materialistically-minded person? (Note I John 2:16) If the accumulation of money does not bring soul-security, from whence comes a sense of true security? (Note Hebrews 13:5)
12. What does it mean "to treat the Lord's offering with contempt"? (I Samuel 2:17) What can one do to maintain "the sense of the sacred" in life? Share Biblical examples of those who maintained an attitude of reverence, respect, and awe, as they encountered God and holy things. (Note Exodus 3:1-5; Isaiah 6:1-8)
13. How would you describe the person who is "flippant"? Can one be a person of faith and, at the same time, 'make light' or joke about holy things? What is the difference between 'wholesome humor' and 'unwholesome joking', as these responses relate to holy matters? Is there a general tendency in our irreverent society for Christians

to be insensitive regarding 'sacred matters', as reflected in the widespread use of 'humor', 'jokes' regarding 'religion', 'heaven', 'hell', 'church', 'preachers', 'marriage', 'sex', etc.?

14. Do you agree with the following statement: "A believer must be careful to nurture his faith by remaining serious-minded in the midst of a light-hearted society, and by maintaining the 'fear of the Lord' in the midst of a cynical society"?
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "One of the most effective weapons in the devil's armory is to instill into people a misplaced sense of humor....When a man makes a joke of everything, he manages to cover up the shame of what is shameful."
16. Is it possible for faith to be cultivated in any other atmosphere other than the atmosphere of reverence, respect, and godly fear? (Note Ephesians 5:4; Proverbs 10:19; Ecclesiastes 5:2-3, 10:12-14; James 1:21)
17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To yield to the temptation of lust is to deal a 'death blow' to one's faith." (Note I Samuel 2:22-25; II Timothy 2:22; Proverbs 6:20-35; Colossians 3:5; I Thessalonians 4:3-8; I Corinthians 6:13,18)
18. Describe and define a 'hedonist' and the philosophy of 'hedonism'? Why is the modern-day 'playboy' totally opposed to the Christian philosophy? Note (Philippians 3:18,19; Jude 10)
19. In successfully winning the battle against 'lust', what do you believe a Christian must do to gain 'self-control' and 'discipline over his strong inner sexual drives'? Do you agree with the following statement: "What you hold in the mind passes automatically into act, if you hold it there long enough"? Is there a difference between 'having an evil thought' and 'thinking evil'? What is the difference between 'having a temptation' and 'yielding to temptation', especially as these two distinctions relate to the inner thoughts which one has? What is the difference between having wholesome sexual attraction for a person of the opposite sex, and having unwholesome lustful thoughts regarding a person of the 'opposite sex'?
20. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We must guard our affections, for our affections guide our lives."

21. Is there a Scriptural basis for the following statement:  
"The secret to sex-control is mind-control, and the secret of mind-control is focusing one's mind on Christ"?  
(Note II Corinthians 10:5; Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:8)
  
22. What advice would you give to a person who is struggling with lustful thoughts? Do you agree with the following statements: "If you struggle with evil or lustful thoughts, don't try to fight these thoughts! To fight such thoughts is to give more attention to these thoughts"? Is the following advice by E. Stanley Jones 'sound' and 'sensible': "All the prohibitions against the wrong use of the sex urge will not save you unless the love of Christ be at the center - then the sex urge becomes marginal and right"?

**CHAPTER 16**

**FAITH**

**SAMUEL (HIS CALL) - CONFIRMED FAITH**

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CALL) - CONFIRMED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 2:27 - 3:21

INTRODUCTION: Someone said, "Many are called, but few are chosen because few are choice!" This statement is not intended to convey an idea that God arbitrarily calls some to greatness and arbitrarily curses others to damnation. No! This statement merely means that, while God gives His call of repentance and His call to service to all persons, there are only a few who become a part of God's elect family because only a relatively small number respond positively to God's universal call. The choice or favored ones are those who respond favorably to God's call. Samuel responded obediently to God's call and, as a result, became a favored servant of God.

PROPOSITION: God wants to reveal Himself personally to all persons, but only those who, like Samuel, respond obediently to that call, come to know God personally and serve God effectively.

- I. CIRCUMSTANCES BEFORE THE CALL (2:27-36) - Prophesied Judgement of Eli's Household.
- II. CONFIRMATION THROUGH THE CALL (3:1-10) - Personal Presence of God to Samuel.
- III. CONTENT OF THE CALL (3:11-14) - Unrestrained Impending Judgement Against Eli's Household.
- IV. CONSTERNATION IN THE CALL (3:15-18) - God-Revealed Judgement Reticently Communicated to Eli.
- V. CONSTANCY FOLLOWING THE CALL (3:19-21) - Recognized Message Respectfully Received.

CONCLUSION: When the call of God comes to you, respond obediently in order that you might serve Him effectively!

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CALL) - CONFIRMED FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** I Samuel 2:27-3:21

**INTRODUCTION:** Someone said, "Many are called, but few are chosen because few are choice!" This statement is not intended to convey an idea that God arbitrarily calls some to greatness and arbitrarily curses others to damnation. No! The statement merely means that, while God gives His call of repentance and His call to service to all persons, there are only a few who become a part of God's elect family because only a relatively small number respond positively to God's universal call.

The choice or favored ones are those who respond favorably to God's call. Samuel responded obediently to God's call and, as a result, became a favored servant of God.

**PROPOSITION:** God wants to reveal Himself personally to all persons, but only those who, like Samuel, respond obediently to that call, come to know God personally and serve God effectively.

Listen carefully for and respond positively to God's call in your life. As we study the call of God in young Samuel's life, seek to understand God's call in your own life.

In studying the call of God to Samuel, we must look at the following:

- I. Circumstances before the Call (I Samuel 2:27-36) - Prophesied judgement against Eli's household.
- II. Confirmation through the Call (I Samuel 3:1-10) - Personal presence of God to Samuel.
- III. Content of the Call (I Samuel 3:11-14) - Unrestrained judgement against Eli's household.
- IV. Consternation in the Call (I Samuel 3:15-18) - Revealed judgement reticently communicated to Eli.
- VI. Constancy following the Call (I Samuel 3:19-21) - Recognized message respectfully received.
- I. Circumstance Before The Call (I Samuel 2: 27-36) - Judgement of Eli's Household.

What were the circumstances, religiously speaking, existent among the people of Israel before Samuel received his dramatic

call from God? As our Scripture indicates, there was a low moral condition in the nation of Israel, just previous to Samuel's call. Far from keeping themselves 'unspotted from the world', Eli's sons were corrupted through and through by sin. They were anything but ideal examples to follow. Even though God had graciously bestowed favor upon Eli's family (I Samuel 2:27-28), Eli's sons scorned God's sacrifice and offering (I Samuel 2:29), and Eli himself was not blameless, for he did not restrain his sons in their greedy practice of taking for themselves "the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel." (I Samuel 2:29)

Eli's sons' treatment of God's offerings, not only revealed their terrible greed, but it also revealed their calloused indifference and irreverence (I Samuel 2:17). They also engaged in gross immorality as noted in I Samuel 2:22.

Greed, irreverence, and immorality caused God's anger to be kindled against the household of Eli. Through a 'man of God' whom God sent to Eli (I Samuel 2:27), God prophesied judgement against Eli's household. Said God, "Everyone of you that I do not cut off from my altar will be spared only to blind your eyes with tears and to grieve your heart, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life." (I Samuel 2:33) "And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you - they will both die on the same day." (I Samuel 2:34)

One of the darkest periods of Israelite history was during the period of the Judges, when Israel repeatedly went after other gods, causing God's wrath to be stirred up and God's judgement to descend upon Israel in the form of God-sent oppressors. During times of oppression, the people of Israel would cry unto the Lord for deliverance, and God would respond to their cry and send judges (leaders with charisma) to unshackle Israel from their bondage. 'Apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance, complacency, apostasy, oppression' - this is the monotonous cycle in the Book of Judges! Dark days morally and religiously were partly the result of a corrupted priesthood. A corrupt society is both the cause and the effect of a corrupt priesthood.

During the darkest days of history, part of the darkness of those days is due to the fact that the clergy have become corrupt. It was so, previous to the time of the Protestant Reformation. It was so in England, just before God raised up John Wesley.

Why was Eli so responsible? Because "he should never have permitted those sons to don the priestly robes. Even after he had inducted them into office, he should have unfrocked them as soon as he found them incorrigible. He must have known

that the welfare of the Church transcends everything personal. But like many another doting father, Eli seems to have had more influence over everyone else than over his sons." (Blackwood; Preaching From Samuel: page 34)

During the darkest times of history, when the moral life of the community is the lowest, the light of God has often broken through, and that light of God's love has often come in the form of God raising up a special message to lead a special movement of moral reform. For instance, God raised up Saint Francis of Assisi during a time in history when the churches desperately needed reformed. Martin Luther was raised up during a time when corruption filled the Catholic Church. John Wesley was raised up at a time in British history when corruption so filled society generally that the nation was on the brink of a social revolution. Martin Luther King Jr. was raised up by God in the twentieth century in America at a time when America's laws were discriminating against the black race. Martin Luther King, at the cost of much suffering and eventual martyrdom, led a civil rights movement in America that resulted in legislation that gave equality to the black man.

Samuel was raised up by God during a period in Israelite history when moral chaos and religious corruption were widespread.

As in the case of Samuel, God's personal presence may be revealed to you during a time when the circumstances surrounding you are dark and depressing. If your outward look on life is dark, your upward look toward God can always be bright. Like Samuel, it is when you are continuing faithfully to carry on your daily activities for God in God's House, that God may choose to reveal Himself personally to you. Some of your greatest personal calls in life may come to you from God during times when society is suffering its greatest crisis.

## II. Confirmation Through The Call (I Samuel 3:1-10) - Personal Presence of God to Samuel.

Young Samuel had been faithfully nurtured, both at the feet of his dear mother in the privacy of his home, and in his service to Eli in the House of the Lord at Shiloh. Like a seed that germinates because it has been planted in well prepared and well watered soil, so young Samuel's life 'germinated' because it was planted in a well prepared atmosphere of godliness. Samuel, whose knowledge of God was real to him intellectually but only in a second-hand fashion, came to know the Lord personally and intimately and in a first-hand fashion. Samuel knew a lot about the Lord and was obediently following the Lord's ways to the best of his ability, but until God's great

personal revelation came to Samuel, "*Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*" (I Samuel 3:7)

The one who is honestly seeking God intellectually and who is following the ways of God to the best of his knowledge, can be certain that God will, in His own time and way, reveal Himself personally and intimately and perhaps even dramatically ( as in the case of Samuel)! Intellectual knowledge about God will become spiritual knowledge of God through God's personal revelation of Himself to the open, responsive person. Because Samuel had learned obedience to Eli in his work around the temple, Samuel was ready quickly to obey the Lord when the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel. Someone said, "The child who learns to do small things well when he is small gets the best training for doing big things well when he is big." (Quoted in "Preaching From Samuel" by Blackwood: page 39)

God became a living, personal reality to Samuel from the time of God's personal revelation to the time when Samuel's lifetime work was accomplished. Samuel walked with God in the intimacy of personal relationship.

I deeply appreciate the many testimonies of personal experience of God, which are given in our Church services, especially on Sunday evenings. One precious person who was recently converted, testifies: "For 46 years, religion was a ritual to me, now it is a relationship with God. I used to recite my prayers, now I commune with God." "For most men and women, religious experience has been a calm assurance of the reality of a relationship which gives meaning to existence." (Philosophy of Religion; Trueblood; page 148)

God's personal presence in Samuel's life was confirmed through God's special revelation and call in Samuel's life. Have you encountered God personally? To you, is God merely a personality to be studied, or is He a person to be enjoyed? One can know a lot about marriage without being married; one can know a lot about God without knowing God personally. Would it have to be said of you, as it was said of Samuel (before his personal encounter with God): "Samuel did not yet know the Lord" (I Samuel 3:7)? As God is calling you, respond as Samuel responded: "Speak, for your servant is listening." (I Samuel 3:10) God wants to reveal Himself to you personally and intimately, if not always dramatically. Let your information about God prepare you to enter into a personal relationship with God.

### III. Content of the Call (I Samuel 3:11-14) - Unrestrained Impending Judgement Against Eli's Household.

"Samuel's discovery of God led to an unwelcome task. To his

dismay the lad found that he must become the messenger of God's judgement. He learned that oncoming doom would fall on his friend and benefactor, aged Eli, as well as on the land that both of them loved. Through years to come the people would have to suffer because of Eli's failure to curb his wicked sons.

"What a searching test of a lad's integrity! Sometime between the coming of night and the dawning of day the boy Samuel meets with God and hears the call to become a messenger of judgement. When the morning breaks, what will he do? Will he tell Eli about the uplifting call or about the oncoming doom? Will the lad speak the truth, or evade the issue? Does he know that a man sins as grievously if he keeps when he ought to speak as if he speaks when he ought to keep silent? Whatever the rationale, young Samuel passed with distinction the first test of his new religious experience." (Blackwood: page 41,42)

Understanding the call of God in our lives is important if we are effectively to be used of God. First, let us remember that God's primary call to all mankind is the call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. God calls all to repentance; God offers to all the gift of saving faith, and makes it possible for all to call upon Him to be saved from sin. However, God's universal call can be rejected by individuals. God wills to save all, but only those who wish to be saved will in actuality be saved!

God's universal and primary call is the call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. God's secondary and individualized call has its own unique features. God calls all sinners to repentance, but He calls each individual believer to specialized service in His Kingdom.

Samuel received a series of calls from God throughout his long lifetime. Each time the Lord gave Samuel a new task to perform, Samuel quickly obeyed. We too must learn to fulfill our God-given assignments in life. For most of us, those assignments may not seem too dramatic. Assignments like witnessing to our unsaved friends, giving tithes and offerings faithfully to our local church, caring for our family through loving involvements, serving our church and community through the use of our spiritual gifts, exercising positive influence through the words we speak and the relationships we develop.

There may be a few in our world whose call from God involves unusual and decisive action. Like David Wilkerson who, as a young preacher, received a special call from God to leave the countryside and go to the big city of New York to witness to street gangs and drug addicts. God used him remarkably! Or like Amos in the Old Testament who when challenged by the King

of Israel and told to leave the city, said, "*I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'*" (Amos 7:14-15)

All Christians, so-called 'laymen' and clergymen alike, are called by God to share the good news of Christ. Notes Elton Trueblood, "We have made a step forward in our understanding of the gospel when we recognize that each Christian must be a preacher in one way or another. Whatever it is that you are not willing to share is something that you do not really prize!" (The Encourager; page 32)

When God converted Paul, God spoke these words to Paul, "*I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*" (Acts 26:16-18) Our roles in life and our jobs and professions in life will be different, but our call in life, as believers, is the same: "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Samuel filled several roles in life. As a boy, he was a servant in the tabernacle at Shiloh. He served as a prophet and as a preacher and as a travelling judge. He also served as the king's personal counsellor. Later in his life he was an organizer of a prophetic school. As a versatile man of God, he fulfilled his God-given call in life through a variety of roles. Whatever your changing roles in life may be, your unchanging call in life is to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ to lost men and women! God has appointed every one of His children to be His witnesses and to be His rescuers! To witness to the light of God's love and to rescue men from the darkness of Satan's bondage!

#### IV. Consternation In The Call (I Samuel 3:15-18) - God-revealed Judgement Reticently Communicated to Eli.

Is the call of God accompanied with gladness or with sadness, with joy or with sorrow? It can't be denied that, in spite of the challenges and hardships of the Christian life, the last word in Christianity is 'Joy'. "Joy unspeakable and full of glory" is the spirit of Christianity. 'Godliness with contentment is great gain' is a Biblical phrase that describes the sheer joy that comes when one is living a godly life.

Samuel experienced the joy of the Lord during his long life and ministry. He was a fulfilled man because he fulfilled the will of God for his life.

However, while not minimizing the joy that Samuel experienced in his walk with God, let us not think for a moment that the call of God for Samuel or for us is without its challenges and its consternation!

Samuel's vision from God caused Samuel distress and fear. "*He was afraid to tell Eli the vision.*" (I Samuel 3:16) "In later years, throughout a career full of arduous duties, Samuel never faced a more unwelcome task than that of telling aged Eli about his approaching doom." (Blackwood; page 42)

"I delight to do thy will, O God!" - these should be the words from our lips which express the love of our hearts for God and for His will for our lives. To be God's mouthpiece to declare His message of love is to enjoy the greatest privilege on earth. 'If God be for us, who can be against us' - these are words that should reassure our hearts in the face of a hostile world!

Yes, the call of God should lead to unspeakable joy in our lives! But, in speaking of the contentment that comes from obeying the call of God, we must, if we are to be realistic, also speak of the consternation that sometimes comes when a believer first hears the call of God in his life.

When God revealed his will to Samuel, regarding impending judgement on Eli's household, Samuel was greatly distressed. Samuel did not relish telling his supervisor that God was going to bring judgement upon him and his entire household.

The prophets of the Old Testament did not relish having to be God's mouthpiece to declare God's impending judgement on Israel and Judah!

Christians today - you and I - do not relish confronting sinners with the message of repentance - telling sinners that they are wrong and that they need to repent if they intend to escape the judgement of hell! It was not a coveted job to be a prophet! It was not a coveted job to go to King David and tell him to his face that he had sinned against God, and yet that was the assignment which God gave to Nathan the prophet.

Many servants of God (like Samuel) have been filled with consternation when they received a call from God. Ananias, the man whom God used to bring healing to the repentant persecutor Saul, was filled with consternation when God told Ananias to go and meet Saul! (See Acts 9:10-17a)

When David Wilkerson received an unusual vision from God regarding "five tragic calamities coming upon the earth" (page 11 of 'The Vision'). he was greatly troubled and didn't want to reveal these visions to anyone. Like Samuel, he was afraid he would be misunderstood or rejected. In his introduction to his book entitled, 'The Vision', he writes, "While I was in prayer late one night these visions of world calamities came over me with such impact that I could do nothing but kneel, transfixed, and take it all in. At first I did not want to believe what I saw and heard. The message of the vision was too frightening, too apocalyptic, too discomfoting to my materialistic mind. But the vision came back to me, night after night. I couldn't shake it off. Deep in my heart I am convinced that this vision is from God, that it is true, and that it will come to pass. Yet this vision has caused me to do some very real heart-searching. I have been afraid that most people won't believe it, or that I'll be branded as some kind of fanatic. I shared this vision with some of my closest friends and associates and have been warned against publishing it....In spite of my fears and apprehensions, I can no longer shake off a conviction that this vision must be published. If I understand divine guidance at all, God has instructed me to speak out. Some of this vision will come to pass in the very near future. Some of the events are more distant. But I believe all the events mentioned will happen in this generation!" (page 11,12)

The calls or revelations of God in your life will probably, most of the time, be accompanied with a certain calm and inner joy, but there may be a time when God's call or revelation to you will cause great consternation. The Scriptures tell us, "Suffer hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Samuel suffered hardship when he received a call from God to declare an unhappy message to the priest of Israel! However, God gave courage to young Samuel to declare that message and God will also give courage to you to declare God's message of repentance in our present unrepentant society! Eli did not scorn Samuel when Samuel revealed the unpopular message. "*So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the Lord, let him do what is good in his eyes.'*" (I Samuel 3:18)

If you courageously declare the unpopular message of repentance, God will also give you some positive responses in the form of repentant souls who cry out to God for forgiveness in the light of your message! So, whether the call of God gives you great comfort or great consternation, be faithful to communicate God's message to needy people.

V. Constancy Following the Call (I Samuel 3:19-21) -  
Recognized Message Respectfully Received.

A man who consistently lives in righteousness, is a man whose message will be constantly vindicated by God before the people of the land. There must be a consistency in holy living before there can be a constancy in one's verbal message. The young Samuel was attested as a servant in the House of the Lord first before the older Samuel was attested as a prophet in "all Israel from Dan to Beersheba." (I Samuel 3:20) The life one lives becomes the foundation for what one says. Samuel lived a holy life and therefore could with authority speak a holy message! And God vindicated that message: "*The Lord let none of his words fall to the ground.*" (I Samuel 3:19)

Samuel's words were respected because his life was respected by all in Israel. What we are is more important than what we say, but our words will have weight with people if our lives have been heavy with the holiness of God!

God will not allow your words to 'fall to the ground' if your life has not fallen into sin! A pure life produces a penetrating message. He who lives under God's authority will have authority with men! He who speaks often with God will have words worth speaking to men! If you live close to God, people will recognize that your message is from God, and there will be many who will respectfully receive it!

**CONCLUSION:** When the call of God comes to you, respond obediently in order that you might serve Him effectively!

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CALL) - CONFIRMED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. How would you describe the religious conditions which prevailed in the nation of Israel, at the time that Samuel received his dramatic call from God? (I Samuel 2:27-36). Has it not been true in history that, during the darkest days morally and religiously, God has raised up a great spiritual leader to champion the cause of righteousness and to call his nation to repentance ( as for example, when God raised up St. Francis of Assisi and Martin Luther and John Wesley during times of great moral and spiritual decay)?
2. What responsibility (and blame) did Eli the High Priest carry, in terms of the moral chaos and spiritual decline in Israel, just previous to Samuel's dramatic call? Should not religious leaders who's personal lives give clear evidence of spiritual and moral corruption ( as was the case of Eli's sons), be quickly removed from places and positions of authority and leadership? Are spiritual leaders (teachers) subject to a greater judgement from God if they betray their God-given 'sacred trust'? (note James 3:1) Do you believe God's judgement on Eli and on his sons was too severe? (Note I Samuel 2:29-36) Is it true (and Biblical) to say that God's promises are 'conditional' - i.e., God will keep His promises if those to whom He gives His promises are faithful and obedient to fulfill the conditions which God lays down? (Note Romans 11:17-24)
3. Considering Eli's relationship to his two sons, how well can you describe a 'doting father'? What responsibility does a father have in terms of his discipline and instruction of his children? (Note Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Proverbs 22; 6;13:24; 22:15;23:13-14; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; I Timothy 3:4). In your opinion, why are so many fathers today reticent to discipline their children? What consequences is a father likely to reap if he is too lenient and too permissive in his response to a disobedient child? Is it possible to 'break' (mold) a child's will without breaking a child's spirit? What is the difference between disciplining a child and nagging a child? (Ephesians 6:1-4) How can you distinguish between normal expressions of adolescent independence and morally wrong adolescent rebellion?

4. Cite examples to illustrate the truth of the following statement: "The one who is honestly seeking God intellectually and who is following the ways of God to the best of his knowledge, can be certain that God will in His own time and way, reveal Himself personally and intimately and perhaps even dramatically!" (Note I Samuel 3:1-10)
5. Considering the life of Samuel, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The child who learns to do small things well when he is small gets the best training for doing big things well when he is big."
6. How would you distinguish between an intellectual faith in God and a personal and intimate faith in God? How can one, who has an intellectual knowledge about God, come to have a deeper spiritual knowledge of God? (Note Psalms 145:18 and Jeremiah 29:12-13) Do you believe that a child, who (like young Samuel) has been faithfully nurtured in the ways of God during his young childhood in his home and in his church, is more likely to recognize the personal call of God to him, than is the child who has had little spiritual nurture or religious instruction at home and at church? Why or why not?
7. Share a time in your life when you, like Samuel, felt that you personally encountered God, the result of which is that you were enabled to experience God intimately and not merely intellectually or theologically.
8. What unwelcome assignment did God give to young Samuel, according to I Samuel 3:11-14? Can the person of faith expect, at times, to receive a commission or an assignment from God which, if obeyed, could lead to personal discomfort or rejection or persecution?
9. How would you distinguish between God's universal call to all persons, and God's individualized call to specific persons? In terms of Christian service, what assignments has God given to every believer?

Give your response (or reactions) to the following stanzas from a popular song:

"A charge to keep I have,  
 A God to glorify,  
 A never dying soul to save,  
 And fit it for the sky.

"To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill;  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master's will.

"Help me to watch and pray,  
And on thyself rely,  
Assured, if I my trust betray,  
I shall forever die."

(A Charge To Keep I Have)

10. Considering the example of Samuel who, from his youth until his death, trusted God completely and obeyed God quickly, what do you believe is the greatest responsibility of a believer today in terms of his response to God's commands? (Note Ezekiel 33:7-20)
11. To whom is God's call to witness given, to 'trained professionals' only or to all believers? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Whatever it is that you are not willing to share is something that you do not really prize!" Does God's call to Paul, recorded in Acts 25:16-18, apply to modern day Christians, or was this call unique to Paul only?
12. Considering the constancy of Samuel's ministry of proclaiming God's truth amidst his versatile roles throughout his long life, do you believe the following statements reflect what should be the 'focus' in every believer's life: "Whatever your changing roles in life may be, your unchanging call in life is to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ to lost men and women! God has appointed everyone of His children to be His witnesses and to be His rescuers"?
13. Considering the great consternation which Samuel experienced when God revealed to him what calamities would soon come upon the household of Eli (I Samuel 3:15), do you believe the following statement accurately reflects truth: "The calls or revelations of God in your life will probably, most of the time, be accompanied with a certain calm and inner joy, but there may be a time when God's call or revelation to you will cause great consternation"?

14. Considering the godly impact which Samuel had upon the people of Israel, give your comments on the following statements: "The life one lives becomes the foundation for what one says. What we are is more important than what we say, but our words will have weight with people if our lives have been heavy with the holiness of God!"
15. What is your interpretation of the following statement: "A pure life produces a penetrating message"?
16. What evidence can you cite to demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "He who lives under God's authority will have authority with men"?



CHAPTER 17

FAITH

SAMUEL, (HIS CONSECRATION) - CONSTANT FAITH

## FAITH

### SAMUEL, (HIS CONSECRATION) - CONSTANT FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 12:2

TEXT: "From childhood I have led a public life till this very day."

INTRODUCTION: Samuel is considered by many to be one of the greatest Old Testament characters. His character is one of the most flawless characters, serving Israel with purity of motive and intensity of zeal.

Samuel's life was a consecrated life. Perhaps of all qualities the quality that most stands out about Samuel is consistency in performing his duties to God and his people.

PROPOSITION: In looking at Samuel, let us note the qualities that most stand out in him - his consecration, his courage, his consistency. These qualities served Samuel well during his lifetime - qualities that are needed in every man's life.

#### I. SAMUEL THE CONSECRATED ONE

- A. Born as Answer To Prayer
- B. Consecrated At An Early Age
- C. Served In Tabernacle During Childhood
- D. Called By God To Fruitful Service (I Samuel 3:1-18)

#### II. SAMUEL THE COURAGEOUS ONE

- A. Prophesied With Courage
- B. Preached Repentance
- C. Remained Steadfast In The Face Of Danger
- D. Judged Without Favoritism

#### III. SAMUEL THE CONSISTENT ONE

- A. As Servant In Tabernacle
- B. As Prophet And Preacher
- C. As Travelling Judge
- D. As Kingly Counsellor
- E. As Organizer Of Prophetic School

CONCLUSION: Samuel the consecrated one was enabled to be courageous and consistent in duty throughout his long lifetime. Man must consecrate; God must empower - empower for service to our fellowmen. Blessed is the child that is early consecrated to God. Parental consecration of the child must

be followed with deep personal consecration to God. When that happens, look for a life that is courageous in duty and consistent in performance. Blessed is the adult who in old age can say with Samuel, "From childhood I have led a public life till this very day." (I Samuel 12:2) Fruitful is the life that is lived in public service to God and man.

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CONSECRATION) - CONSTANT FAITH

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 12:2b

TEXT: "From childhood I have led a public life till this very day."

INTRODUCTION: Samuel is considered by many to be one of the greatest Old Testament characters. His character is one of the most flawless characters. He served Israel with purity of motive and intensity of zeal.

Samuel's life was a consecrated life. Many mothers have followed the example of Samuel's mother and dedicated their child to God ever before the child was born. Samuel became a most courageous man in Israel, following the later tradition of the prophet. Perhaps of all qualities the quality that most stands out about Samuel is consistency in performing his duties to God and his people. Samuel moved on the stage of Israel's history for several decades - from his consecrated childhood until his nationally-honored death. He faithfully performed his God-given and varied tasks.

PROPOSITION: In looking at Samuel, let us note the qualities that most stand out in him - his consecration, his courage, his consistency. These qualities served Samuel well during his lifetime - qualities that are needed in every man's life.

#### I. SAMUEL THE CONSECRATED ONE

##### A. BORN AS ANSWER TO PRAYER

Ever before Samuel was born, he was promised by the Lord. "Eventually, after their eating and drinking at Shiloh, Hannah arose. Eli the priest was seated on a bench near the doorpost of the Lord's temple. Out of a sorrowful soul she prayed to the Lord and cried bitterly. She then made a vow. She said, 'O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt actually look at Thy handmaid's trouble, wilt think of me and not forget Thy handmaid, and wilt grant Thy handmaid a son, then I will give him to the Lord all his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.'" (I Samuel 1:9-11)

It was a deep shame for a woman not to give birth to a son. It was a belief that God in mercy could give fruitfulness to the womb. Therefore, in mercy, God heard Hannah as she poured out her heart to God, and God gave her fruitfulness. Blessed is the woman who recognizes that her offspring are God-given.

`Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening. And the Lord said to Samuel: See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family - from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'" Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am." "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes." (I Samuel 3:1-18)

God has a purpose for every man's life, but each man must respond to God's call. Some are untrained to hear the call, others are calloused to the call, some ignore the call, and some respond in obedience to the call. Samuel was of this latter type. The greatness of Samuel's adult life can be attributed to this divine call to which Samuel was obedient. To find fulfillment and fruitfulness in life, it is essential for man to obey the call of God.

## II. SAMUEL THE COURAGEOUS ONE

Samuel was one of the most courageous men of the Old Testament. His courage was manifested in various ways.

### A. PROPHESED WITH COURAGE (I SAMUEL 3:10-14)

Samuel's job was not easy. In the vision as a child, Samuel was told by God to tell Eli this message. A boy telling the high priest that his own household could look forward to only a dismal future! A boy telling the high priest that he was a failure in raising his sons! It is no wonder that Samuel was "afraid to tell the vision to Eli" (I Samuel 3:15b). Nevertheless, Samuel obeyed and carried out his commission.

We too, who are given a message from God, are asked to obey, regardless of the difficulty of the task. Fear may plague, but God will give courage to carry out His will.

God did not let Samuel's words fall to the ground. "Thus Samuel matured, and the Lord was with him; He let not one of

His words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to understand that Samuel was commissioned as the Lord's prophet. Once more at Shiloh the Lord appeared again, for there He revealed Himself to Samuel through the divine message." (I Samuel 3:19-21)

#### B. PREACHED REPENTANCE (I Samuel 3:10-14)

Before Israel, Samuel boldly proclaimed the message of repentance. As a prophet, he foretold; as a preacher, he forthtold. His message as a prophet and as a preacher was given to him from the Lord. His message as a preacher was the message of repentance. "Then Samuel told the whole house of Israel, 'If you wholeheartedly turn to the Lord, then remove the strange gods from you, including the Ashtaroath, and center your worship on the Lord; serve Him alone. Then He will deliver you from the Philistines' power.' The children of Israel then got rid of the Baals and Astarte and served the Lord exclusively. So Samuel announced, 'Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord on your behalf.' Gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord; they also observed a day of fasting. Then and there they confessed, 'We have sinned against the Lord.' And at Mizpah Samuel judged the people." (I Samuel 7:3-6)

Repentance Involves:

1. Positive Appeal - "Return unto the Lord" (Verse 3)
2. Negative Command - "Rid yourselves of the foreign gods." (Verse 3) Get rid of all substitutes for the true God. A god is anything or anyone that you give your allegiance to. It takes courage to tell people to forsake their evil gods and to turn to the true God. Modern gods today include the gods of money, pleasure, power and science. To abuse something that is good is to turn the good into a god that is worshipped. For instance, money abused turns money into a god - materialism,. Pleasure abused turns pleasure into a god - hedonism. Power abused turns power into a god - pride and exploitation. Science abused turns science into a god - scientism ( worshipping science as a 'cure all' for all human problems).
3. Call to make a Decisive Commitment - "Commit yourself to the Lord". (Verse 3)
4. Call to live a Devoted Lifestyle - "Serve Him Only" (Verse 3).

5. Assurance of Promised Victory - "He (God ) will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." (Verse 3)

Positive Response to the call to Repentance Involves:

1. Decisive Rejection of all false gods. (Verse 4)
2. Single - hearted devoted to the true God. (Verse 4)
3. Humble contrition before the Lord. (Verse 5)
4. Open confession of sins to the Lord. (Verse 6)
5. Earnest entreaty to spiritual leader for prayer. (Verse 8)

The Lord alone can deliver from the enemy. Earlier, the Israelites were depending upon the Ark of the Covenant to bring deliverance to Israel. But anything short of the Lord will fail to give victory over the enemy. The ark failed to bring deliverance over the Philistines (4:5-10). Anything short of the Lord today will fail to give us victory over Satan and his strong hosts. We must put our faith alone in the Lord to whom belongs all might and power. Victory is found in Christ alone!

Israel represents the Church in the New Testament sense. He who would be a true preacher must preach repentance. The message of repentance is not a popular message but a greatly needed message.

Repentance issues forth in a change of loyalty from false gods to the only true God. Repentance always involves confession of sin. The courageous preacher must proclaim a courageous message - the message of repentance.

C. REMAINED STEADFAST IN THE FACE OF DANGER. (I SAMUEL 7:7-13)

The account tells us that Samuel remained courageous in the face of an external threat. *"When the Philistines learned that Israel was gathered at Mizpah, and the Philistine princes marched against Israel; and the Israelites, hearing of it, were in fear of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, 'Do not cease calling on the Lord our God for us, so He may deliver us from the Philistine dominance.'* Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it whole as a burnt offering to the Lord; and when Samuel called on the Lord for Israel, the Lord answered him. While Samuel was occupied with offering the burnt offering and the Philistines were closing in to attack Israel, just then the Lord thundered mightily against the Philistines

and confused them, so that they suffered defeat before Israel." (I Samuel 7:7-13)

In the face of danger, the man of God is given opportunity to display his faith in God, and to prove God's Sovereign power. Samuel showed himself courageous, not cowardly, in the face of great danger. He trusted in God, and so must the Church (the New Testament parallel to Israel) when powers seek to destroy the Church. There are many types of threats to the Church - secularism, communism, cultism without and complacency within the church. The Christian must remain steadfast, the same as Samuel. *"My beloved brother, be steadfast, immovable, at all times abundantly active in the Lord's service, aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile."* (I Corinthians 15:58) God has promised, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against my Church." What a promise! Therefore, we should courageously trust God in the face of threats to the Church.

#### D. JUDGED WITHOUT FAVORITISM (I SAMUEL 7:15-17)

Samuel was a courageous and impartial judge. From his early childhood, Samuel was sensitized to truth and righteousness and justice. "Without being prophets we could predict what kind of a judge Samuel would make when he sat down on the seat of justice. Seeing God; remembering what Abraham said to God on one occasion about the Judge of all the earth; able to tell men all that was in their hearts; Israel never had a judge like Hannah's son. Josephus says that Samuel had an 'inborn love of justice!....He was clear-eyed, firm-handed, sure-footed, resolute-minded, righteous man, with an inborn sense of truth and righteousness: and all his opinions, and decisions, and sentences carried all men's consent and conscience with them." (Bible Characters by Alexander Whyte; pg.224)

#### III. SAMUEL THE CONSISTENT ONE (Faith is "Faithfulness - Consistently following and obeying God)

Perhaps the quality that most stands out about Samuel is his consistency. Few, if any, characters in the Old Testament have a record of consistency in moral excellence as Samuel does. Throughout his long life, he is portrayed as one who consistently obeyed God.

Throughout his long life he was consistently righteous, just, and faithful. Said Samuel, before Israel in his later life: *"Here I am; witness against me in the presence of the Lord and of His anointed. Whose cattle have I taken? Whose donkey have I seized? Whom have I abused? Whom have I wronged? From whom have I accepted a present to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you!"* They said, "You have not mistreated us; you have not wronged us, and you have received no present from

anyone." He said, "The Lord is witness among you today, and His anointed is witness that you have found nothing in my possession!" They confirmed, "He is witness!" (I Samuel 12:3-5)

Let us note briefly the various ways in which Samuel was consistent in performing his duties. His life stood the test of time. With advancing years, his zeal did not lessen and his love did not grow cold.

#### A. AS SERVANT IN TABERNACLE

Samuel was faithful as a child in the Lord's House. There are many years of Samuel's life of which we have no record. Those years were doubtless routine years - years in which he daily and consistently carried out his God-given tasks. "And all the while young Samuel increased in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men." (I Samuel 2:36) Reminds us of a Greater One than Samuel who too was faithful in the little daily tasks of routine living while he was growing up (Luke 2:40). It is said, "The child who learns to do small things well when he is small gets the best training for doing big things well when he is big." (Preaching From Samuel; Andrew Blackwood; pg. 39)

#### B. AS PROPHET AND PREACHER

Samuel was faithful as a Prophet. It is not easy consistently to carry out a hard task especially the task, of telling Israel things that sometimes were convicting. Consistency in forthtelling the message of God - the message of repentance and sacrifice - is not easy, but it is extremely essential, if a man is to be a true servant of God. Paul charged Timothy in the New Testament: "Herald the message; be at it when it is and when it is not convenient; confute, exhort, rebuke with unqualified patience and willingness to teach." (II Timothy 4:2 Berkeley) In other words, be consistent in your proclamation of truth.

#### C. AS TRAVELLING JUDGE

Samuel consistently carried out his duties as Judge. "He made the rounds annually to include Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, holding court at these centers for Israel." (I Samuel 7:16) Samuel never grew tired of defending justice and righteousness. He never compromised with wrong, and did not become calloused to injustice with the passage of time. Neither must the servant of God today, as he moves in a world of gross injustice. How easy it is, with the passage of time, to grow complacent or even calloused to the social injustices or worldly practices about us. As Samuel, we must be consistently sensitive to righteousness and justice.

#### D. AS KINGLY COUNSELLOR

When Israel desired a king to rule over them, Samuel strongly reacted in opposition. Samuel, the last great leader of the Theocracy, believed it to be a sin for Israel to desire a human king. God alone was king of Israel and had ruled Israel up until this time. For Israel to ask for an earthly king was the same as betraying trust in God. *"Their saying, 'Give us a king to judge us,' was disgusting to Samuel, and he prayed to the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel: 'Whatever they tell you, listen to the people; for they have not rejected you, but Me they have rejected me to be king over them.'* (I Samuel 8:6,7) Samuel sought to persuade the people; however, they declined to listen to Samuel. They said, *"No, there must be a king over us, so we may be like all the other nations."* (I Samuel 8:19, 20a) God consented to the people's request, and accommodated himself to the people's wishes but trouble was ahead for Israel.

How did Samuel react to the emergence of a king? Did he grow bitter and jealous that another man now had taken the leadership of Israel from him? Never! Instead, Samuel prayed for Saul, the new king, saying, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Notes Alexander Whyte: "Samuel said that as his answer to his sentence of deposition and banishment from being their head and their king in all but the name. Samuel, then, among them that pray and forgotten after a lifetime of self-forgetful service.... Samuel among them who have such a pure heart that nothing will ever turn their heart to gloom, or bitterness, or discontent, or retaliation, or to anything else, but to still more prayer." (Bible Characters; page 228)

The attitude Samuel showed must be the attitude that every true Christian must show - the attitude of humility. He must be willing to accept the new and to step down in leadership and to give it to someone else.

#### E. AS ORGANIZER OF PROPHETIC SCHOOL

I Samuel 19:20 implies that Samuel organized a prophetic school. He well realized that the future of Israel did not depend upon her kings (Samuel could never accept the new monarchy), but strongly believed Israel's future depended upon strong spiritual leaders. Samuel well knew that a school could not produce prophets any more than a modern-day seminary can produce a true preacher. A prophet or a preacher must first be called, but that call must be followed with careful and diligent training. We are forever indebted to Samuel for his emphasis upon disciplined training for God's work. The future of Israel depended upon trained spiritual leaders.

The Church, too, must have foresight. It dare not depend upon the instruments of man; it must perpetuate its spiritual heritage. Indeed, not only the future of the Church depends on this, but the future of the nation.

CONCLUSION: Samuel, the consecrated one, was enabled to be courageous and consistent in duty throughout his long lifetime. Man must consecrate; God must empower - empower for service to our fellowmen. Blessed is the child that is early consecrated to God. Parental consecration of the child must be followed with deep personal consecration to God. When that happens, look for a life that is courageous in duty and consistent in performance. Blessed is the adult who in old age can say with Samuel, "*From childhood I have led a public life till this very day.*" (I Samuel 12:2a) Fruitful is the life that is lived in public service to God and man!

## FAITH

### SAMUEL (HIS CONSECRATION) - CONSTANT FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What do you believe is the greatest of all great qualities which stands out in the long life of Samuel?
2. Why (as in the case of Hannah) should a woman consider her children as a gift from God and as an answer to prayer? Is any child conceived merely by chance, or is each child a miracle from God? (Note Psalms 139:13-16; Job 33:4; Jeremiah 1:5). If every person's conception is God-Ordained, is there ever a justifiable reason for aborting an unborn child?
3. Do you believe a public dedication of your children is significant and important? Why or why not? (Note I Samuel 1:24-28)
4. If you are a parent, what can you do to teach your children, while they are very young, to respect 'Holy Things', and what can you do to influence your children early in their lives to dedicate themselves to the service of God and His Church? From a study of the life of Samuel, do you agree that the following statement reflects truth regarding character formation in a child; "Character is produced by God's transformation, but character is also learned by practice?"
5. What are different ways in which persons can respond to God's call? Illustrate how it is possible for a parent to be too possessive of a child, thus making it difficult for a child properly to respond to God's call in his life.
6. What command did God give to the boy Samuel that was exceedingly difficult to obey, and which challenged Samuel's courage to the maximum degree? What is the relationship between 'faith', 'obedience' and 'courage'?
7. According to I Samuel 7:3-6, how can 'Repentance' best be defined? Is it possible to be a 'man of faith' without at the same time being a man who challenges persons to repent of their sins?

8. How (according to I Samuel 7: 7-13) did Samuel display his courage in the face of impending danger? What are some of the dangers that face the Church of Jesus Christ today, and how can believers manifest courageous faith in God, in the face of these threats and dangers? Why is it important for believers to remain steadfast in the face of these dangers? (Note I Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9)
9. Considering the example of Samuel's important sense of justice as the great Judge in Israel, what is the relationship between 'faith' and 'justice'? (Note I Samuel 7: 15-17; 12: 3-5)
10. Illustrate the truth of the following statement: "The child who learns to do small things well when he is small gets the best training for doing big things well when he is big." Why is faith sometimes best demonstrated in the performance of one's routine duties?
11. Why is it not always easy (as in the case of Samuel the Prophet) to be faithful in the proclamation of truth? (Note II Timothy 4: 2-5)
12. Is it possible (with the passage of time and with the increase of ever-greater expressions of perversions in society) for believers to grow insensitive and even indifferent to moral evil and to social injustices? How does a study of Samuel's consistency in moral integrity to the end of his life, help believers today to maintain an uncompromising stand against evil.
13. How did Samuel react to the emergence of a king? Did he grow bitter and jealous that another man had taken the leadership of Israel from him? Is it not easy for believers to become 'hurt' or 'jealous' when they are replaced in office or in positions of leadership by persons who are much younger and less experienced?
14. Does I Samuel 19:20 imply that Samuel organized 'a prophetic school'? What is the relationship between spiritual preparations and academic (formal) preparations in the training of a preacher? In terms of perpetuating its spiritual heritage, what can the modern-day local church do to facilitate the raising up of spiritual leaders?



CHAPTER 18

FAITH

SAUL - ABANDONED FAITH

## FAITH

### SAUL - ABANDONED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 15:22

TEXT: Obedience is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams."

INTRODUCTION: There are some characters in the Bible whose lives are characterized by great beginnings but tragic endings. Saul is one of those characters. As the first king of Israel, he goes down in history as a tragic failure. Starting so well, he finished so poorly. That need never be true in our lives. We can start well, continue well, and finish well. God is able to keep us true to Him until the very end of life, if we do our part in keeping ourselves obedient to God's commands.

PROPOSITION: Tragic as it is to contemplate, the pathway of history is strewn with its Sauls - men who started well in life but who ended life as a miserable failure. We must look carefully at those snares which were the cause of Saul's pathetic fall that led to his tragic end. Study Saul's life in order to imitate his noble qualities, but in order also to avoid his pitfalls.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. BRIGHT BEGINNING
  - A. Humility
  - B. Proclamation of Truth
  - C. Modest Silence
  - D. Natural Leadership
  - E. Chosen By God To Be King
  
- II. PATHETIC FALL
  - A. Rashness and Impulsiveness
  - B. Disobedience
  - C. Insincerity
  
- III. TRAGIC END
  - A. Lonely Despair
  - B. Murderous, Insane Behavior
  - C. Demonic Relations
  - D. Suicidal Death

CONCLUSION: What can we learn from the life of Saul? The minimum lessons we ought to learn are these: 1) Saul's early life of humility, courage, wisdom, stateliness, and strength

of leadership is very exemplary and is to be followed; 2) Saul's impulsive temperament, which could have been used to good advantage, became his downfall. His impatience and rashness of behavior led to disobedience and eventually to insincerity and hypocrisy. We must learn to wait and never to forget that nothing - not even religious sacrifice - can substitute for explicit obedience to God's command; 3) Sin that is persisted in will always led to a tragic end - the same as it did in Saul's life. One's relationship with God must be maintained. Backsliding is a possibility for a Christian. Saul's life is the profile of tragedy and to avoid his tragedy, don't fall into his snares!

## FAITH

### SAUL - ABANDONED FAITH!

**SCRIPTURE:** I Samuel 15:22

**TEXT:** "Obedience is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams.." (I Samuel 15:22)

**INTRODUCTION:** "*I have played the fool.*" (I Samuel 26:21) This is the confession of King Saul. He is referring especially to one act, or to one series of acts in his life. He is condemning his conduct toward a young man that he once admired and loved, named David. But his same confession might have been used as a final summing up of Saul's life. It might serve as his autobiography. And that which deepens the pathos of his confession is the fact that this role was self-chosen. Saul was not sent into the world to play the part of a fool. God did not plan to deck him out with cap and bells. He was intended to play the part of a king. God planned that he should wear the garments of royalty. But he thwarted God's plan. He chose the role of fool. But he is not the type of fool that makes us laugh. He is a fool over whom we must weep if we can find any tears bitter enough." (Old Testament Characters; page 131; Chappell)

There are some characters in the Bible whose lives are characterized by a great beginning but a tragic ending.

Saul is one of those characters. As the first king of Israel, he goes down in history as a tragic failure. Starting so well, he finished so poorly. That need never be true in our lives. We can start well, continue well, and finish well. We can be like Paul the apostle who said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." II Timothy 4:7-8) Saul the king lost his faith; Paul the apostle kept his faith. Saul the king shrank back from following God and was destroyed; Paul the apostle continued to believe and was saved in the end (Hebrews 10:39).

God is able to keep us true to Him until the very end of life, if we do our part in keeping ourselves obedient to God's commands. Wrote Jude with confidence in God's keeping power: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 24,25) Here is God's promise to the faithful: "Since you have kept my command to endure

patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the Whole world to test those who live on the earth." (Revelations 3:10) Declared Paul with confidence: "I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." (II Timothy 1:12)

Getting back to Israel and its first king, Saul, you remember that Israel took things into its own hands, and insisted on having a king. Samuel was greatly grieved over this request. Israel, up until this time, was a theocracy - that is, a government ruled by God. Now Israel wanted to be ruled like those nations around them - by a king (a monarchy).

God accommodated Himself to Israel's request, and told Samuel that Israel was not rejecting Samuel but that Israel was rejecting God instead.

God allowed Israel to have her way. God will many times allow us to have our way when we insist upon it. But, failure is in store for us, as in the case of Israel, when we insist on having our way. Israel's first king was a failure, symbolic of the folly of Israel wanting her own way.

We must remember that God did not destine Saul to be failure, however. Saul was a failure ultimately because of personal disobedience.

Other characters beside Saul cause one great concern. Like Saul, they had a great beginning but a tragic end. Think of Judas Iscariot who was hand-picked by Jesus as a choice disciple, and one who was so reliable and honest that he was given the special job of keeping the money bag and the treasurer's books. Judas betrayed his trust, misinterpreted his Lord's mission, allowed himself to become greedy, and ultimately lost his relationship with his Master. Not even Jesus' last appeal in the Garden moved Judas to true repentance: "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" Judas, like Saul, fell from grace. Great was his fall!

"Demas in love with this world hath forsaken me," said Paul. Paul's travelling companion left Paul and fell back into sin and worldly pursuits.

One great man turned down the offer to have his biography written, for said he, "I have seen too many men fall out of the race of life on the last lap!"

Yes, there is eternal security - 'In the Son' - but only 'in the Son'. Conditioned upon our response of faith to the power and love of God. *"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when*

you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10: 35-39)

The Bible has promises, conditions, and warnings. The warnings are to be heeded as well as the promises claimed. Many warnings. "When you think that ye shall stand, take heed lest you fall." (I Corinthians 10:12)

"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.' If I tell the righteous man, that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right -- if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live. Yet your countrymen say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. Yet, O house of Israel, you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to his own ways." (Ezekiel 33:11-20)

The story of Saul baffles our understanding. It is at the same time a story of success and failure, strength and weakness, beauty and ugliness, courage and cowardliness, hope and despair with a dark and despairing ending. It is a story that goes 'against the grain' of our natural desires - a story so unlike the storybook of 'forever happy' endings. There are the bright high-lights, but there are also the dark shadows. The story of Saul, in short, is the story of stark reality - a story with a bright beginning but a tragic ending. In Saul we find the profile of tragedy. Perhaps the tragedy of all

tragedies is expressed in this saying: "It could have been different." Saul's life could have been different.

To understand the tragedy of Saul's life, we dare not minimize the truly great qualities that characterized Saul's bright beginning. It is only as we take a good look at the great qualities of his early life, that we can understand the depth of tragedy that characterizes his life as a whole.

**PROPOSITION:** Tragic as it is to contemplate, the pathway of history is strewn with its 'Sauls' - men who started well in life but who ended life as a miserable failure. We must look carefully at those snares which were the cause of Saul's pathetic fall that led to his tragic end. Study Saul's life in order to imitate his noble qualities, but in order also to avoid his pitfalls.

#### I. BRIGHT BEGINNING

Saul's early life is an example in greatness and courage that evokes true admiration. Several characteristics portray him as a truly great man.

##### A. HUMILITY

When Saul initially met Samuel, Saul felt very unworthy and humbled himself before Samuel. When Saul was invited to be Samuel's dinner guest, Saul replied, "*Am I not a Benjamite, of one of the smallest tribes in Israel? And is not my family of least importance among Benjamin's families? Why do you speak this way to me?*" (I Samuel 9:21)

Later, when it was time for Samuel to anoint Saul as king before Israel, Saul could not be found. "*Samuel then had all the tribes of Israel come forward, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken. He then had the tribe of Benjamin draw near by its families, and the Matri family was taken. Finally Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, 'Has the man come here? The Lord answered: He is hiding himself among the baggage. So they ran and brought him out from there, and as he stood among the people, it showed that he was head and shoulders taller than any of the people. Samuel said to the whole nation, 'Do you see whom the Lord has chosen? There is none his equal among all the people.'*" Then all the people gave a might shout, 'Long live the king!'" (I Samuel 10:20-24)

We admire Saul's humility - his sense of feeling unworthy of this high call. Indeed, all great men in the Church have felt a sense of deep unworthiness and humility when they have been called by God to a high responsibility.

## B. PROCLAMATION OF TRUTH

The record tells us that Saul prophesied or foretold the message of God for that hour. *"As they reached the hill, see, a group of prophets met him; the Spirit of God took hold of him, and he prophesied along with them. All his old acquaintances, who saw him prophesying along with the prophets, remarked to one another, 'What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul, too, among the prophets?' A man from the neighborhood responded, 'But who is their father?' So it became a saying, 'Saul among the prophets'"* (I Samuel 10:10-12) As a real leader of men, Saul boldly proclaimed the message that God put upon his heart and lips. The true leader must never be ashamed to be identified with God's messengers. Saul fearlessly spoke, and so must we.

## C. MODEST SILENCE

When Saul returned to his uncle after his meeting with Samuel, Saul's uncle asked him, *"Do tell me what Samuel said to you."* Saul replied, *"He informed us at once that the donkeys had been found."* (10:16) Saul mentioned nothing concerning the kingdom or of his appointment to the highest office in the land. He kept that a secret, reminding us of Jesus' mother of whom it is recorded: *"Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."* (Luke 2:19)

Writes Andrew Blackwood, "Ability to keep a secret shows self-control.....Some such practical wisdom led former President Coolidge to remark that his custom of remaining silent had never once involved him in difficulty." (Preaching From Samuel; page 60)

Saul refused to praise himself or to advertise his success. He remained modest, and a modest man's life will evoke admiration and praise from others in due time. Wise is the Proverb: *"Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips."* (Proverbs 27:2)

## D. NATURAL LEADERSHIP

"Saul possessed the indefinable something that makes everybody love a man despite all his failings. As long as the two of them lived, King Saul filled a large place in the heart of Samuel. So did the ruler win the affection of young David. In fact, despite all his aberrations, Saul appears to have made no personal enemies." (Andrew Blackwood)

As a natural leader, he brought orderliness out of chaos in the national life. Taking over leadership as king during the dark, chaotic days of the Judges was no easy thing. He lead

a semi-barbaric group of disunited people into a united group of well-organized soldiers who acted like a nation.

As we have already seen, Saul's appearance and apparent ability evoked a very positive response from the people of Israel. The people gave a mighty shout, "Long live the king." (I Samuel 10:24b)

In battle, Saul also was a natural leader. He was courageous organizer in the presence of a serious threat. The account makes this clear: "Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will subject to you." But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel." The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you." When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they turned out as one man. The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. (I Samuel 11:1-7,11) Saul proved himself able as a soldier and as an organizer. He had the ability to inspire courage and strength. He was highly respected among the people of Israel.

The charismatic qualities which we see in Saul are the same qualities that make any man a great leader. People are looking for strong leaders, wise in insight, decisive in action, and fearless in the face of a threat. The qualities that made Saul great are the same qualities that are found in any great leader.

#### E. CHOSEN BY GOD TO BE KING

"He was the best that God could find in all Israel at that time." (Andrew Blackwood) "Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people'." (I Samuel 10:24)

## II. PATHETIC FALL

### A. RASHNESS AND IMPULSIVENESS

Instead of waiting on God and on Samuel, he acted impulsively and blamed his impulsiveness on Samuel's delay and on the fact that the soldiers were beginning to scatter. Fear causes one to lose his reason and his patience. Saul blamed Samuel for delaying, and he blamed the soldiers' leaving.

A strong, forward-looking, progressive leader oftentimes has an impulsive temperament. Such a person must practice self-control and restraint - in other words, he must balance the impulsiveness with reason - if he is to be a successful leader. "Do we forget that Jacob and David, as well as Peter and Luther, with countless others blessed of God, belonged to the impulsive type?" (Preaching From Samuel; page 103)

The beginning of Saul's downfall was his impulsive temperament which he failed to control and restrain. Facing the threat of the powerful Philistines and viewing the fearful Israelites who began deserting Saul (13:5-8), Saul became very fearful himself and his impulsive temperament took over. "Saul said, 'Bring me the burnt sacrifice and the peace offerings.' Then he offered the burnt offering, and scarcely was he through sacrificing the burnt offering when Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and greet him, but Samuel asked, 'What have you done?' Saul replied, 'When I saw that the people were deserting me and you did not come at the agreed time, while the Philistines were camping at Michmash, I thought, Now the Philistines will swoop down on me at Gilgal, and I have not prayed for the Lord's favor; so I forced myself to offer a burnt sacrifice.'" (I Samuel 13: 9-12) This action of impatience, resulting in performing the duties that were divinely-assigned to Samuel, was the beginning of Saul's total undoing that eventually led to a tragic end. Samuel rebuked Saul: "Samuel told Saul, 'You have acted foolishly; you have not observed the instructions of the Lord your God, which He charged you; else the Lord would have established your kingship over Israel for ever. Now, however, your kingship will not last. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man in harmony with Him, whom the Lord has appointed to be His people's prince because you have not obeyed what the Lord commanded you.'" (I Samuel 13: 13,14) He started out doing God's will but "then he tried to carry out God's will in Saul's way and with Saul's strength, which proved to be weakness." (Blackwood; 18)

### B. DISOBEDIENCE

The story of Saul's disobedience is well-known, but this story always bears repeating because of the serious lessons it can

teach us. God gave commandment to Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites which had been a serious menace to Israel. Saul's obedience was only partial. "Saul struck down Amalek from Havilah to the Shur approach east of Egypt. He captured Agag, the Amalaek king, alive; but he doomed all the people to complete destruction with the sword. However, Saul and the people spared Agag, also the choicest sheep and cattle and the fattest lambs - everything of high value they did not doom to destruction. only the lesser quality cattle and worthless they utterly destroyed. Then came the Lord's message to Samuel; I am grieved ever to have made Saul king; for he has quit following Me and has not carried out My orders. Samuel was so deeply moved, he cried to the Lord all night.." (I Samuel 15:7-11) Someone said, "Half-hearted obedience counts as absolute rebellion against God."

Saul's partial obedience was not accepted by God, and neither will our partial obedience be accepted by God. God demands complete and explicit obedience - in the details as well as in the general. Some there are - professing Christians - who obey in part the Word of God, but who seem to ignore other important parts of God's Word. Let none of us think that it is impossible for us to ever be in that class. "Therefore let him, who feels sure of standing firm, beware of falling." (I Corinthians 10:12) A minister was talking to Billy Graham concerning the disciplinary action that was taken when one in the church was found drinking. Billy Graham replied by asking the minister what action was taken when a member did not obey the command "Be filled with the Spirit." "When Samuel reached him, Saul said, 'The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions.' But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?' Saul answered, 'The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.' 'Stop!' Samuel said to Saul, 'Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.' 'Tell me', Saul replied. Samuel said, 'Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, "Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.." Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?' 'But I did obey the Lord.' Saul said, 'I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.' But Samuel replied: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and

*sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."* (I Samuel 15:13-22)

Saul's sin was thanklessness, disobedience, irresponsibility! There are still those who think that some kind of sacrifice will substitute for simple obedience to God. Saul's bitter experience teaches us differently. Religious rites, ceremonies, or services will never substitute for obedience to God's commands. "Righteousness stands out above worship." (Blackwood)

### C. INSINCERITY

His envy drove him on in murderous pursuit of David's life, even though he would temporarily show sorrow again and again for his evil, envious actions. No true or lasting repentance. *"Saul replied to Samuel, I have sinned; I have transgressed the Lord's command and your order because I was afraid of the people and listened to them. Now then pardon my sin; go back with me, and I will worship the Lord." But Samuel told Saul, 'I will not return with you; because you have rejected the Lord's word, therefore the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.'"* (I Samuel 15:24-26)

David sinned, but he truly repented. Saul sinned, but his sorrow never resulted in genuine and lasting change. The sin of Saul at this time and during his pursuit of David, was the sin of insincerity. His sorrow was the sorrow of remorse, not the sorrow of true repentance. *"For the sorrow that relates the sorrower to God works out a repentance that leads to salvation such as is never regretted, while the world's sorrow issues into death."* (II Corinthian 7:10)

When David spared Saul's life, Saul would temporarily repent and be sorry for his shameful actions, only to revert to his murderous plot against David. Saul was an insincere man; His actions did not bear out his words.

Saul did not truly repent; David did. Both Saul and David sinned greatly against God. Saul was filled with remorse; David was filled with genuine repentance. "Saul did sin. He sinned deeply. But there have been countless others who have sinned in a far more ugly and hideous way than he, whose lives yet ended in glory and in victory. Saul was never guilty of any sin half so detestable as the sin of his successor, who came to be a man after God's own heart. The tragedy of the life of Saul was not so much in the fact that he sinned as in the fact that he could never be brought to face his sin and to confess it and to hate it and to put it away." (Old Testament Characters; Chappell; page 136)

"When these cattle began to low, Saul had a big chance. His sin became open and palpable. Had David been in his place, I feel confident that he would then and there have burst into tears and have asked the old prophet to pray for him. But not so Saul. Saul was just ready for more talk. He said, 'I did not absolutely destroy all the sheep and cattle, but the reason I did not was the fault of the people. The people spared them. I am not to blame. They are to blame. A sin has been committed, but it is not mine, it is theirs.

"Oh, this fatal excuse making! There is nothing that more surely shows an utter lack of repentance on the part of a man than the fact that he makes excuse for his sin. Just so long as you blame circumstances, just so long as you blame the Church, just so long as you blame anybody in the world but yourself, just that long will you remain unrepentant. Just that long, too, will you remain unforgiven." (Ibid; page 136)

Repentance! This made the difference between Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot. Simon Peter wept bitterly the tears of genuine repentance after he denied his Master three times (Mark 14:72). Judas Iscariot, filled with anguish after realizing the treachery of his cruel betrayal of Jesus, "*cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*" (Matthew 27:5)

How true is II Corinthians 7:10. "*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*" (NASB)

The basic demand of both John the Baptist and Jesus was: "Repent!"

To the Jew the one gateway back to God is the gateway of repentance...C.G. Montefiore writes, 'To the rabbis the essence of repentance lay in such a thorough change of mind that it issues in a change of life and a change of conduct.' (Barclay's Matthew volume 1; page 52,53)

Said the Jewish Rabbis, "If a man has an unclean thing in his hands, he may wash them in all the seas of the world, and he will never be clean, but if he throws the unclean thing away, a little water will suffice." (Ibid; page 54)

Further, "the Jew held that true repentance issues, not merely in a sentimental sorrow, but in a real change in life -- and so does the Christian." (Ibid; 54)

The problem with King Saul was his insincerity. At times he was filled with remorse and shame because of his actions, but true repentance would have permanently changed him in his

actions and reactions to David. A lack of true repentance was the cause of Saul's ultimate downfall and tragic end.

"Saul made that confession - 'I have sinned' - more often than any other man in all the Bible. It was on his lips again and again. From the number of times he uttered it, you might fancy that he was the most penitent of men. How often he is saying, 'I have sinned, I have sinned!' But under what circumstances does he make these confessions? He makes them only when he is in some kind of difficulty. Whenever you hear Saul confessing after this fashion, you may know he is in some kind of difficulty from which he wants immediate release. Here the prophet has told him that because of his sin God is going to take the kingdom from him. He does not want to lose the kingdom. Therefore he acknowledges his guilt. But never would he make such an acknowledgment except under pressure of some impending calamity." (Ibid; page 137,138)

There is still a need for preaching and practicing true repentance, a genuine moral transformation! When a five-year old child, who attended a 'Good News' Club in our home, was asked what sin is, he answered, "Sin is when you 'konk' someone over the head with a plate!"

Even a five-year old knows that a person has not genuinely repented of his sins if that person keeps on 'konking' people over the head with plates!

That Saul did not truly repent of his sin is seen by the fact that he continued to pursue David in an attempt to kill him.

### III. TRAGIC END

The further we go into Saul's life, the more despondent we become. Saul goes from bad to worse. The sins of his life produce a portrait in his old age, altogether different from the beautiful and courageous portrait of his youth. A painter once sought a man to pose for a portrait of Christ. A kindly face that radiated with Christlike characteristics must be found. That man was found and he posed for a portrait of Christ. Years passed. The same artist sought for a man to pose as Judas - a face marked and rough and worn. A man was chosen and to the great surprise of the artist, the man who was chosen to pose as Judas was the same man that years before had posed as Christ. The man who had posed as Christ had fallen into the vices of sin, and sin had left its terrible marks, changing a Christlike face into a Satanic face!

So it was with Saul! How art the might fallen! Saul's life is the profile of tragedy, as seen by his behavior in the last days of his life.

## A. LONELY DESPAIR

After Samuel harshly rebuked Saul for his willful disobedience against God, the record says:

*"As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors - to one better than you. He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.' Saul replied, 'I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God.' So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord. Then Samuel said, 'Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.' Agag came to him confidently thinking, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past.' But Samuel said, 'As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women.' And Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal. Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel." (I Samuel 15:27-35)*

What a pathetic and tragic picture! Saul, left to bemoan his own sin. Saul, all glory of kingship gone. Saul, the kingship of Israel torn from him and his descendants, and given to another.

Saul, left alone never to see Samuel again. What could Saul possibly do without the support and presence and counsel of Samuel? The record goes on to tell us. Tragedy upon tragedy paints the picture of Saul's last days very dark.

## B. MURDEROUS, INSANE BEHAVIOR

The cancer of envy ate away fast at the very soul of Saul. *"When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced, they sang: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.' Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David." (I Samuel 18:6-9)*

And yet the very one that became the object of Saul's murderous envy, was the one who was able to calm Saul's wild and evil spirit. Saul only repaid evil for good. *"Next day*

an evil spirit from God took hold of Saul so that he raved inside his house, while David as usual played the harp. In his hand Saul had a spear which he threw, intending to pin David to the wall; but twice David escaped from his presence....When Saul noticed how capable he was, he dreaded him, while all Israel and Judah prized David highly because as a leader he went in and out before them." (I Samuel 18:10,11,15,16)

Sin at its advanced stages often robs one of mental health. Sin often produces bazaar behavior. Sin can even drive a man to insanity, as it did at times to Saul.

### C. DEMONIC RELATIONS

*"But the Lord's Spirit departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him."* (I Samuel 16:14) God's Spirit will either be a help or a hindrance to a man, depending upon whether or not that man obeys or disobeys that Spirit. It is like the man who faces a strong wind. As long as he faces the wind, it is a hindrance to him. But if he walks with the wind, the wind becomes his helper. The wind hasn't changed, only the man has changed positions. The Spirit of God is always the same. If man is walking against the Spirit, then the Spirit appears to be a hindrance or evil to the man. Saul turned against the Spirit and the Lord seemed to be as an evil spirit to Saul.

Saul finally resorted to witchcraft, hoping to find solace for his lonely, troubled soul. How pathetic are the words of Samuel to Saul, through the medium of the witch of Endor.

Samuel said to Saul, *"Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"* *"I am in great distress,"* Saul said. *"The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called you to tell me what to do."* Samuel said, *"Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has turned away from you and become your enemy? The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors - to David. Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today. The Lord will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines."* Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and night. (I Samuel 28:15-20)

#### D. SUICIDAL DEATH

The end of Saul is most sad and tragic. Unable to overcome the Philistines and receiving a battle wound while fighting against them, Saul could not bear to think of falling into the hands of his Philistine enemies. Saul requested his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword, but the armor-bearer refused to do so. Therefore, "*Saul then took his sword and threw himself upon it.*" (I Samuel 31:4) Saul thought to save himself the shame of being captured by the Philistines, but little did he realize the shame that he caused Israel. Israel's first king died a suicidal death! Notes Richard Taylor, "That Saul was a regenerate man is evident, but that he surely died in awful and complete and eternal apostasy is also evident." (A Right Conception of Sin: page 87)

**CONCLUSION:** What can we learn from the life of Saul? The minimum lessons we ought to learn are these: (1) Saul's early life of humility, courage, wisdom, stateliness, and strength of leadership is very exemplary and is to be followed; (2) Saul's impulsive temperament which could have been used to good advantage, became his downfall. His impatience and rashness of behavior led to disobedience and eventually to insincerity and to hypocrisy. We must learn to wait and never to forget that nothing - not even religious sacrifice - can substitute for explicit obedience to God's commands; (3) Sin that is persisted in will always lead to a tragic end - the same as it did in Saul's life. One's relationship with God must be maintained. Backsliding is a possibility for a Christian, and a state of backsliding is dangerous, for it can lead to complete apostasy and a tragic end. Saul's life is the profile of tragedy, and to avoid this tragedy, don't fall into his snares!

**TAKE HEED** *Don't grieve the Spirit* - I Thessalonians 5:19  
(Spirit Left Saul)

*Obey the Lord's Commandments* - I John 2:3-6 (Saul disobeyed God's explicit command)

*Wait on the Lord* - Isaiah 40:31 (Saul acted impulsively)

*Don't neglect the 'Means of Grace'* - Hebrews 10:22-25

*Maintain fellowship as you Walk in the Light* - I John 1:7

*Openly Confess all Known Sin in the spirit of True Repentance*  
- I John 1:9

"And what was his tragedy? Not so much the fact that he sinned, but the fact that he could never be brought to face and confess his sin and put it away. He refused to repent.

Thus refusing, he flung away his here and he gave away his hereafter. Therefore, we can think of no better epitaph to be carved upon his tomb than this: `He played the fool.'" (Chappell; Sermons on Old Testament Characters; page 140)

Don't play the fool! Repent of every known sin and turn to Christ and follow Him obediently!

The way of repentance is the way of healing and wholeness and restoration!

## FAITH

### SAUL - ABANDONED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why can it be said that Saul's life is 'a profile of tragedy'?
2. Why can it be said that Saul 'played the fool' (I Samuel 26:21)? Was Saul sent into the world by God to play the part of a fool, or did Saul choose the role of a fool? Why is Saul the kind of fool over whom we (as believers) ought to weep? What is your personal response when you hear that a Christian, who is esteemed in the eyes of the church as a great spiritual leader, has miserably failed morally?
3. Note some characters in the Bible whose lives are characterized by a great beginning but a tragic ending. (Luke 6:12-16; 22:48) (II Timothy 2:17-18; 4:10).
4. What evidence is there from Scripture that God is able to keep a believer 'true and faithful' to the very end of his life? (Note II Timothy 4:7-8; Jude 24,25; Revelation 3:10; II Timothy 1:12).
5. What evidence is there from Scriptures that it is possible for a one-time believer to 'fall from grace' and eventually to be eternally lost? (Ezekiel 33:11-20; Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 11:24-28; Luke 12:42-46; John 6:66-71; John 15:1-7; Romans 11:20-22; Colossians 2:18,19; I Timothy 1:18-20; I Timothy 6:9-10,20-21; Hebrews 6:4-9; Hebrews 10:19-31; Hebrews 10:39; James 5:19,20; II Peter 2:1-22; 3:16,17).
6. Considering the example of Saul in his younger life (I Samuel 9:21;10:20-24), how would you define and describe 'Humility'?
7. What evidence is there that Saul, during his younger life, was a prophet (a proclaimer of truth)? (Note I Samuel 10:10-12)
8. Are there times when it is wiser to remain silent than to verbalize everything that God has revealed to you with others? (I Samuel 10:16; Luke 2:19; Proverbs 27:2)

9. What evidence is there to indicate that Saul was a natural leader, liked and respected by the people of Israel and one who brought orderliness out of chaos in the national life of Israel? (I Samuel 10:24;; 11:1-7,11)
10. Is there evidence from Biblical and Church History, that strong leaders (as in the case of King Saul) tend to be impulsive in temperament? Is it not true that some men of 'great faith' tend to be 'impulsive' in action and that these persons need to exercise greater reason and self-control and restraint? Do you agree with the following statement: "The beginning of Saul's downfall was his impulsive temperament which he failed to control and restrain?"
11. What, according to the account in I Samuel 13:5-14, were the tragic results of Saul's disobedience? What are some of the circumstances around us today that can influence us to attempt to carry out God's will with our own timing and in our own ways, the consequences of which can be most tragic to us? What is meant by the phrase "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22)? Are believers today vulnerable to the same sins which Saul was guilty of - sins of thanklessness, disobedience, irresponsibility? What attitude should believers have as they face threatening temptations? (Note I Corinthians 10:12) Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Righteousness stands out above worship."
12. What is the difference between the 'sorrow of remorse' and the 'sorrow of true repentance'? (Note II Corinthians 7:10) Why did David, whose sins were far more detestable than Saul's, receive forgiveness, whereas Saul never found restoration from his moral failures? Why is it so easy for one to rationalize or to 'scapegoat' his sins, and why is it so hard to manifest true repentance when one disobeys God's laws?
13. Share your response to the following statement: "There's nothing that more surely shows an utter lack of repentance on the part of a man than the fact that he makes excuse for his sins. Just so long as you blame circumstances, just so long as you blame the Church, just so long as you blame anybody in the world but yourself, just that long will you remain unrepentant. Just that long, too, will you remain unforgiven."
14. Are loneliness and despair inevitable results of sin which come to the person who refuses genuinely to repent of his disobedience and rebellion against God's will? (I Samuel 15:27-35)

15. Considering consequences of sin in Saul's life (I Samuel 18), do you believe that sin can rob one of his mortal health and can result in bazaar behavior and even insanity? When does the Holy Spirit seem to be as an 'evil spirit' to a person? Do you agree with the following statement: "God's Spirit will either be a help or a hinderance to a man, depending upon whether or not that man obeys or disobeys that Spirit?" Is it possible to grieve the Spirit out of one's life through a lack of repentance? (Note Genesis 6:3; Proverbs 29:1)



CHAPTER 19

FAITH

DAVID (THE YOUTH) - COURAGEOUS FAITH

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE YOUTH) - COURAGEOUS FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 17:8-11,32-51

INTRODUCTION: Someone wrote of Goliath, "Goliath stood ten feet tall in his stocking feet, wore a size 20 collar, a 9 1/2 hat, and a 52-inch belt. When he put on his full armor, he not only looked like a Sherman tank but weighted like one." What a giant to meet, especially when he is out to kill you!

PROPOSITION: The giants in our lives are just as threatening! But, just as David put His trust in the living God and used the spiritual weapons of God, so we too can trust God and use God's weapons. What will be the result? The Goliaths in our lives will fall and be destroyed!

#### OUTLINE:

- I. YOUTHFUL IDEALISM IN THE NAME OF FAITH (I Samuel 17:32)
- II. ADULT PESSIMISM IN THE NAME OF REALISM (verse 33)
- III. YOUTHFUL COURAGE BECAUSE OF GOD'S POWER (verse 34-37)
- IV. SPIRITUAL WEAPONS FOR A MIGHTY SPIRITUAL VICTORY (verse 38-51)
- V. CONQUERING OUR GIANTS TODAY
  - 1) The Giant of Inferiority
  - 2) The Giant of Peer Pressure
  - 3) The Giant of Lust

CONCLUSION: Whatever the `giant' may be, you can conquer it. Like David, you can trust God and listen to God's call on your life instead of the pressure of unbelieving persons around you. Like David, you can take the sling of faith and fling the stone (the Word of God) into the forehead of your giant! Faith in God is powerful in defeating your foes. The Word of God can effectively be used against all threatening giants in your life.

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE YOUTH) - COURAGEOUS FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** I Samuel 17:8-11,32-51

**INTRODUCTION:** Someone wrote of Goliath, "*Goliath stood ten feet tall in his stocking feet, wore a size 20 collar, a 9 1/2 hat, and a 52-inch belt. When he put on his full armor, he not only looked like a Sherman tank but weighted like one.*" (*Peculiar Treasures: page 41*) Listen to a description of the armor he wore. "*He was a giant of a man, measuring over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet, a two-hundred pound coat of mail, bronze leggings, and carried a bronze javelin several inches thick, tipped with a twenty-five pound iron spearhead, and his armor bearer walked ahead of him with a huge shield.*" (I Samuel 17:5-7, Living Bible)

**PROPOSITION:** What a giant to meet, especially when he is out to kill you! The giants in our lives are just as threatening! But, just as David put His trust in the living God and used the spiritual weapons of God, so we too can trust God and use God's weapons. What will be the result? The Goliaths in our lives will fall and be destroyed!

#### I. YOUTHFUL IDEALISM IN THE NAME OF FAITH (I SAMUEL 17:32)

David was not making youthful boasts based on his own supposed strength. David was making confident claims based on his personal faith in God. David was not afraid because he knew God, and in knowing of God's power, the power of Goliath looked like nothing to David. The secret to facing threatening situations in our lives - the giants - is to know God, to have so much confidence in God's strength and might that the might of human problems looks small in comparison!

David didn't lose heart in the face of a great threat because he had his eyes on God, not on Goliath. David's close contact with God was David's basis for encouraging others not to lose heart! When you live close to God, you are in a position to be a great encourager to others!

David's faith and optimism was contagious. Your faith in God can also be contagious. One of the important jobs we have as fellow Christians is to encourage each other. That is one reason we should consistently come to church - "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - an all the more as you see The Day approaching.*" (Hebrews 10:25)

The Bible says, 'A little child shall lead them.' The faith of a child or youth is truly remarkable. Youthful idealism

can be used of God. Too often, adults tend to lose faith and tend to see the obstacles rather than the opportunities in a situation.

Do you see opportunities or obstacles in the situations of your life? One person who went to Africa as a salesman to sell shoes wrote back that sales were poor because Africans did not wear shoes. He thought that he ought to return to America. Another salesman who was sent to Africa wrote back to his boss in America with great excitement and said, "Send me many cases of shoes. None of the Africans here wear shoes. The opportunities here are beyond measure!"

The Israelites saw in Goliath an obstacle. David saw in Goliath an opportunity. David saw that human problems committed to God become divine projects to demonstrate God's power. Saul was like the salesman who wanted to leave Africa when he saw that they did not wear shoes. "On hearing the Philistine's words (Goliath's words), Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified." (Verse 11) But David looked at Goliath all together differently: "David said to the Philistine, *You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands.*" (I Samuel 17: 45-47)

## II. ADULT PESSIMISM IN THE NAME OF REALISM (Verse 33)

Saul (and other adults) discouraged David (or tried to). David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God?" They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him." When Eliab, David's oldest brother heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." (I Samuel 17:26-30,33) David's brothers looked down on David with disdain, and

essentially told their little brother to go home and take care of his sheep! Mind his own business!

Saul pointed out David's limitations. David was small and Goliath was big! David was inexperienced, and Goliath was very experienced as a mighty warrior!

There are adults yet who try to discourage children and youth, and essentially tell children, "You're too young, you're too inexperienced. Mind your own business." "Your youthful idealism doesn't work in a world full of harsh realities! The giants of life are far too big for you to face. You have no business talking with such confidence!"

There are yet adults who try to discourage a child's or youth's exercise of faith and optimism. There are those who will try to bring death to youthful aspirations and dreams and hopes. However, there are others who will encourage you and help you find your potential!

Adults should inspire the faith of a child, not try to put out the flames of faith! In fact, we adults need the simple and child-like faith that conquers giants! *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matthew 18:1-4)*

David humbled himself before God and therefore was exalted before men. He bowed low before God, and therefore could stand tall and courageous before the giant! He committed the battle to the Lord. (Verse 47) *"As adults then, let's encourage our youth and children, not discourage them. Let's point to their potential, not to their limitations! Let's compliment them, not criticize them!"*

Said Jesus, *"If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."* (Matthew 18:6) Parents or adults who destroy the faith, idealism, and spiritual vision of their children, cause their children to sin. Woe to such an adult!

One of the first duties of parents and adults is to encourage their children! "Luther's father was very strict, too strict, strict to the point of cruelty. Luther used to say: *'Spare the rod and spoil the child - that is true; but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well.'*" (Barclay)

"Benjamin West tells how he became a painter. One day his mother went out leaving him in charge of his little sister Sally. In his mother's absence he discovered some bottles of colored ink and began to paint Sally's portrait. In the doing so he made a very considerable mess of things with ink blots all over. His mother came back. She saw the mess, but she said nothing. She picked up the piece of paper and saw the drawing. 'Why,' she said, 'it's Sally!' and she stooped and kissed him. Ever after Benjamin West used to say: 'My mother's kiss made me a painter.' Encouragement did more than rebuke could ever do." (Barclay)

### III. YOUTHFUL COURAGE BECAUSE OF GOD'S POWER (Verse 34-37)

(1) David recalled God's past mercies and power - killed the lion and bear in the past. (Verse 34-35) Remember the miracles of the past!

(2) David applied his experience of God's power in the past to the challenge of the present. (Verse 36-37)

(3) David did not deny the power and threat of the giant, but he looked beyond the giant to the God of Israel whose power was infinitely greater than the power of the giant. Human problems are diminished in the light of God's infinite power.

### IV. SPIRITUAL WEAPONS FOR A MIGHTY SPIRITUAL VICTORY (Verse 38-51)

(1) Human weaponry is inadequate. (Verse 38-39) Wrote Paul, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (II Corinthians 10:3-5) Education, position, etc. are not able to give us victory!

(2) Spiritual Weaponry for a mighty spiritual victory (Verse 38-51) David stepped out from the crowd and believed God. Listening to God instead of the unbelieving and cynical world around us is the first step to spiritual victory. David could have listened to his cynical brothers and to unbelieving Saul, but instead he took his counsel from Almighty God! He did not succumb to peer pressure, but instead he responded to the pressure of faith in his heart. His inner belief in God was expressed outwardly: 'I will go out and face the giant regardless of the blasphemy of the giant and

*regardless of the unbelief of the crowd of Israelites that surrounds me!'*

If we are to win a spiritual victory, we too must 'step out' for God, giving heed to God's call to courage rather than succumbing to the peer pressure of an unbelieving and godless world. *"Come out from among them and be ye separate," saith the Lord, "and then I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters!"* (II Corinthians 6:17-18) David used his God-given weapon - his sling. The weapon which God puts in our hand - the weapon of faith - like the simple sling which David used in battle, may appear to others to be too simple and crude and ineffective. Faith wins the battle. Faith is the victory. Not dependance on the heavy armor of Saul, but dependance on the living God, as symbolized by the simple sling of David!

David flung the stone from the sling and the stone found its target. The stone sunk into Goliath's skull and the enemy of Israel tumbled to the dust! The stone represents the 'Word of God.' The 'Word of God' - the Bible - is the stone which brings down the giants in our lives. Think of Jesus when he was being tempted. Jesus used the Scriptures against the devil and Jesus won the victory.

Remember, the battle is the Lord's. The Word of God (represented by the stone) alone can bring the giant to the ground. But without David, the battle could not have been won. God gave David faith to face the enemy, but David nevertheless had to exercise that gift of faith. The victory over the giants in our lives is not automatic. We must do our part. God gives us faith as a gift. God gives us the stones (the Word of God.) But it is David who put the stone in his sling, and it is you and it is I who must use the Bible against the 'giants' in our lives. You must put your faith into action, as David did. You must apply the Word of God to your problems.

#### V. CONQUERING OUR GIANTS TODAY

There are many giants that we face today. Let's look at a few of them.

##### (1) The Giant of Inferiority

James Dobson, who has dealt with many teenagers and children, believes that Inferiority is one of the biggest 'giants' threatening to destroy teenagers. He talks about this giant. "That feeling called Inferiority -

that crushing feeling that nobody likes me, that feeling that I am a failure, that I am a loser, a personal disaster, that I am ugly, or that I am unintelligent, or I don't have as much ability as someone else. It's that deep, deep feeling of worthlessness." Most teens feel inferior because they feel they don't come up to society's standards: (1) Beauty, (2) Brilliance, (3) Money.

Remember, God's standards are different than man's standards. God does not judge your worth by your beauty or brains or your money. God values you just because you are you! Christ would have died for you if you would have been the only one in all the world, - that's how much God loves you. He loves you as if you were the only one to be loved. He loves you even when you don't love yourself. He has confidence in you even when you lose confidence in yourself! God's love is unconditional - that is, He loves you regardless of your present circumstances. God corrects us when we are wrong, but that does not mean that God loves us any less. He loves you when you have been bad.

## (2) The Giant of Peer Pressure

"When you feel inferior, unnecessary, odd, or don't like yourself, and you're bitterly disappointed with who you are and what you are, then you are under greater pressure to avoid ridicule from the group. You don't want anyone laughing at you. So you dress the way the group tells you to dress, you talk the way they want to talk. All of your ideas are the group's ideas. You are afraid to do anything for fear of group ridicule - raise your hand in classroom, etc.

"Conformity is so dangerous because it can make you do things that are wrong simply because you don't have courage to tell the group that you must be different." Drugs - "Suppose you are in a car when several are taking drugs. What will you do when you are offered drugs or alcohol? Stand up like Daniel in the Old Testament (Be courageous like David.) Stand up and say: 'That's stupid. I won't go along with the group!'

"The leader is the one who is not inferior and weak. He can stand alone! Not made of jelly. He has the guts to stand up for right. ("Any dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim upstream.") The Bible says, 'If God be for us, who can be against us!'" (Main thoughts from James Dobson)

There are people who are godless and who try to make you feel foolish for being a Christian. They try to make you conform to the standards of unbelief in the world. But thank God for modern Davids who are not afraid of ridicule and godless peer pressure.

One young Christian man, a freshman attending a state university was ridiculed in front of an entire class of 100 students by a godless Professor. The professor told the young man that he was foolish for reading the Bible. He said that he only got confused when he read the Bible. Replied the young Christian student: `Sir, the Bible is God's letter to Christians. That's what you get for reading someone else's mail!'

You can overcome the giant of worldly peer pressure. The Bible says, "*Be not conformed to this world. Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold. But be transformed by God!*" (Note: Romans 12:1-2)

### (3) The Giant of Lust

Sex is beautiful and sexual feelings are normal and God-given, but lust is always wrong. Paul told youthful Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts." Lust is wanting to use another person to gratify your own selfish desires. This is very wrong. Adulterous actions and adulterous thoughts are both wrong. Said Jesus, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (Matthew 5:27)

Treating people as things to be exploited is very wrong. Lust is turning the beautiful into the ugly, the sacred into the profane. How do you conquer the giant of lust in your life? By prayer. By committing your mind to Christ's cleansing blood, guarding what you look at and what you mediate on, and guarding what you listen to in music.

Young persons, what do you watch on T.V.? What shows do you see at the theatre? There are relatively few shows, either at a theatre or through T.V. that Christians can watch today. What kind of music do you listen to? Some Rock music is known to stimulate lustful ideas and feelings. Much of it is satanically inspired!

God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and as God is holy, so Christians also are to be holy in their thinking. What you hear and see is what you think about, so be very careful what you look at and what you hear.

Mediate on good and wholesome thoughts. What you think will affect your very destiny!

Sow a thought, reap an action.  
Sow an action, reap a habit.  
Sow a habit, reap a character.  
Sow a character, reap a destiny!

There are many other 'giant's' which youth and children face, 'giants' which threaten to destroy their lives. 'Giants' like stealing (shoplifting), cheating on tests, rebellion against authority.

The Giant of Inferiority Complex - Read Philemon 4:13; Psalms 139:13-16; Matthew 10:30-31.

The Giant of Greed - Read Philemon 4:11-13 and Hebrews 13:5.

The Giant of Lust - Read Hebrews 13:4.

The Giant of Jealousy - Read Romans 12:3,10.

Pray this prayer: (to overcome the giant of jealousy):  
"Father, help me to rejoice with those who rejoice as well as to weep with those who weep. Enable me to take genuine pleasure in the success of others, regardless of the degree of success I am allowed to enjoy. Uproot the ugly weed of jealousy from my heart and plant in its place the beautiful flower of good will and love. In Jesus' lovely name. Amen."

Steps for deliverance from jealousy:

- (1) See the possibility of deliverance through Christ alone who never envied another.
- (2) Honestly face your personal need for deliverance.
- (3) Rechannel your tendency towards comparison with others. Compare yourself with yourself, not with another.
- (4) Rejoice in the God-ordained place which Christ has for you personally.
- (5) Realize that Christ can take away the desire for the approval and praise of the crowd - the source of much envy - and that Christ can replace this desire with the sole desire for the praise and approval of God.
- (6) Play down your successes. Never deliberately provoke envy in another, either through overt remarks of conceit or through actions of pride.

*"Then make my my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider*

*others better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:2-3)*

The Giant of Judgementalism - "Father, help me never to draw quick conclusions about people, without the adequacy of facts and without the sensitivity of deep understanding. Help me to believe the best about people, never the worst. Help me to assume, if there is any room for assumption at all, that people are much better than what others say they are. In the charitable name of Jesus. Amen.

*"Then make my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:2-3); Do not judge, or you too will be judged. (Matthew 7:1); There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:2,3)*

*God alone knows all, therefore He alone is prepared to judge all. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. God alone knows the thoughts and intents of all men's hearts. Therefore leave all judgment to God. God will, in the end, 'balance the books'. II Corinthians 5:10. All will be judged ultimately by God; therefore, we must not 'play God' ourselves.*

Negativism - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

*Believing the best about others will help others to become their best."*

*God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving. He can do what's best. He knows what's best; He wants to give me what is best. Even though I can't understand with my mind, I can accept with my heart. In all of life's experiences I can learn to give thanks, for nothing can happen to the true believer but what God allows, and God will not allow His children to shed any needless tears.*

*Jesus is the Divine Yes to all of life. "That puts a positive Yes upon every No that comes to a Christian. Everything furthers those who follow Christ." (E.S. Jones 'Divine Yes'. page 101)*

*Those who see Christianity as a list of demands will be driven to negative despair, but those who see Christianity as a reservoir of limitless resources will be leaping with positive*

joy! Note Philemon 4:8. Dwell on the positive! Don't dwell on negative conditions and don't absorb the negative spirit of reactionary and critical people.

Pray this prayer: "Father, help me to be positive, not disapproval, to give acceptance and not rejection, to be appreciative and not critical, to be edifying and not derogatory, to be constructive and not destructive, to show affection and not hostility, to be delightful and not unpleasant. In Jesus' positive and affirming name. Amen."

In conquering the enemy of Negativism, make this AFFIRMATION: "Evil companions corrupt good manners, and negative thinkers destroy positive motivation. I will be positive and keep company with positive persons!"

CONCLUSION: Whatever the `giant' may be, you can conquer it. Like David, you can trust God and listen to God's call on your life instead of the pressure of unbelieving persons around you. Like David, you can take the sling of faith and fling the stone (the Word of God) into the forehead of your giant!

Faith in God is powerful in defeating your foes. The Word of God can effectively be used against all threatening giants in your life.

## FAITH

### David (The Youth) - Courageous Faith

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. With what degree of personal conviction do you believe the truth of the following statement: "The secret to facing threatening situations in our lives - the 'giants' - is to know God, to have so much confidence in God's strength and might that the might of human problems looks small in comparison?"
2. In what ways (according to I Samuel 17:32-37) was David's faith and optimism 'contagious'? Give examples of ways in which modern-day Christians can encourage one another to perform 'feats of faith' in the face of secular opposition and worldly threats. Should the local church be a 'center for encouragement'? (Note Hebrews 10:25)
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Youthful idealism can be used of God to encourage adults, for too often adults tend to lose faith and tend to see the obstacles rather than the opportunities in a difficult situation."
4. Do you believe that (as seen in the dramatic victory of David over Goliath) human problems committed to God become divine projects to demonstrate God's power?
5. Can you cite examples of pessimistic adults who (in the name of 'realism') tried to hinder the exercise of a youth's faith and optimism? Why should an adult be careful not to 'throw cold water' on 'youthful idealism'?
6. How should God-oriented youth respond to an adult cynic who says to him: "You're too young, and you're too inexperienced! Your youthful idealism doesn't work in a world full of harsh realities! The 'giants' of life are too big for you to face. You have no business talking with such confidence?"
7. Considering the example of the youthful David (I Samuel 17:32-51) and the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 18:1-4), how would you describe and characterize a 'childlike faith'?
8. In an attempt of a parent to build faith in his child, why is it so devastating for a parent to focus on the eliminations and the faults rather than on the potential and the strength of his child? Tell why you agree or disagree with the

following statement: "Parents who destroy the faith, idealism, and spiritual vision of their children, cause their children to sin." (Note Matthew 18:6)

9. According to I Samuel 17:34-37, how did David exercise the courage of faith in the face of a life-threatening situation?

10. How does I Samuel 17:38-39 teach us that human weaponry is inadequate as we fight out spiritual battles? (Note II Corinthians 10:3-5)

11. Considering the example of young David (I Samuel 17::38-51), do you agree with the following description of 'Faith': "Faith means giving counsel to Almighty God, regardless of all the 'odds' against you, and refusing to succumb to outer negative peer pressure and to one's own inner doubts and fears?"

12. Considering David's reaction to the threats of Goliath, what does the 'sling' and the 'stone' represent to us, as we seek to exercise true faith in our spiritual battles?

13. If it is true that 'the battle is the Lord's, is it also true that the victory over the 'giants' in our lives is not automatic? What is God's part and what is the believer's part, in winning the spiritual battles of life?

14. How would you describe the 'giant' of 'inferiority complexes' which seeks to destroy the lives of young people today? What false standards in society contribute to the deep feelings of inferiority which so many youth battle with today? What, according to the teachings of Christianity, is the basis of a person's dignity and self-esteem? What specifically should a young person do today to 'kill the giant' of inferiority which seeks to destroy his very life socially, intellectually, and spiritually? Do you believe that most, if not all, physical suicide are priced with a lose of personal confidence and self-esteem?

15. What would you, as a counsellor say to a young person who is struggling to overcome negative 'peer pressure'? Note I Corinthians 15:33; Romans 12:1-2; Daniel 3:13-18)

16. How would you counsel a youth who is being attacked by the 'giant of best'? How would you, in a counselling setting, distinguish between 'natural attraction for the opposite sex' and 'unnatural lust for the opposite sex?' (Note Philippians 4:8; I Corinthians 6:12-20; I John 2;15-17; II Timothy 2:22)

CHAPTER 20

FAITH

DAVID (THE FUGITIVE) - TESTED FAITH

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE FUGITIVE) - TESTED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Samuel 13:14

TEXT: "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart."

INTRODUCTION: Before David actually sat on his God-appointed throne as the greatest King of Israel, he was hunted like a wild animal by jealous-ridden, murderous Saul. Let us look at this period in David's life. Three activities of David stand out during this time - (1) David the Friend, (2) David the Fleeer, (3) David the Forgiver.

PROPOSITION: The warmth of personality, the discretion of action, and the nobility of spirit all unite to make David a truly great man during this fugitive period of his life. That which is most impressive during this period is David's attitude of forgiveness, despite Saul's murderous attempts at David's life. The really great man is the man who is true in friendship, wise in threatening danger, and forgiving of evil behavior.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. DAVID THE FRIEND
- II. DAVID THE FLEER
- III. DAVID THE FORGIVER

CONCLUSION: The young David matured into the adult David, and part of that maturity came through the trials of fugitive living. David faced the temptation to despair but he held on in trust to God, partly with the help of noble Jonathan. David was tempted to be bitter and to return evil for evil, but instead he returned good for evil and proved himself most fit for the highest office in Israel. David's fugitive life was most unpleasant but it proved to be a means of perfecting his character. Saul now dead, David was ready to become king.

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE FUGITIVE) - TESTED FAITH

SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 13:14

TEXT: "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart."

#### INTRODUCTION:

Before David sat on the throne of Israel as king, David wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground - running for his life because he was pursued by the murderous King Saul who was jealously outraged because of David's growing popularity. (Hebrews 11:38)

David's life is worthy of serious study, considering that more is told about him than any other man in the Bible. David was a choice youth. He was respectful, faithful, talented, disciplined, wholehearted, versatile, brilliant, and a deep lover of God and nature. David, who was tutored by God in nature, was a courageous challenger in the face of Israel's enemy - Goliath. David trusted God, defied sin, wrought a mighty victory, and humbly ascribed all praise to God. It is no wonder that God chose David to be king of Israel. However, before David actually sat on the throne of Israel, he was hunted like a wild animal by jealous-ridden, murderous Saul. Let us look at this period in David's life. Three activities of David stand out during this time - (1) David the Friend, (2) David the Fleeer, (3) David the Forgiver.

#### PROPOSITION:

The warmth of personality, the discretion of action, and the nobility of spirit all unite to make David a truly great man during this fugitive period of his life. That which is most impressive during this period is David's attitude of forgiveness, despite Saul's murderous attempts at David's life. The really great man is the man who is true in friendship, wise in threatening danger, and forgiving of evil behavior.

#### I. DAVID THE FRIEND

David and Jonathan are the epitome of human friendship. Their love for one another was as great as that which exists between a man and his wife. "Jonathan's soul was in unison with David's soul; Jonathan loved him as himself." (1 Samuel 18:2) There was nothing that Jonathan would not do for David. They were of one mind and one purpose. Their love was deep - a soul love. Each fellowshiped in the depth of spirit with the other. The interest of one was the interest of the other. The joys and sorrows of one were the joys and sorrows of the other.

"Because he loved him, Jonathan made a covenant with David; he stripped himself of the robe he had on and gave it to David; also his armor with sword, bow, and belt." (1 Samuel 18:3,4) This was indeed a most sacred covenant. Covenant in the Old Testament was made between two parties, each pledging his undying devotion and faithfulness to the other. To break a covenant was a most serious offense and was described in terms of tragic infidelity. By stripping himself of his armor, sword, bow and belt, Jonathan was symbolically showing the transfer of kingly power from the household of Saul to the household of David. What a humiliating act and yet what a noble act. Jonathan knew that his father's behavior had forfeited any possibility of himself becoming king. David would soon become king in place of Jonathan, but Jonathan held no resentment towards David. Jonathan, in love, stepped down that David could step up.

The son (Jonathan) is different than the father (Saul), as the day is different from the night. Saul jealously resented David and sought his death; Jonathan tenderly loved David and protected his life. "Saul suggested to his son Jonathan and to all his attendants to bring about David's death. But Saul's son Jonathan prized David highly, so he warned David, 'Saul, my farther, is intending your death; be on guard tomorrow morning; go in hiding in some secret spot.'" (1 Samuel 19:1,2) Later, when Jonathan learned more definitely of the murderous intentions of his father, Jonathan warned David, who was in hiding, through an interesting scheme involving the shooting of arrows in a certain way. (1 Samuel 20:16-40) Upon learning of Saul's intentions, David and Jonathan met again to reaffirm their love for one another. "As soon as the lad was gone, David came from beside the stone pile and threw himself prone on the ground before Jonathan, bowing down three times. They kissed each other and wept together until David got control of himself. Then Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace! Since we have sworn to each other in the Lord's name. the Lord will be Mediator between me and you; also between my descendants and yours forever! David then arose and left, while Jonathan entered the town.'" (1 Samuel 20:41,42)

Jonathan's heart was heavy when he learned of his father's terrible hatred of David. Jonathan remained loyal to his father and in the end even died in battle with his father. However, Jonathan's love for David never wavered, and Jonathan's love for David on one occasion almost cost Jonathan his life. Because Jonathan stood up for David, "Saul threw his spear at him to kill him." (1 Samuel 20:33)

On one occasion when Saul was hotly pursuing David, David became weary and weak in his faith. David was discouraged and his trust in God was weakened. If David would have forsaken

God at this time, David would never have become King. Who of all people would come to strengthen David but the very son of the man who was the cause of David's discouragement - Jonathan! No jealousy in Jonathan's heart. No secret hope that David would fail in order that Jonathan would have more of an opportunity to become king. Rather, Jonathan's love for David and loyalty to him is greater than ever before. "Jonathan, Saul's son, went to David in the woods and strengthened his trust in God. He told him, 'I have no fear, for the hand of Saul my father will not reach you. You will be Israel's king, and I will be next to you. My father Saul knows this too well.'" (1 Samuel 23:16,17) Jonathan's friendship proved to be most precious and valuable to David.

Faith means faithfulness, as seen in the faithful love which David had for Saul. Faith is not proud or self-sufficient, but faith in God manifests itself in a life of humble submission, undying love, and mutual dependence.

Faith in God is demonstrated by faithfulness in human relationships. Faith in God during the hardships of life does not result in closing off people around oneself, but in opening up one's life in humble dependence to a close friend.

Do you have a 'Jonathan' in your life, one in whom you can tenderly confide and one with whom you can pray and share your burdens and heartaches? David, who was destined to be king, was not lifted up in his own eyes, but was one who was not ashamed to pour out his deepest feelings to a close friend.

Fortunate is the man who has a 'Jonathan' in his life, who is transparent enough and humble enough to reveal his needs and his heartaches. There may be a time in your life when you, like David, feel discouraged or feel that circumstances have been unfair, or a time when people have misunderstood you or been jealous of you. It is when you feel like a fugitive that you need a 'Jonathan' in your life - a close friend who will weep with you as well as rejoice with you.

Let your husband or your wife (if you are married) be a 'Jonathan' in your life. Share with your wife or your husband your deep feelings. It is not a sign of a weak faith to turn to a faithful friend and to share life's burdens with that friend. Having such a friend or a marriage companion with whom you can share the deepest concerns of your life can be a great spiritual help. The great men of faith (like David and like Paul) were men who had close friends with whom they could share their life's burdens.

This, by the way, is a good case for belonging to a 'Christian Growth Group' - a small group where you can care and share and pray for fellow believers in the spirit of humility and love.

Faith in God means establishing faithful human relationships where love flows freely and where burdens are shared openly.

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

## 11. DAVID THE FLEER

The fugitive flight of David is interesting and filled with drama, but it is somewhat detailed and drawn out. We will but briefly follow that flight. Saul's early jealousy of David fast intensified. While David was serving Saul by playing on the harp, the evil of Saul's heart was quickly vented on David. "Then an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul while he sat in his house with a spear in his hand. As David was playing the strings with his hand, Saul tried to pin him to the wall; but David dodged away from Saul so that he hit the wall with the spear, and that night David escaped." (1 Samuel 19:9,10)

Saul's messengers attempted to surround David's house to catch and to kill David, but with the help of Michal, David's wife, David fled away and escaped. Saul's messengers broke into the house and sought to kill what they thought was David in his bed, only to find out that Michal had wrapped an image up in the bed to make it appear as David. (1 Samuel 19:11-17)

Weary and in need of food, David persuaded the high priest Ahimelech to give him the shewbread for food. The sword of Goliath was kept by Ahimelech and, because David was in need of a weapon, Ahimelech gave David Goliath's sword which David had years before taken in battle from Goliath. After David left, Saul heard that David had been to see Ahimelech. Saul therefore went to Ahimelech and asked Ahimelech why he had protected and sided with David. Ahimelech was unaware that there was any division between David and Saul and told Saul that he was innocent in the whole affair. However, the hate of Saul for David was so great that Saul refused to believe Ahimelech, and proceeded to carry out a most horrible act. "But the king said, 'Ahimelech, you must certainly die, you and your whole family!' The king then ordered the guards who stood by him, 'About face!' Execute the Lord's priests because they too side with David, and although they knew he was a fugitive, they never informed me.' But the king's men would not lift their hands to dispatch the priests of the Lord. The king then ordered Doeg,, 'About Face! Dispatch the priests!' Doeg the Edomite turned around and dispatched the priests; he slew eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod, He also put Nob, the town of the priests, to the sword, massacring men, women, children and babes on the breast; cattle, donkeys, and sheep." (1 Samuel 22:16-19)

Only one priest, Abiathar, escaped this massacre. He came to David and told David all. David was exceedingly grieved, in heart, and said, "I am the occasion of death for your entire family. You stay with me: have no fear, for whoever is after your life is after mine. With me you are perfectly safe." (1 Samuel 22:22b,23)

David had near escapes from the cruel hand of Saul. With an outlaw band of about 400 men, David lived a rather unsettled life, running from place to place from Saul. "David stayed in desert strongholds and remained in the mountainous parts of the Aiph desert. Day in and day out Saul kept hunting for him, but God did not hand him over into his power." (1 Samuel 23:14) Saul was so intent on finding David to kill him that he said on one occasion, "If he is anywhere in the land, I will trace him among all the thousands of Judah." (1 Samuel 23:23) For awhile David even lived among the Philistines and posed as their friend, to escape the threat of Saul's murderous attempts.

David learned during this period of fugitive fleeing to trust God. His faith was greatly in God and he committed his cause unto God. David, however, while trusting in God, trusted also in his good judgment. He did not give himself over into the hands of Saul, for he realized the seriousness of evil. David was not naive when it came to human nature. He knew the seriousness of jealousy, and he did not give jealousy opportunity to express itself. A wise man does not carelessly throw himself into the trap of evil with the contention that God will take care of him. The wise man knows when to retreat and when to run - not out of cowardice, but out of wisdom and true courage.

### III. DAVID THE FORGIVER

During David's fugitive flight from Saul, there was at least two different times when David had opportunity to slay Saul, but on both occasions David restrained himself. (1 Samuel 26:7-24) This is the account of David's second sparing of Saul's life.

Earlier, David found Saul sleeping in a cave and cut off the tail end of Saul's robe. Then Saul woke up and a conversation, with some distance between them, took place. "David said to Saul, 'Why do you listen to people's words, who say "David schemes evil against you?" Just look! This very day your eyes see how in the cave the Lord put you in my power. They talked about killing you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master for he is the Lord's anointed.' Take a look, my father, and see your coattail in my hand. I cut off the tail end of your robe without killing you; so you know that I have no evil or

rebellion in mind; that I have done nothing against you, while you intend to take my life." (1 Samuel 24:9-11) Replied Saul to David, "'Is this your voice, my son David?' Saul then raised his voice and wept. He told David, 'You are fairer than I am; for you treated me well, and I have treated you meanly. Today you have shown your benevolent spirit toward me, not killing me when the Lord committed me into your hand. When one surprises his enemy, will he let him go unharmed? May the Lord be good to you for your dealings with me today. Now then, I know for certain that you will be king and that the kinship over Israel will be enduring under your direction. So, make oath to me by the Lord that you will not destroy my descendants, nor wipe out my name from my father's family.' David swore this to Saul, and Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold." (1 Samuel 24:16-22)

David refused to lower himself to hate. He returned good for evil, and consequently "heaped coals of fire" on Saul's head. (Romans 12:20) David refused even to talk evil of Saul, let alone do him any physical harm. Although Saul was acting in a very unkingly fashion and was soon coming to his end, David respected him as king and treated him with the honor that befits a king. David's spirit remained unspotted even during bitter persecution, and even after Saul's tragic death, David had nothing evil to say of Saul. Rather, David's mourning over the death of Saul and Jonathan was most deeply-felt and genuine.

"David took up his lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

'Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights.  
How the mighty have fallen!  
Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets  
of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines  
be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised  
rejoice.

Oh mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew  
nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain.  
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the  
shield of Saul - no longer rubbed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the  
mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the  
sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

Saul and Jonathan - in life they were loved and  
gracious, and in death they were not parted.  
They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger  
than lions.

O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

How the mighty have fallen in battle!  
Jonathan lies slain on your height.  
I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me.  
Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.

How the mighty have fallen!  
The weapons of war have perished!"

Faith in God is demonstrated by your ability to forgive those who do evil against you.

David repeatedly restrained his wrath and extended his mercy towards Saul.

There is no true faith in God without a spirit of genuine forgiveness of others. David was most noble in his treatment of Saul, even sparing Saul's life when David could easily have put an end to his enemy's life. David followed the example of Christ. Of his enemies, Jesus said (while He was on the cross), "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

Jesus had earlier taught His disciples to love their enemies. (Note Matthew 5:43-48).

In the hour of his death, Stephen (the first Christian martyr) had words of forgiveness for his enemies on his lips.

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'" (Acts 7:59-60)

Paul wrote, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry' feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'" (Romans 12:19-20)

Wrote Peter, "And now this word to all of you: You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God's help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it. If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and guard your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do

#### B. CONSECRATED AT EARLY AGE

Recognizing that Samuel was a God-given child, Hannah the mother consecrated the child to God's special service at a very early age. "When she had weaned him, she took him - still very young -with her; also a three-year-old bullock, a bushel of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the Lord's house at Shiloh. After the bullock had been slain, she took the lad to Eli and said, 'Please, sir, as you live, sir, I am the woman who stood near you here in prayer before the Lord. For this lad I prayed, and the Lord has granted me what I prayed Him for; I have therefore handed him back to the Lord; as long as he lives he is returned to the Lord.' And there he worshiped before the Lord." (I Samuel 1:24-28) This dedication was most significant. The parent who dedicates his child to God's special service is following in the footsteps of Hannah. Have you dedicated your child to God?

#### C. SERVED IN TABERNACLE DURING CHILDHOOD

Year after year, Samuel ministered in the Lord's House at Shiloh. He early learned to respect Holy Things. Ever before he encountered God personally, Samuel was well-trained in religious practice and service. He learned to put first things first. He learned to fear the God of his fathers. He learned to carefully obey the instructions of Eli in serving in the Lord's House. He learned respect and obedience as a child and therefore was respectful and obedient as a man.

Fortunate is the child who has learned obedience, respect, duty, and discipline as a child. Character is produced by God's transformation, but, character is also learned by practice.

#### D. CALLED BY GOD TO FRUITFUL SERVICE

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel as lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I Am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say,

good. Try to live in peace even if you must run after it to catch and hold it! For the Lord is watching His children, listening to their prayers; but the Lord's face is hard against those who do evil. Usually no one will hurt you for wanting to do good. But even if they should, you are to be envied, for God will reward you for it. Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell him, and do it in a gentle and respectful way. Do what is right; then if men speak against you, calling you evil names, they will become ashamed of themselves for falsely accusing you when you have only done what is good." (1 Peter 3:8-16 Living Bible)

**CONCLUSION:** The young David matured into the adult David, and part of that maturity came through the trial of fugitive living. David faced the temptation to despair but he held on in trust to God, partly with the help of noble Jonathan. David was tempted to be bitter and to return evil for evil, but instead he returned good for evil and proved himself most fit for the highest office in Israel. David's fugitive life was most unpleasant but it proved to be a means of perfecting his character. Saul now dead, David was ready to become king.

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE FUGITIVE) - TESTED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. How would you describe Jonathan's love for David? (1 Samuel 18:2) Considering Jonathan's relationship to King Saul, and considering God's will to make David the next king, why can it be said that Jonathan's love for David was not only great because of its depth but that it was also unusual because of the uniqueness of the circumstances? Is there any indication that Jonathan was ever jealous or envious of David? Do you agree with the following statement: "Great faith in a person gives birth to an enduring love for a person, and where there is great love there can never be competition, strife, or envy." (Note the description of love as recorded in 1 Corinthians 13, especially the following (which is an accurate description of Jonathan's love for David) - "love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud....If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him." (Living Bible)
2. What was the significance of the covenant which Jonathan made with David, as recorded in 1 Samuel 18:3-4?
3. Share events from the life of Jonathan that demonstrate his undying loyalty to David even during times when Jonathan risked his life to protect David. Can one's faith in God be measured by one's loyalty to God's people - a loyalty that is willing to lay down one's life? (Note 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4)
4. How is Jonathan's encouragement of David (when David was very low in his spirits and utterly discouraged) an example to us as we seek to be true friends to others? (Note 1 Samuel 23:16,17; Proverbs 18:24; Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)
5. Do you find yourself transparent enough and humble enough to reveal your needs and heartaches to a 'Jonathan' in your life? Is it a sign of a 'weak faith' for a Christian to turn to a faithful friend for the purpose of sharing life's burdens with that friend? (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:12-14) Have you experienced meaning and joy in your life as a result of regularly sharing your needs with other believers in the context of a small weekly 'Growth Group' or 'Bible Study Group'?

6. What is your response to the following statement: "Faith in God means establishing faithful human relationships where love flows freely and where burdens are shared openly?"
7. What lessons do you believe David learned during the fugitive period of his life when he had often times to flee from murderous King Saul? Have you ever had a time in your personal life when you felt like a 'fugitive' - a time when circumstances were hard and when people around you were unfair? What lessons can a believer learn during a time of hardship and suffering and loss and persecution, that he might not learn during times of routine and calm and prosperity? (Note 1 Peter 3:8-17; 4:12-19)
8. Considering the cautionary steps which David took to escape the murderous plots of hateful King Saul, do you believe that the following statements reflect the 'common sense' of truth: "David was not naive when it came to human nature. He knew the seriousness of jealousy, and he did not give jealousy opportunity to express itself. A wise man does not carelessly throw himself into the trap of evil with the contention that God will take care of him. The wise man knows when to retreat and when to run - not out of cowardice, but out of wisdom and true courage?"
9. How do you react when you read of David's refusal to do evil to King Saul? (1 Samuel 24:16-22; 26:7-24) Share your response to the following New Testament portion of Scripture: "Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that He will repay those who deserve it. (Don't take the law into your own hands.) Instead, feed your enemy if he is hungry. If he is thirsty give him something to drink and you will be 'heaping coals of fire on his head.' In other words, he will feel ashamed of himself for what he has done to you. Don't let evil get the upper hand but conquer evil by doing good." (Romans 12:19-21 Living Bible)
10. Share your reaction to the following statements: "Faith in God is demonstrated by your ability to forgive those who do evil against you. There is no true faith in God without a spirit of genuine forgiveness of others." (Note Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:59-60)



CHAPTER 21

FAITH

DAVID (THE PENITENT) - REPENTANT FAITH

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE PENITENT) - REPENTANT FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 51:1-19

**TEXT:** "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalms 51:17)

**INTRODUCTION:** Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after your failure wondered if God still cared for you? He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail? Psalms 51 describes the steps toward recovery of one who had fallen miserably into sin.

**PROPOSITION:** The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences into the life of the one who has violated God's laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. DESCRIPTION OF SIN'S TRAGEDY
  - A. Context of Sin (Conditions Conducive For Passion)
  - B. Consequences of Sin (Results of Passionate Action)
  
- II. DESCRIPTION OF THE SINNER'S RECOVERY
  - A. Conviction of Sin (Awakening of the Sinner's Conscience)
  - B. Confession of Sin (Consternation in the Sinner's Prayer)
  - C. Cleansing from Sin (Faith for the Believer's total deliverance)
    - (1) The Reality of Original Sin
    - (2) The Divine Standard of Inward Purity
    - (3) The Possibility of Abounding Joy
  - D. Character-Building through Faith (Growth for the Believer's Maturity)
    - (1) Steadfastness
    - (2) Holiness
    - (3) Joy
    - (4) Submission
    - (5) Service

- (6) Righteousness
- (7) Praise
- (8) Humility
- (9) Worship

**CONCLUSION:** The Bible says that 'where sin abounds, grace superabounds'! There is no sin stain so deep but what the cleansing blood of Jesus goes deeper yet! Is your sin great? Then God's love is greater yet! Is your heart broken? Then God's power to heal is available! Confess your sins, plead the mercy of God, cry out to God for inner cleansing, believe God for total healing, and accept God's offer to clothe you with His own garments of righteousness! He will not only forgive your sins and cleanse you from inner moral depravity, but He will heal your broken spirit and rebuild your life. You can become a mature believer, healed and whole and ready to turn other sinners to the living God. (Psalms 51:13) Throw yourself on the mercy seat of God! Be whole!

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE PENITENT) - REPENTANT FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 51:1-19

TEXT: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalms 51:17)

INTRODUCTION: There is an old-fashioned song entitled "Does Jesus Care?" I sang it often in Church when I was a mere child. One verse goes like this:

"Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed  
To resist some temptation strong;  
When for my deep grief I find no relief,  
Tho' my tears flow all the night long?

The chorus answers the question:

"O yes, He cares; I know He cares.  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Savior cares."

Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after your failure wondered if God still cared for you? Have you ever felt so guilty that you had a hard time thinking that you could ever love yourself again? Have you ever had a hard time looking at yourself in the mirror after you did or said or thought something that was ignoble? Have you ever had an experience when you felt, like Simon Peter, that you had denied your Lord? "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:61,62)

It is comforting to know, as our text says, that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart of repentance. Peter sinned grievously and he wept bitterly, but he also repented and turned to God wholeheartedly. Peter's sins were forgiven and his dignity was restored. He became a great leader in the early church.

He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. Wrote Paul to the overly-confident Corinthian believers: "So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that

he does not fall tomorrow." (I Corinthians 10:12 Phillips.) Notes Don Bastian, "Be sure of God, but don't be too sure of yourself without Him. A New Yorker had puffed his way to the peak of Matterhorn. In glee he leaped into the air, both hands above his head. Just then, a cold gust nearly swept him off the peak. His guide shouted, 'Down on your knees.'....It was like telling him 'Either get down on your knees or fall flat on your face.'" (A Faith To Grow By; page 41)

What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail?

It is interesting that the Bible records the failures of its heroes. "Noah got drunk, Moses got angry, and Gideon got scared. Peter could be inconsistent, Paul was inconsiderate, Thomas doubted, Martha pouted. But God dealt with them and used every one of them for His glory and for our blessing." (What Happens When Life Doesn't? Briscoe; page 136)

Psalms 51 describes the steps toward recovery of one who had fallen miserably into sin. Scholars believe this Psalm was written following the time when the prophet Nathan came to David to rebuke David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

**PROPOSITION:** The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences into the life of the one who has violated God's laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing.

## I. DESCRIPTION OF SIN'S TRAGEDY

### A. CONTEXT OF SIN (Conditions Conducive For Passion)

1. Idle Mind - II Samuel 11:1,2 Indulgence - eating and drinking; leisure with no great task; David stayed in Jerusalem and enjoyed leisure (got up from his couch.) Note Briscoe, "No red-blooded king stays in bed while his men are on the field of battle. The king had a case of the royal blahs." (page 137)

"In works of labor or of skill,  
I would be busy too,  
For Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do." (Isaac Watts)

Someone said, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." Note the following warnings against idleness: II Thessalonians 3:6-13; I Timothy 5:11-15. The man or woman whose mind is full of God's thought and whose hands are full of love projects is not likely to fall into sin!

Titus 3:14 says, "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives."

2. The Second Look that led to passionate thinking and mental adultery (How did he know she was exceptionally beautiful? He obviously gazed at the woman.) Guard the affections of your heart by guarding the eye gate and the hearing gate of the body.

3. Mental plotting - II Samuel 11:3 which eventually gave birth to:

4. Passionate Act itself - II Samuel 11:4.

#### B. CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (Results of Passionate Action)

The Bible says, "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." We can choose initially, but we cannot choose the consequences. For instance, a murderer may be forgiven of his sin, but he must bear, as a forgiven murderer, the consequences of his sins - imprisonment. Or take another illustration: A man who has smoked all of his life can be forgiven, but he must bear, as a forgiven person, the consequences of his smoking habit - bad health perhaps in the form of lung cancer or heart disease. A lustful sinner can be forgiven of his terrible sexual sin, but the consequences of his sin may remain - consequences like regret or sometimes certain diseases. David was wonderfully forgiven, but the consequences of his many sins remained.

1. Unexpected problems (II Samuel 11:5) - conception of illegitimate child. Sin never keeps its promises. Pleasures in sin are only for a 'season', short-lived. Pleasures give way to pain and heartache, and shocking surprises.

2. Cover-up plot which was unsuccessful (II Samuel 11:6-9) (the Bible says, "Be sure your sins will find you out.")

3. Further desperate plotting as attempt to cover up his shameful sin (II Samuel 11:10-13.) Sin leads to deception.

4. Successful plot of murder. (II Samuel 11:14-17)

5. Stole another man's wife. (II Samuel 11:26,27;12:10)

6. Harsh judgment from God. (II Samuel 12:15-19)

(a) Illegitimate son's death (II Samuel 11:14-17)

(b) Ammon, a son of David, committed incest with Tamar, a daughter of David. Absalom, David's son, slaughtered Ammon as a punishment (II Samuel 13:22-38).

(c) Absalom, David's son, undermined David, secretly conspired against David for the throne of Israel, took over Jerusalem temporarily, causing David to flee for his life, and finally David's army fought against Absalom's army resulting finally in Absalom's tragic death.

(d) Internal rebellion, dissensions, and plots which made life weary for David.

One of the tragedies of sin is that others are affected when one sins. Sin has terrible social consequences. David faced serious trouble in his household for years, following his sin.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE SINNER'S RECOVERY

A. CONVICTION OF SIN (Awakening of The Sinner's Conscience)

The prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, and he said to David, 'You are the man.' (II Samuel 12:7) Before a man can be right with God, he must experience a spiritual awakening. He must confront God and recognize his own personal, spiritual need. This 'Collision with God' or inner awakening to personal need is the work of God's Spirit. Notes Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Though men decide not to believe in God and to put Him and His ways out of their lives, though they ignore all consequences and in a spirit of bravado decide to follow the other life, they do not therefore finish with God and truth at that point. The truth continues to remind them of its existence and to worry them. It does so most definitely, of course, in and through the conscience. It warns, it condemns, and it prohibits. The Truth is not static and lifeless. It is actually within us--there is 'light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world'...The truth follows us and worries us." (The Plight of Man and the Power of God. Page 51)

During the time that David was hiding his sin, his conscience must have bothered him very much. Sin unconfessed brings much disturbance. In another Psalm (Psalms 32:3) David writes

about the affects of unconfessed sins: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."

B. CONFESSION OF SIN (Psalms 51:1-4) (Consternation in the Sinner's Prayer)

After God awakens a person to his true spiritual condition, he must repent of his sins. When Nathan confronted David with his heinous sins, David did not try to rationalize his sins or deny them or scapegoat responsibility upon someone else. "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" (II Samuel 12:13) In Psalms 51:1. David recalls GOD's merciful disposition: "Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions." The sinner who finds himself helpless and hopeless, has no claim to make on God except God's mercy. The sinner, whose awakened conscience intensifies his sense of total unworthiness, never demands God's justice (which would result in the execution of the death sentence), but he pleads for God's mercy (which results in pardon and forgiveness).

"In my hands no price I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling."

"The blood, the blood is all my plea,  
O, hallelujah, it cleanses me."

It is God's nature to be merciful, so the repentant one can be assured that he will receive what he needs - mercy - not what he deserves - justice! God's unfailing love and His great compassion is the source of hope for an otherwise hopeless and despairing situation of moral collapse.

If David believed that God was, by nature, a God of unfailing mercy and compassion, how much more should we affirm God's mercy, especially now that we see God's love personified in Jesus Christ! Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost, that He came to heal the morally diseased, that He came to restore the fallen. Jesus is filled with compassion for sinners.

"Come, and He will give you rest;  
Trust Him, for His word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest;  
Christ receiveth sinful men."

David realized his personal guilty condition and made no

attempt to blame others or to rationalize or to deny his sin. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." (verse 3)

Even though David had sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba and against the entire nation of Israel which he ruled over as king, David recognized that sins against mankind and nations were essentially sins against the Sovereign God Himself. "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (verse 4a)

Even though sins have social consequences and need the pardon of our fellowmen against whom we have sinned, there is no sin that is not a violation against God's will, that is not a perverting of God's ways, that is not a missing of God's mark. All sin is sin against God primarily, and only against others secondarily. To understand the true nature of sin is to feel compelled to acknowledge God's goodness in contrast to one's own evil, and to acknowledge God's righteousness in contrast to one's own unrighteousness. Seeing one's sin against the backdrop of God's holiness compels one to cry out with David, "I have done evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge." (verse 4b)

C. CLEANSING FROM SIN (Psalms 51:5-9) (Faith for the believer's total deliverance.)

1. The reality of Original Sin (verse 5)

David acknowledged his need, not only for forgiveness of sins which he committed, but also for cleansing of moral depravity which he inherited. "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalms 51:5) Notes Donald Bastian regarding Original Sin, "It is that evil tendency with which every individual is born, a tendency which disposes him to do wrong and thus to become not only by nature, but by personal choice a sinner." Donald Bastian says that original sin "is explained by the universal law of natural generation that like begets like. Adam, by the personal exercise of his own free will fell into sin, thus becoming a sinner. The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure, but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own." (Genesis 6:5,12; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21-22)

2. The Divine Standard of Inward Purity (verse 6,7)

Prayed David to God: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place." (Psalms 51:6)

David recognized his need for pure motives, for inward healing of all duplicity and double-mindedness. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. It was Kieregaard who said that purity of heart is "to will one thing" - to will to do God's will only. To be truthful in the 'inward parts' is to be genuine and integrated, with a heart set upon God alone. A supreme preference for God and His holiness describes a pure heart. God calls every believer to a life which is guileless, singleminded, wholehearted, sincere, love-filled, Spirit-controlled.

What God commands, He also supplies. If God requires inward purity in the heart of believers, then God will also enable believers to be pure. The God who calls His people to be holy is the God who also accomplishes the work of total cleansing in the hearts of His people. It is the backslidden believer who must confess his sins; it is the Savior who alone can forgive the sins. It is the believer who must acknowledge his need for heart cleansing; it is God the Sanctifier who alone can cleanse the believer's heart of all moral pollution! "*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*" (Psalms 51:;7)

3. The Possibility of Abounding Joy (verse 8,9)  
"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity." (verse 8,9)

The one who confesses his sins and who consecrates his life to God, is the one whose broken life will be healed and whose joy will be restored. God will hide His face from his sins and will blot out all his iniquity, and the consecrated believer will experience joy and gladness beyond measure.

Note the order: Confession of sins which brings forgiveness, consecration of heart which brings cleansing, inner healing which brings unbounded joy! It is futile to seek or to expect gladness in one's life until there has first been genuine repentance of sin and total consecration of the heart of God. Joy is the result of a right relationship with God, and there cannot be a right relationship with God unless sins have been forgiven and moral depravity has been cleansed.

D. CHARACTER-BUILDING THROUGH FAITH (Psalms 51:10-19)  
(Growth For the Believer's Full Maturity)

The God who forgives and the God who cleanses, is also the God who establishes the sincere believer in a life of true

maturity. The marks of a mature, godly lifestyle are briefly described in the remaining verses of Psalms 51.

1. Steadfastness (verse 10)

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." The power of God to forgive and the power of God to cleanse are marvelous powers, but is not the power of God to keep the believer free from sinning on a moment-by-moment basis just as great? For the believer to remain steadfast and faithful amidst the changes and the chances of life and amidst the threats of temptations is a miracle indeed. To serve God, come 'hell or high water', is a mark of a man who has learned daily to submit to the lordship of Christ! A 'steadfast spirit' is a spirit that can stand the tests of time and the tests of trials and temptations. Wrote Paul to the Corinthian believers, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" (1 Corinthians 15:58 King James Version)

It should not be surprising to us that heart purity is inseparably connected with steadfastness in the Christian walk. James tells us that it is the carnal believer - the one who is double-minded - who is "*unstable in all he does.*" (James 1:8) The unstable are like "a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." (James 1:6)

2. Holiness (verse 11)

"Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." Saul, the first king of Israel, so grieved the Lord that eventually the Spirit of the Lord left him. David, having gravely sinned against the Lord, feared that the Spirit of God might be taken from him as happened to Saul. But the difference between Saul and David must be recognized. Saul's temporary remorse for his shameful actions did not lead him to deep repentance and a permanent change of behavior. Saul did not, like David, have a broken heart and a contrite spirit of genuine repentance.

The person of the Spirit is grieved in the life of the backslidden believer, but the Spirit does not leave such a person if he pleads for inner cleansing, and if he surrenders himself anew to the leadership of the Lord. The Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart of the straying believer, is the same Holy Spirit who rebuilds and matures the character of the surrendered believer.

3. Joy (verse 12a)

David cries out, "Restore to me the joy of your

salvation." Joy that is lost because of willful sinning, can be restored because of sincere confession and total surrender. Salvation - the recovery of a lost soul by the power of God - is a worthy cause of unspeakable joy. The joy of the Lord constitutes the strength of the believer whose sins are forgiven and whose heart is cleansed and whose will is surrendered to do God's will. Happiness depends on happenings, but the joy which God gives to the trusting heart is independent of life's changing circumstances. Happiness is a product of happy external events; joy, on the other hand, is a gift of God permanently experienced by the sanctified believer, in spite of circumstances!

#### 4. Submission (verse 12b)

David further prays, "Grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Glad obedience as a result of a submissive spirit is a mark of true maturity. A 'willing spirit' is a spirit that is teachable and moldable, open to change and to correction and to discipline.

#### 5. Service (verse 13)

"Then will I teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.." The man whose sins are forgiven and whose heart is cleansed and whose spirit is teachable, is a man who is ready and worthy to teach others. Persons who are well trained themselves become good trainers of others. Persons who personally experience forgiveness and inner cleansing are equipped to help others whose experiential needs are the same as their own. The truly converted and the thoroughly cleansed ones become God's best evangelists and teachers, or better said, God's only evangelists, for how can one convert another to God if he has never been personally converted himself? David knows that if his sins are forgiven, if his heart is cleaned, if his joy is restored, if his spirit is renewed, then he is equipped to teach transgressors and to turn sinners to God. One important mark of maturity is the desire to witness, to seek the lost ones for the Lord, to teach transgressors the ways of God.

#### 6. Righteousness (verse 14)

"Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."

What a contrast between the sinner's 'bloodguilt' and the Lord's righteousness. David deserved the death penalty for his gross iniquities, but he asks not only for pardon and purity but for the Lord's very righteousness to be given to him! Far from being presumptuous, the sinner

whose guilt is real needs to acknowledge his unworthiness before God, but, far from despairing, the sinner whose pardon and cleansing is assured by Christ, needs to claim the best that God has to offer him - the very gift of God's righteousness! Thus, while there is never a place for presumptuous self-righteousness (because of the fact of man's universal guilt and moral pollution), there is also never room for debilitating self-despair (because of the fact of God's gift of Christ's righteousness available to all of mankind.) From the depths of 'bloodguilt', one can be raised to the heights of Christ's 'borrowed righteousness'. Even though our hands are stained with the blood of our sinful crimes, the blood of Jesus Christ is able to justify the ungodly and to clothe him with the pure garments of God's righteousness!

A truly mature person is one who enjoys Christ's righteousness in place of his own self-righteousness. He has exchanged his own filthy rags of self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6), for the pure garments of Christ's righteousness. He stands justified in God's sight because of what Christ has done for him. His tongue sings constantly of Jehovah's righteousness. (Psalms 51:14)

#### 7. Praise (verse 15)

"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." When God forgives sins, resolves guilt, cleanses moral depravity, restores joy, and heals the broken spirit, is it not logical that the Lord will also unstop the shame-silenced mouth? When God opens sealed lips, the tongue shall declare the state of the cleansed heart and the renewed mind and the healed spirit. Praise for the God whose miracle power has affected inner changes shall pour forth from grateful lips. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." Praise befits the godly and is a mark of true Christian maturity. "If God opens the mouth he is sure to have the fruit of it...when vanity, anger, falsehood, or lust unbar the door, the foulest villainies troop out; but if the Holy Spirit opens the wicket then grace, mercy, peace, and all the graces come forth in tuneful dances." (The Treasury of David; Spurgeon; page 455)

#### 8. Humility (verse 16-17)

Declares David, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

The contrite heart, the broken spirit, the repentant soul

- these the Lord cherishes, for these are the manifestations of true humility. The one who abandons any hope for salvation except in Jesus Christ is the one whose salvation is assured. "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy laws' demands; Thou must save, and Thou alone." "Could my tears forever flow, Could my zeal no languor know? These for sin could not atone, Thou must save and Thou alone!" "A heart crushed is a fragrant heart. Men condemn those who are contemptible in their own eyes, but the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He despises what men esteem, and values that which they despise. Never yet has God spurned a lowly, weeping penitent, and never will he while God is love, and while Jesus is called the man who receiveth sinners." (Ibid; Spurgeon; 456)

A mark of true maturity is humility. Humility has the ring of reality to it, for the humble man acknowledges his total dependency upon God. Jesus said, "Without me, ye can do nothing." The mature man is one who has declared personal moral bankruptcy and who relies alone on Jesus Christ as his source of adequacy and competency. "To some extent it is necessary for people to have confidence in their God-given abilities, but deeply ingrained self-trust leads to disaster." (What Works When Life Doesn't?; Briscoe;141)

If the mature person is one who has a 'steadfast spirit' instead of a faithless spirit (verse 10), and one who has a 'willing spirit' instead of a rebellious spirit (verse 12), then the mature person is also one who has a 'broken spirit' instead of a proud spirit (verse 17).

#### 9. Worship (verse 18-19)

"In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar." (verse 18,19)

The one who is personally renewed by the Lord's saving and sanctifying grace, is the one who desires intensely to see 'Zion' - the Church of God - prosper collectively (verse 18b). Building up the walls of Jerusalem (verse 18b) is a picturesque way of saying, "God, build up the strong defenses of your Church to protect her against godless and demonic forces." Notes Spurgeon, "There is surely no grace in us if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare." (Ibid; page 456)

Desire for a prospering Church (verse 18) is fulfilled when God's people are corporately and enthusiastically

worshipping the Lord (verse 19). "Though we bring no more sacrifices for sin, yet as priests unto God our solemn praises and votive gifts are thank offerings acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. We bring not the

Lord our least things - our doves and pigeons; but we present him with our best possessions - our bullocks." (Spurgeon; *Ibid*; page 456)

A mature Christian is always a worshipping Christian - a believer who prays for the prosperity of God's Church and who gladly presents himself (along with his fellow worshippers) as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God." (Romans 12:1)

**CONCLUSION:** The Bible says that "*Where sin abounds, grace superabounds!*" *There is no sin stain so deep but what the cleansing blood of Jesus goes deeper yet!* "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" (Psalms 51:17)

Is your sin great? Then God's love is greater yet! Is your heart broken? Then God's power to heal is available! Confess your sins, plead the mercy of God, cry out to God for inner cleansing, believe God for total healing, and accept God's offer to clothe you with His own garments of righteousness! He will not only forgive your sins and cleanse you from inner moral depravity, but He will heal your broken spirit and rebuild your life. You can become a mature believer, healed and whole and ready to turn other sinners to the living God. (Psalms 51:13) Throw yourself on the mercyseat of God! Be whole!

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE PENITENT) - REPENTANT FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after you failed, wondered if God could ever forgive you? Have you ever (like Peter after he denied his Lord) 'wept bitterly' because of your sins, and wondered if you could ever love yourself again? (Luke 22:61,62)
2. What causes believers to become overly confident in their lives, causing them to become very vulnerable to sin? (1 Corinthian 10:12; Mark 14:38)
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences to the life of the one who has violated God's laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing."
4. According to 11 Samuel 11:1-4, what conditions are conducive for strong temptations which lead to sinning? Do you agree with the following statement: "The man or woman whose mind is full of God's thoughts and whose hands are full of love projects is not likely to fall into sin?"
5. Give your comments on the following statements: "Every moral decision brings with it either negative consequences or positive results, depending on whether the decision was for or against the will of God. 'Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap'."
6. What were some of the negative consequences in David's life which came as a result of his initial wrong moral choice (in committing adultery with Bathsheba)? What is meant by the statement: "Sin has terrible social consequences?" If God is a God of justice, how do you account for the fact that often 'the innocent' suffers as a result of someone's wrong moral choice (sin)?
7. Is it possible for a person to get right with God without first experiencing a spiritual 'awakening'? From your own personal experience, or from your observation of others, how would you define and describe 'Spiritual Awakening'?
8. What, according to Psalms 32:3-4a, are some of the affects on a person who fails to confess his sins to God?

9. What is the only 'claim' that a helpless sinner has on God? (Psalms 51:1)
10. When David's sin was exposed by Nathan the prophet, how did David respond? (II Samuel 12:13) What are inadequate ways to deal with one's sins? What should one do if he commits a sin against God? (Psalms 51:3)
11. Was David shortsighted when he prayed the following prayer of confession to God: "Against you (God), you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight?" (Psalms 51:4a)
12. What is the difference between 'volitional sins' and 'original' sin? How do you interpret David's 'acknowledgement' in Psalms 51:5?
13. What does it mean to be truthful in the 'inward parts', according to Psalms 51:7? What Scriptural evidence can you cite to show that there is a twofold nature of sin (i.e., sinful actions and sinful nature) and that there is a twofold cure for sin (i.e., forgiveness for what one has done, and cleansing from what one is)? Theologically speaking, is God's work of Justification in the life of a sinner concerned with forgiveness of sins, whereas God's work of Sanctification in the life of a believer concerned with cleansing from inherited moral pollution (i.e., 'depravity' as a result of 'original sin')?
14. In finding spiritual restoration, what is the relationship between 'confession', 'consecration', 'inner healing', and 'joy'?
15. As recorded in Psalms 51:10, what do you believe it means for one to have a 'steadfast spirit'? (Note I Corinthians 15:58; Philippians 4:1)
16. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The person of the Spirit is grieved in the life of the backslidden believer, but the Spirit does not leave such a person if he pleads for inner cleansing, and if he surrenders himself anew to the leadership of the Lord." (Psalms 51:11)
17. How would you distinguish between 'Joy' and 'Happiness'? (Psalms 51:12)
18. As recorded in Psalms 51:12, what does it mean for one to have a 'willing spirit'?

19. What personal and academic 'credentials' must one have if he is to be an effective 'teacher' and 'evangelist'? (Psalms 51:13)
20. In addition to pardon and purity, what else does David request that God give to him, according to Psalms 51:14?
21. As recorded in Psalms 51:15, what do you think will be the content of praise of the one whose shame-silenced mouth is opened to declare the wonders of God?
22. In light of the truth of Psalms 51:16-17, give your interpretations of the following statement: "To some extent it is necessary for people to have confidence in their God-given abilities, but deeply ingrained self-trust leads to disaster." Is it possible for a person to have a wholesome self-esteem and, at the same time, have "a broken and a contrite spirit"?
23. In contrast to a 'faithless spirit', a 'rebellious spirit', and a 'proud spirit', what 'spirit' characterizes a truly mature and godly person? (Psalms 51:10,12,17)
24. It is possible for a person to be truly dedicated to God and, at the same time, be uninvolved in and indifferent to the local church? (Note Psalms 51:18-19)

**CHAPTER 22**

**FAITH**

**DAVID (THE CONQUERING KING) - TRIUMPHANT FAITH**

## FAITH

### DAVID (THE CONQUERING KING) - TRIUMPHANT FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Chronicles 28:1-8

**INTRODUCTION:** David appears in the Honor Roll of Faith in Hebrews 11, not because he never failed but because, in spite of his great failures, he greatly sought God. He sought God so fervently that he is declared a 'man after God's own heart.'

**PROPOSITION:** What made David's faith as a king so outstanding? Many things, but we shall note only four basic manifestations of David's great faith as a king. Even though we are not kings over nations, we too can manifest the same type of faith which David manifested.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. FAITH MEANS CLAIMING NEW TERRITORY FOR GOD
  - A. We are to take 'territory' physically for God.
  - B. We are to take 'territory' intellectually for God.
  - C. We are to take 'territory' socially for God.
  - D. We are to take 'territory' spiritually for God.
  
- II. FAITH MEANS FOLLOWING GOD CLOSELY AND PROVIDING GODLY LEADERSHIP FOR THOSE FOR WHOM WE ARE RESPONSIBLE.
  
- III. FAITH MEANS TO REPENT DEEPLY OF KNOWN SINS IN OUR LIVES, AND TO ACCEPT CHASTENING FROM GOD, AND TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO WRONG US, WITHOUT REBELLION OR VINDICTIVENESS.
  - A. Repent Deeply of Known Sins
  - B. Humble Acceptance of the Chastening Rod of God
  - C. Forgiving those who have caused the suffering
  
- IV. FAITH MEANS ASPIRING TO DO GREAT THINGS FOR GOD

**CONCLUSION:** We are to take new territory for God. We need to ask ourselves what we are doing to bring greater health to our body and mind. We are to grow intellectually, growing in knowledge and understanding and wisdom. We are to grow socially, broadening the circle of our social contacts for the purpose of sharing the Gospel message with more and more people. Also, we are to grow spiritually, growing in love for God and for others, as well as in love for ourselves. As persons of faith, we are to provide strong and godly leadership in homes, communities, and church. Faith means deep repentance of known sins in one's life, humble acceptance of man-inflicted suffering as God's rod of chastening and

correction, and full forgiveness of those whom God has allowed to inflict suffering upon one's life. Faith means thinking big! Are your dreams right enough and big enough for God to praise? What do you presently dream of doing for God?

## FAITH

### David (The Conquering King) - Triumphant Faith

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 28:1-8

**INTRODUCTION:** David appears in the Honor Roll of Faith in Hebrews 11, not because he never failed but because, in spite of his great failures, he greatly sought God. He sought God so fervently that he is declared a 'man after God's own heart.'

**PROPOSITION:** What made David's faith as a king so outstanding? Many things, but we shall note only four basic manifestations of David's great faith as a king. Even though we are not kings over nations, we too can manifest the same type of faith which David manifested.

Let us look at four manifestations of faith as seen in the life of David the king.

#### 1. FAITH MEANS CLAIMING NEW TERRITORY FOR GOD

"David went on from victory to victory. Seeing the need of unifying the country, he seized for himself a new capital - Jerusalem (11 Samuel 5:6-10), a city hitherto non-Israelite - centrally located between north and south and the property of no one of the tribes (a step to be compared with that of our founding fathers who selected the site of Washington, D.C.). We should note that he took it with his private army. (11 Samuel 5:6). It was his personal property, and he called it 'the city of David'. (11 Samuel 5:9) Subsequently he reduced one by one, as archaeology proves, the other Canaanite towns that had so far withstood Israel, and incorporated them into his state. The climax of his military glory came when in a series of incredibly brilliant campaigns (11 Samuel 8:10-12) he conquered the Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite kingdoms of Transjordan and made them tributary, and then went on to extend his victories over the Aramean states of Syria. When the wars were over, David ruled an empire which stretched from the Gulf of Aqabah in the south to central Syria in the far north. Kings still farther to the north hastened to make peace with him. (11 Samuel 8:9-10)

"A more dramatic reversal of fortune could hardly be imagined. In a few short years Israel had been changed from a disorganized league of tribesmen struggling for existence into the ranking nation of Palestine and Syria." (The Kingdom of God; page 37; John Bright)

David claimed and took new land for God. By faith, we too are to take new territory for God - not land, but 'territory' in a spiritual sense of the term.

A. We are to take 'territory' physically for God.

Faith means taking new territory physically in your life. It is true that some of the greatest men of faith have poor health - a fact that is understandable when one realizes that we live in a sin-cursed world where disease is sometimes allowed to attack the body of the best saints.

It is also true, however, that many physical problems are self-imposed, because of ignorance or willfulness. Notes Lyn Cryderman in the October 1983 issue of the 'Light and Life' magazine, "Sometimes I'm skeptical because I don't think we deserve to be healed. We violate God's laws of nutrition, rest, exercise, and dependence on Him, then pray for deliverance from the ill effects of an indulgent life-style. Do I dare attempt to manipulate the One who breathed life into Adam?" What are you doing to bring greater health to your body and mind?

B. We are to take 'territory' intellectually for God.

*"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (11 Timothy 2:15)*  
*"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)* *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (11 Corinthians 10:5).*

Are you learning to "think God's thoughts after Him", to "meditate upon God's laws day and night", "to study to show yourself approved unto God"?

Are you ready to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is within you? Are you regularly studying the Scriptures? Are you regularly reading thought-provoking and heart-warming Christian books? Growing Christians read good books. Do you spend any time listening to Christian messages on tape cassettes? The Bible repeatedly tells us to grow in knowledge and understanding and wisdom. Take new territory for the Lord intellectually. Keep your mind alive by reading, memorizing, and meditating.

C. We are to take 'territory' socially for God. We are to have love for all (I Thessalonians 3:12). We are to have prayers for all. (I Timothy 2:1-2) We are to give the Gospel to all. (II Peter 3:9)

Broadening the circle of social contacts for the purpose of sharing the Gospel message with more and more people! Vital Christians never become ingrown or exclusive or cliquish. There is always room for more new people in your heart and affections.

While not neglecting your long-time friends, you are constantly seeking to reach out to new friends. Paul was constantly reaching out to new people, with claims of the Gospel of Christ. (II Corinthians 19:15-16)

Faith means expanding your territory of social contacts, making friends with as many as possible in order to save more and more people.

D. We are to take 'territory' spiritually for God. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."* (II Peter 3:18) *"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God."* (Hebrews 6:1) *"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness."* (II Peter 1:5,6).

Growth in Christlikeness (Galatians 5:23,24). Spiritual growth is evidenced by growth in love (Ephesians 3:16-19), and growth in knowledge (Philippians 3:12-14). Areas of spiritual growth include the following: Bible reading, Prayer, Giving, Witnessing, Obedience to God and Resistance to Satan.

## II. FAITH MEANS FOLLOWING GOD CLOSELY AND PROVIDING GODLY LEADERSHIP FOR THOSE FOR WHOM WE ARE RESPONSIBLE.

David was an example of godly leadership, for he was one who exercised authority over his people because of his identification with his people.

The greatest authority of all is the authority which is earned by the leader who does not 'lord it over' his people, but who moves his people to follow him because he is "a man who will never ask anyone else to do what he is not prepared to do himself." (Barclay's 'The King and the Kingdom';page 29).

There are those human leaders who say, "Do as I say, and not as I do", but David was one who commanded a large following because he was an example of a servant. He essentially said, "Do as I do".

Jesus taught that he who would lead all, must serve all! "Jesus told them, 'In this world the kings and great men order their slaves around, and the slaves have no choice but to like it! But among you, the one who serves you best will be your leader.'" (Luke 22:25,26 Living Bible)

"When the last struggle was on and when once again David wished to lead his men into battle his people would not let him go. 'You shall not go out', they said, 'for you are worth ten thousand of us' (II Samuel 18:3) David was too dear to his people for them to let him risk death in his old age....David was always ready to run the risks his men ran and so they loved him. People always respect a man who will never ask anyone else to do what he is not prepared to do himself." (Barclay's 'The King and the Kingdom; page 29)

Faith, as in the case of David, means leading others by means of a godly example. NOTE I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; John 13:12-16.

David was a man of great faith because David provided godly leadership for those for whom he was responsible. If we claim to be men of great faith today, we too must provide an example of godly leadership - godly leadership in our homes, godly leadership in our communities, godly leadership in our churches.

III. FAITH MEANS TO REPENT DEEPLY OF KNOWN SINS IN OUR LIVES, AND TO ACCEPT THE CHASTENING FROM GOD, AND TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO WRONG US, WITHOUT REBELLION OR VINDICTIVENESS.

A. Repent Deeply of Known Sins.

When David was accused openly by Nathan for his sin, he did not defend himself. He simply said, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" (II Samuel 12:13) The man of faith, like David, openly confesses his sins to God and wonderfully receives forgiveness from the Lord. After David confessed his sins, Nathan replied, "*The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*" (II Samuel 12:13)

However, the man of faith knows, as David learned, that even though the guilt of sin is removed because of open confession, the consequences and scars of sin are not always removed. Nathan said to David, "*Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.*" (II Samuel 12:10)

Throughout the remainder of David's long reign as king of Israel, he faced internal rebellion, dissensions, and plots which made life weary for David. The 'sword' never departed from David's house!

The man of faith knows that God forgives sins and that the greatest consequence - eternal death - is removed from him as a result of Christ's cleansing blood! However, he also realizes, along with David, that sin can leave scars in his life. Perhaps God leaves some of the scars in life as a reminder of God's former grace and forgiveness in our lives.

#### B. Humble acceptance of the chastening rod of God.

Faith means not only deep repentance for known sin in one's life, but faith also means humble acceptance of the chastening rod of God. In the days of his misfortune, when he was going into exile apparently a broken man, there came a man called Shimei and this man took advantage of the king's misfortune to vent his spleen upon him. He called David names, he cursed him, he even pursued him along the road with curses and he flung stones at him. Shimei was that most loathsome of creatures - one who kicked a man when he was down. (II Samuel 16:5-14)

How should the man of faith today react towards suffering? "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you joyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, *"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"* So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. | Peter 4:12-19. This Scripture assumes that the sufferer is suffering unjustly at the hands of evil men."

There may be times, as in the case of David, when the believer feels his suffering is being allowed by God as a means of chastisement for his past sins. How should the believer react during those times? Hebrews 12:7-13 speaks to this concern. *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not*

*disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."*

Allow God to use all suffering in your life to benefit you. The outcome of suffering can be peace and joy, as a result of character development.

C. Forgive those who have caused the suffering.

Faith also means forgiving those who have caused the suffering in the believer's life. Shimei caused David suffering and brought shame to David. David not only looked at the suffering which Shimei inflicted as God's possible instrument of chastisement in David's life, but David refused, after he was restored to kingly glory, to inflict vengeance upon Shimei. Note I Samuel 19:16-23

"The day came when the tables were turned and when David returned in triumph. And then Shimei came crawling abjectly for forgiveness. David's captains would have slaughtered him - and who shall blame them? But David's answer was that not a man should be put to death that day in Israel and that he freely forgave (II Samuel 19:16-23). All through life it is much easier to bear a grudge than it is to forget; it is much easier to take vengeance when we can, than to forgive. Anyone can do that. It takes a really big man to forgive. And in this - as in all things - Jesus is our example. Once Paul wrote to his friends, *'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you'* (Ephesians 4:32). David was like that; and we must be like that too." (The King and the Kingdom; page 30,31; Barclay)

So, to repeat this third point on faith, we must say: Faith means deep repentance of known sins in one's life, humble acceptance of man-inflicted suffering as God's rod of chastening and correction, and full forgiveness of those whom God as allowed to inflict suffering upon one's life. David's encounter with Nathan the prophet (II Samuel 12) and with Shimei, the cursing enemy of David whom David refrained from killing (II Samuel 16:5-14; 19:16-23), teach us these important lessons in faith as it relates to suffering.

#### IV. FAITH MEANS ASPIRING TO DO GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.

David was a man of great faith because he aspired to do great things for God, and God honored his strong faith by allowing David to achieve great success - geographical expansion of his kingdom to unprecedented proportions, political unity in spite of internal unrest among his family, religious prosperity through the establishment of central worship in Jerusalem where the ark of the covenant was placed.

David had one great dream which was never realized, but God honored David for even having that dream! David wanted to build a beautiful Temple of the Lord. Said Solomon about his father's long-time dream, "My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart. Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, who is your own flesh and blood - he is the one who will build the temple for my Name.'" (11 Chronicles 6:7-9)

Faith means thinking big! There may be times when it is right to think small (like when you are thinking of the needs of one person rather than the needs of a mere impersonal 'mass' of people). However, most small thinking is a contradiction to faith! Jesus said, "*Do you not say, 'Four months and then the*

*harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest.*" (John 4:35)

Jesus was the greatest of all men of faith. Jesus saw opportunities in every problem, instead of problems in every opportunity. He saw, not only future opportunities, but He saw immediate opportunities. He said that there is no need to wait for a harvest. The fields of human souls are NOW ready to be harvested for the Kingdom. A man of faith, like Jesus, must think big.

Do you dream of doing great things for God? David dreamed of building a Temple for the Lord. That dream was never realized, but God praised David for even having the dream!

Are your dreams right enough and big enough for God to praise? What do you dream of doing for the Lord? I admire men who have great dreams for the Lord. Bill Bright, Founder and President of Campus Crusade For Christ, has a dream! His dream which he is seeking to realize in his lifetime through the cooperation of thousands of staff members, is to fulfill the Great Commission in his generation! Because of that

master dream, he has masterfully strategized in a way that has resulted in the conversion of tens of thousands of people in many nations to the Lord in a period of some three decades!

I have a fellow pastor friend in the city of Fort Collins who some years ago had a dream of his church reaching the entire city of Fort Collins with the Gospel of Christ. As he viewed the city lights of Fort Collins one night from the top of Horsetooth dam, he prayed for the conversion of the entire city! Whether or not his vision is ever fully realized by him and his church, could it not be said of him as it was said by God of David, "Because it was in your heart to build a temple (to evangelized the entire city of Fort Collins) for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart."

Will you have great enough dreams in your life that God can say of you at the end of your life, "Because it was in your heart to .....for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart?"

I admire men of faith whose vision is clear and whose dreams for God's kingdom are big! Our present conference superintendent, Jack Delamarter, is a man with a vision, a man with a big dream. I quote from an recent issue of the Light and Life Magazine where a feature article on the Rocky Mountain Conference appears. Says Delamarter, "Cities in this area are growing rapidly, and I don't think it's exaggerating to say that we could have forty to fifty churches within the next ten years...The only thing holding us back is personnel, but I'm trusting God to send us the right persons." (October 1983, page 20)

These are words of great faith, especially when one recognizes that presently there are less than twenty Free Methodist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Conference! Whether or not the dream is realized, one thing can be said regarding this sincere man of faith:

"Because it was in your heart to establish forth new churches in the Rocky Mountain Conference within the next ten years for Jesus' Name, you Jack Delamarter, did well to have this in your heart!"

God rewards people for the unrealized visions which faith gives birth to, as well as for the visible accomplishments which faith produces!

**CONCLUSION:** (1) Faith means claiming new territory for God. By faith, David claimed and took new land for God. By faith, we too are to take new territory for God - not land but 'territory' in a spiritual sense of the term.

David's kingdom grew geographically. We are to take new territory physically for God. We need to ask ourselves what we are doing to bring greater health to our body and mind. We are to grow intellectually, growing in knowledge and understanding and wisdom. We are to grow socially, broadening the circle of our social contacts for the purpose of sharing the Gospel message with more and more people. Also, we are to grow spiritually, growing in love of God and for others, as well as in love for ourselves.

(2) Faith means following God closely and providing godly leadership for those for whom we are responsible. David was a godly leader as king of Israel. We too, are to be men of faith who provide strong and godly leadership in our homes, communities, and church.

(3) Faith, as demonstrated in the life of David, means to repent deeply of known sins in our lives, and to accept chastening from God, and to forgive those who wrong us, without rebellion or vindictiveness. Faith means deep repentance of known sins in one's life, humble acceptance of man-inflicted suffering as God's rod of chastening and correction, and full forgiveness of those whom God has allowed to inflict suffering upon one's life.

(4) Faith means aspiring to do great things for God. David dreamed great things for God. Every man of faith must dream of doing great things for God. Even though David's dream of building a beautiful Temple for God was never realized, God honored David: "Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart." Faith means thinking big! Are your dreams right enough and big enough for God to praise? What do you presently dream of doing for God?

## FAITH

### David (The Conquering King) - Triumphant Faith

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Briefly (and geographically) note the new land that David took (through military power) for Israel, following the time he became king of Israel.
2. What does it mean for you, as a conscientious follower of Christ, to 'take territory' for God in the 'physical', 'intellectual', 'social' and 'spiritual' areas of your personal life? Share your specific goals in each of these four important areas.
3. Give the 'context' in which Lyn Cryderman made the following statement: "Sometimes I'm skeptical because I don't think we deserve to be healed."
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith means expanding your territory of social contacts, making friends with as many as possible in order to save more and more people."
5. What are evidences of dynamic spiritual growth in the life of a sincere believer?
6. From a Biblical viewpoint, how would you define and describe effective leadership in terms of 'authority'? How did David personify such authority? Where is godly leadership best expressed and manifested in our present times?
7. When God forgives sins, does He always remove the 'consequences' of sin? Why or why not? (Note II Samuel 12:10-14)
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith means not only deep repentance for known sin in one's life, but faith also means humble acceptance of the chastening rod of God." (Note Hebrews 12:5-13) What 'ignoble character' did God use to bring chastisement and humbling to David? (II Samuel 16:5-14) How did David respond to such humiliating treatment?
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The man of faith sees that God allows suffering - even the suffering that comes from evil men - and that the suffering is meant to be redemptive, not destructive, in the lives of believers." (Note I Peter 4:12-19) Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Suffering can cause one to become bitter or better."

10. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statement: "Faith means forgiving those who have caused the suffering in the believer's life." (Note I Samuel 19:16-23; Ephesians 4:32)
11. What were some of the great aspirations and dreams (geographically, politically, religiously) which God fulfilled in David's life, as a result of David's steadfast faith in God? Share some of your visions which God has thus far fulfilled in your life, as a result of your steadfast faith in God.
12. As in the case of David, do you believe that there are some of your visions and dreams which God may fulfill in the lives of your children rather than during your own lifetime? (Note II Chronicles 6:7-9)
13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Faith means thinking big! Most small thinking is a contradiction to faith. He who serves a big God ought to believe God for big results!"
14. Why is it that some people see opportunities in every problem, while other people see problems in every opportunity? What must a 'negative thinker' do to become a 'positive thinker' - a man of positive faith?
15. What are some of the 'big things' that you envision doing for God? How can you tell if these 'visions' are the product of your own selfish ambition or if they are the product of God's inspiration?
16. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "God rewards people for the unrealized visions which faith gives birth to, as well as for the visible accomplishments which faith produces!"

**CHAPTER 23**

**FAITH**

**SOLOMON (EARLIER LIFE) - 'INFLUENTIAL FAITH'**

## FAITH

### SOLOMON (EARLIER LIFE) - 'INFLUENTIAL FAITH'

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 4:29-34

INTRODUCTION: Suppose God came to you one night and offered to give to you any one gift that you would request. What one gift would you ask for? Would it be wealth? Would it be a child? Would it be a long life? Would it be security? Would it be a friend? Would it be destruction of an enemy?

"If all possibilities are open to a person, what he or she decides is an accurate reflection of what that person is like on the inside, what his or her true values are." (Glad Reunion; Claypool; page 97)

PROPOSITION: solomon asked for the most important gift - the gift of God's Wisdom! Wisdom is the ability to discern correctly what to do and how to do it. The wisdom-filled person is the one whose influence is deeply felt by many. Seek the wisdom of God and you will doubtless exercise a greater influence than you ever imagined!

#### I. GREAT CALL IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT HONOR

- A. The Inauguration Amidst A Rejoicing People (1 Kings 1:39-40)
- B. The Confirmation From A Sovereign God (2 Chronicles 1:8-10)

#### II. GREAT HUMILITY IS THE BASIS FOR GREAT WISDOM

- A. God's Open-ended Offer (2 Chronicles 1:7)
- B. Solomon's Humble Request (2 Chronicles 1:8-10)
- C. God's Gracious Gift (2 Chronicles 1:11-12a)
- D. God's Abundant Bonus (2 Chronicles 1:12b)

#### III. GREAT WISDOM IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT WITNESS

- A. The Source of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:29)
- B. The Degree of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:30-31)
- C. The Breadth of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:32-33)
- D. The Fame of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:31:b,34; 2 Chronicles 9:1-6)

CONCLUSION: What do you most want to be remembered for, after you die? For your great wealth? For your large house? For your powerful position and vocational success? For your long life of many years? Or do you want to be remembered for your

great wisdom - your godly insights and your godly lifestyle? I'm sure you would like to have some 'Queens of Shebas' say about you: "Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard." (2 Chronicles 9:6)

Like Solomon, live so close to God that you will be known for your wisdom. The only fame that is worth coveting is the 'fame of godly wisdom'! Faith in God which expresses itself as godly wisdom is a faith that is most influential! Our world desperately needs that kind of faith!

## FAITH

### "SOLOMON (Earlier Life) - 'Influential Faith'"

SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 4:29-34

INTRODUCTION: Let me play a little 'game' with you. Suppose the richest man in the world gave as a gift to you a signed check, and told you to fill in any amount that you so desired. What figure would you write on the check? A million dollars? Ten million dollars? How much?

Suppose God came to you one night and offered to give to you any one gift that you would request. What one gift would you ask for? Would it be wealth? Would it be a child? Would it be a long life? Would it be security? Would it be a friend? Would it be a destruction of an enemy?

"If all possibilities are open to a person, what he or she decides is an accurate reflection of what that one is like on the inside, what his or her true values are." (Glad Reunion; Claypool; page 97)

Solomon had all possibilities open to him when God appeared to him during the night in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (1 Kings 3:5)

PROPOSITION: Solomon asked for the most important gift - the gift of God's Wisdom! Wisdom is the ability to discern correctly what to do and how to do it. The wisdom-filled person is the one whose influence is deeply felt by many. Seek the wisdom of God and you will doubtless exercise a greater influence than you ever imagined.

#### I. GREAT CALL IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT HONOR

##### A. The Inauguration Amidst A Rejoicing People (1 Kings 1:39-40)

*"Zadak the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, 'Long live King Solomon!' And all the people went up after him, playing flutes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound." (1 Kings 1:39-40) (NIV)*

Seldom has any king been inaugurated with such fanfare and glory. "Long live King Solomon!"

While it is true that none of us will ever be crowned as a king of a nation, all of us are called by God to serve the Lord in our present generation. Great is the honor of being

called by God to carry out one of His many assignments! Every one of us is called to be holy (1 Peter 1:16); every one of us is called to fulfill ministers of reconciliation (11 Corinthians 5:19); every one of us is called to fulfill the Great Commission - to make disciples of all men (Matthew 28:19-20).

Great is the joy and rejoicing that we bring to both God and to others when we accept our God-given call to share the Good News of Christ with others. "That is what the Scriptures are talking about when they say, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace with God and bring glad tidings of good things.' In other words, how welcome are those who come preaching God's Good News!" (Romans 10:15 Living Bible)

As in the case of Solomon, there will be many who will rejoice greatly when you accept your special call from God and when you are anointed for special service in God's kingdom!

B. The Confirmation From A Sovereign God (2 Chronicles 1:1)

*"Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great."* (2 Chronicles 1:1) Just as Solomon was firmly established in his kingdom rule over Israel, so you too will become firmly established in your ministry to which God has called you. The God who established Solomon's kingdom is also the God who made Solomon great in the eyes of those whom he ruled.

If you are concerned to establish spiritual depth in your ministry, God will take care of the breadth and height of your ministry. If you seek the favor of God, God will give you increasing favor and influence with men! If you are careful to establish your ministry through careful obedience to God, then God will sovereignly confirm your ministry, through powerful influence among men!

II. GREAT HUMILITY IS THE BASIS FOR GREAT WISDOM

A. God's Open-ended Offer (2 Chronicles 1:7)

*"That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'" (2 Chronicles 1:7)*

The God who calls and anoints a man, is the God who graces a man with special gifts. It is God's good pleasure to give good gifts to His children. God is never reticent, but instead He is eager to shower your life and mine with His finest gifts! It is God's will to give you a new nature (11 Peter 1:3,4), to give you the strengthening Holy Spirit

(Ephesians 3:16), to give you hope (Colossians 1:27), to give you love (Romans 5:5), to give you wisdom (James 1:5), to give you heaven as your eternal home (Luke 12:32)!

B. Solomon's Humble Request (2 Chronicles 1:8-10)

Humility can be described as the proper attitude of human insufficiency that one has towards himself, as a result of clearly seeing the greatness of God and the greatness of one's overwhelming responsibilities in life. Human insufficiency which drives one to God, whose divine sufficiency alone can enable one to fulfill a divine call!

*"Solomon answered God, 'You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. Now, Lord God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me wisdom and knowledge, and that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?'" (2 Chronicles 1:8-10)*

Solomon first recognized the greatness and the goodness of God ("You have shown great kindness to David my father"). Solomon next recognized his own sovereignly-appointed position as king of Israel ("You have made me king in his (David's) place."). Solomon next asked God to confirm His promise which He made to David, and to confirm that promise through Solomon. In light of the fact of the immensity of the task of ruling a vast kingdom, Solomon humbly acknowledged his own insufficiency and his need for divine intervention. Solomon next asked God for wisdom to rule the kingdom entrusted to him ("Give me wisdom and knowledge that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?").

A humble attitude is a realistic attitude towards life. When one sees the immensity of life's tasks, and the high and holy standards of God, it is appropriate for one to cry out to God for strength and for wisdom. Without the wisdom which only God can give, one will surely fail in the tests and the trials of life, and one will surely make wrong decisions.

Wisdom is what we most need in life!

C. God's Gracious Gift (2 Chronicles 1:11-12a)

*"God said to Solomon, 'Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you.'" (2 Chronicles 1:11-12a)*

Because Solomon realistically looked at his life and humbly acknowledged his own insufficiency in the face of overwhelming responsibilities as king of Israel, he asked God for wisdom. Wisdom - the most important gift we can receive from God!

Solomon was wise in choosing wisdom! He did not choose wealth, honor, long life, or destruction of his enemies. One can be rich materially and still be a fool, resulting in indulgence, waste, and misuse of wealth. One can be honored by his fellowmen, but if he is not a wise man, his honor will lead to pride and arrogance. Honor without wisdom leads eventually to a downfall, for the Bible says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Living a long life is not necessarily living a good life. Quantity without quality is futility! Many a wicked man has lived a long life, but the foolish man who adds years to his life, only adds suffering, through his evil influence, to more people. Long life without wisdom is futility!

It was not riches or honor or long life that Solomon requested. Neither was it destruction of his enemies. Only the wise man - the one who has received the gift of God's wisdom - knows how properly and righteously to deal with his 'enemies'. Wisdom enables one to be just without being vindictive, and to be merciful without being indulgent in the treatment of 'enemies'.

What do you most covet as a 'gift' from God? Is it wealth or honor or long life or the destruction of your 'enemies'? Or is it the wisdom of God that you most covet?

D. God's Abundant Bonus (2 Chronicles 1:12b)

*"And I (God) will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have." (2 Chronicles 1:12b)*

Interesting, that when Solomon chose wisdom as the gift which he wanted God to give to him, God gave not only what Solomon asked for - Wisdom - but God gave Solomon also additional gifts - wealth, riches, and honor!

Reminds one of what Jesus promised: "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these (other) things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

He who selfishly seeks to find himself, i.e., the one who protects himself and who centers upon himself, is the one who will ultimately lose himself, i.e., he will no longer enjoy living with himself, and his self-centered lifestyle will make him repulsive to others! On the other hand, the one who seeks God only and who gives himself away in service to others, is

the one who finds meaning and significance in life, i.e., his life is full of God's love and his unselfishness attracts people to him, like metal filings are strongly attracted to a powerful magnet!

Seeking God and God's wisdom alone makes a person very magnetic in personality, very loving in relationships, and very strong in servant-leadership.

So, everyone in life is ultimately either a 'double loser' or a 'double winner'! Set your sights on selfish goals, and you eventually will lose not only eternity, but you will become a loser on earth. Seek God and God's wisdom, and you will eventually gain not only eternal life in heaven, but you will gain the best that God has to offer you here on this earth!

"The man who knows right from wrong and has good judgment and common sense is happier than the man who is immensely rich! For such wisdom is far more valuable than precious jewels. Nothing else compares with it. Wisdom gives:

A long, good life  
Riches  
Honor  
Pleasure  
Peace

*Wisdom is a tree of life to those who eat her fruit; happy is the man who keeps on eating it.."* (Proverbs 3:13-18 Living Bible)

### III. GREAT WISDOM IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT WITNESS

#### A. The Source of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:29)

*"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore."* (1 Kings 4:29)

True wisdom, in contrast to so-called 'worldly-wisdom'. finds its source in God alone. It is a divine gift, not a human attainment. No amount of human effort can achieve it, or earn it, or deserve it. It is a gift from God, received by humble souls, who, like Solomon, realize their own human insufficiency and who open their hearts and their minds to the Great Mind of the Universe!

God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts, and one of the choicest gifts of all is the wisdom of God!

Notes Proverbs 3:19-26, *"The Lord's wisdom founded the earth; his understanding established all the universe and space. The*

*deep foundations of the earth were broken open by his knowledge, and the skies poured down rain. Have two goals: wisdom - that is, knowing and doing right - and common sense. Don't let them slip away, for they fill you with living energy, and are a feather in your cap. They keep you safe from defeat and disaster and from stumbling off the trail. With them on guard you can sleep without fear; you need not be afraid of disaster or the plots of wicked men, for the Lord is with you; he protects you."* (Living Bible)

How can one find this most coveted gift? Writes James, "*if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*" (James 1:5) (NIV) When God gives, He does not give in a stingy way or in a way that belittles the recipient. Rather, He gives generously and lavishly and in a way that dignifies and ennobles the recipient. "*if you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it.*" (James 1:5 Living Bible)

The wisdom which God gave to Solomon was "*as measureless as the sand on the seashore.*" (1 Kings 4:29) It was a 'bountiful supply'!

#### B. The Degree of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:30-31)

*"Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite - wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations."* (1 Kings 4:30-31)

The wisdom of this world may seem great, but it cannot be compared with the wisdom which comes from God! The worldly-wise are stupid in God's eyes! The simplest and most uneducated believer, full of God's wisdom, is greater than the most intelligent scholar of the world who defames the name of Jesus! 'Pagan wisdom' cannot be compared to 'Godly wisdom'!

Notes Paul, "I know very well how foolish it sounds to those who are lost, when they hear that Jesus died to save them. But we who are saved recognize this message as the very power of God. For God says, 'I will destroy all human plans of salvation no matter how wise they seem to be, and ignore the best ideas of men, even the most brilliant of them.' So what about these wise men, these scholars, these brilliant debaters of this world's great affairs? God has made them all look foolish, and shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense. For God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find God through human brilliance, and then he stepped in and saved

all those who believed his message, which the world calls foolish and silly. It seems foolish to the Jews because they want a sign from heaven as proof that what is preached is true; and it is foolish to the Gentiles because they believe only what agrees with their philosophy and seems wise to them. So when we preach about Christ dying to save them, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But God has opened the eyes of those called to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, to see that Christ is the mighty power of God to save them; Christ himself is the center of God's wise plan for their salvation. This so-called 'foolish' plan of God is far wiser than the wisest plan of the wisest man, and God in his weakness - Christ dying on the cross - is far stronger than any man. Notice among yourselves, dear brothers, that few of you who follow Christ have big names or power or wealth. Instead, God has deliberately chosen to use ideas the world considers foolish and of little worth in order to shame those people considered by the world as wise and great. He has chosen a plan despised by the world, counted as nothing at all, and used it to bring down to nothing those the world considers great, so that no one anywhere can ever brag in the presence of God.." (1 Corinthians 1:18-19 Living Bible)

#### C. The Breadth of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:32-33)

*"He (Solomon) spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish."* (1 Kings 4:32-33)

Solomon's God-given wisdom was not confined to mere 'theological' or 'religious' knowledge. The versatility of his knowledge was truly amazing! "His interests included writing, music, botany and various branches of zoology....In Solomon, we find authentic spirituality wedded to academic excellence. These qualities give birth to an appreciation for beauty, diversity, and creativity." (Solomon; by Charles Swindoll; page 8)

Wisdom is not exclusive, restrictive, legalistic, narrow-minded and stilted. Instead, wisdom is inclusive, broad, expansive, liberating and creative! "In his award-winning book 'Addicted to Mediocrity', Franky Schaeffer comments; 'if from this world around us we can learn anything about God's character, surely it is that we have a creative God, a God of diversity, a God whose interest in beauty and detail must be unquestioned when one looks at the world which he has made around us, and people themselves as the result of his craftsmanship. We could live in a flat uninteresting world, one that had the bare minimum of gray ingredients to support life, one whose diversity was only enough to provide the

minimum of existence. Instead, we live in a riotous explosion of diversity and beauty. We live in a world full of 'useless' beauty, we live in a world of millions of species, we live in a world peopled by individuals of infinite variety, talents, abilities and this is only on our own planet. When one looks heavenward and sees the complexity of the reaches of space above us, the mind boggles at the creativity of our God.'" (quoted in Solomon; by Swindoll; page 8,9)

Wisdom is the key that unlocks the treasures of knowledge! *"Wisdom and good judgment live together, for wisdom knows where to discover knowledge and understanding."* (Proverbs 8:12)

The man who is enjoying the gift of God's wisdom is the man who also is thrilled in his discovery of God's vast universe of knowledge! He sees the world brimming with opportunities to learn and to discover! He is always discovering more knowledge! He is not afraid to use his intellectual gifts and his creative abilities and his versatile talents to witness more effectively for God!

The best thinkers today should be Christians, for Christians know that all truth is God's truth. This includes scientific truth as well as theological truth! Christians, of all people, should have a great 'thirst' for knowledge. Notes William Barclay, "Our basic mistake in our approach to education may well be the idea that the young person does not want to learn. In point of fact there is nothing in this world more thrilling than learning. Awaken interest, provide a group of friends, find a teacher who loves his subject and who loves his scholars, and the problems will solve themselves." (In The Hands Of God; page 21)

The wisest men of Solomon's day were impressed with Solomon's unusual wisdom and knowledge and versatility. Let the God-given 'lights' in your life - your creative abilities and experiences and talents - shine in the world of men and impact your world for Christ! Don't be afraid to gain knowledge! Explore your world, or, better said, explore God's world! Notes Franky Schaeffer, "By expressing yourself as an artist and by exercising those talents God has given you, you are praising him. Whether what you express is 'religious' or 'secular', as a Christian you are praising him. Everything is his...Remember that as a creative person, the important thing is to create. Who sees what you make, where it goes and what it does is a secondary consideration; the first is to exercise the talent God has given you." (Addicted to Mediocrity; page 59-60; quoted in Solomon (by Swindoll); page 12)

D. The Fame of Wisdom (1 Kings 4:31b, 34; 2 Chronicles 9:1-6)

*Godly wisdom draws attention: "And his (Solomon's) fame spread to all the surrounding nations...Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom." (1 Kings 4:31b,34)*

*"When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. Arriving with a very great caravan - with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones - she came to Solomon and talked with him about all she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her question; nothing was too hard for him to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, as well as the palace he had built, the food on this table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, the cup-bearers in their robes and the burnt offerings he had at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed. She said to the kings, 'The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard.'" (2 Chronicles 9:1-6)*

The man who is divinely-gifted with God's wisdom is the man whose responses and reactions to life and to people are remarkably different and refreshing. The people of the world, as well as Christian people, are most impressed with a truly wise person. Rare is the person who is actively and consistently manifesting the wisdom of God!

What does 'God's wisdom' look like? What is its 'profile'? *"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and full of quiet gentleness. Then it is peace-loving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it is full of mercy and good deeds. It is wholehearted and straightforward and sincere." (James 3:17 Living Bible)*

The quiet, gentle, peace-loving person, whose motives are pure and whose spirit is teachable and whose manners are courteous and whose life is full of mercy and good deeds - such a person is attractive and winsome and magnetic. Just as honey attracts bees, so a loving and merciful and sincere and straightforward person attracts many people. If you are a truly wise person - a person who is pure and gentle and teachable and submissive and merciful and sincere and full of good deeds - then be assured that you will not lack for a large following of people who will be attracted to your beautiful personality and to your wise decisions.

The wisdom of Jesus, expressed in the Temple when He was only a boy of twelve years of age, amazed even the Jewish scholars and leaders. *"Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers."* (Luke 2:;47)

CONCLUSION: What do you most want to be remembered for, after you die? For your great wealth? For your large house? For your powerful position and vocational success? For your long life of many years? Or do you want to be remembered for your great wisdom - your godly insights and your godly lifestyle? I'm sure you would like to have some 'Queens of Shebas' say about you: *"Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard."* (2 Chronicles 9:6)

Like Solomon, live so close to God that you will be known for your wisdom. The only fame that is worth coveting is the 'fame of godly wisdom'! Faith in God which expresses itself as godly wisdom is a faith that is most influential! Our world desperately needs that kind of faith.

## FAITH

### Solomon (Earlier Life) - 'Influential Faith'

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. If God came to you one night and offered to give to you any one gift that you would request, what would you ask for? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If all possibilities are open to a person, what he or she decides is an accurate reflection of what that one is like on the inside, what his or her true values are."
2. Specifically - speaking, what is each believer called by God to be or to do? (Note I Peter 1:16;; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Matthew 28:19-20).
3. Is it realistic to expect many persons around you to rejoice greatly when you respond positively to God's call in your life? Why or why not? (Note Romans 10:15)
4. Just as Solomon was firmly established in his Kingdom rule over Israel (2 Chronicles 1:1), is it possible for you to become strongly established in your personal ministry of servant-leadership in God's Kingdom? Give your personal interpretation of the following statement: "If you are concerned to establish spiritual depth in your ministry, God will take care of the breadth and height of your ministry."
5. What does God's open-ended offer to Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:7) teach us about the nature and character of God? What are some of the 'good gifts' which God desires to give to His children? (Note I Peter 1:3,4; Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 1:27; Romans 5:15; James 1:5; Luke 12:32)
6. According to 2 Chronicles 1:8-10, how did Solomon manifest a spirit of true humility in his response to God's precious offer to him? How would you describe 'Humility' in terms of your attitude toward yourself, toward your responsibilities, and toward God? What is the difference between having personal 'confidence' and personal 'self-sufficiency', and why is the latter attitude so wrong?
7. Why is it a 'curse' for a person to have wealth, honor, and long life, if that person does not have and exercises 'wisdom' from God, at the same time?

8. Give your interpretation (and practical applications) of the following statement: "Only the wise man i.e., the one who has received the gift of God's wisdom - knows how properly and righteously to deal with his 'enemies'".
9. Because Solomon asked for Wisdom, how did God reward Solomon, in terms of additional gifts? What are some of the 'other things' that God has added to your life, as a result of you seeking out the 'Kingdom of God'? (Note Matthew 6:33) Tell what is meant by the following statement: "Everyone in life is ultimately either a 'double winner' or a 'double loser'."
10. According to Proverbs 3:13-26, what are some of the 'Bonuses' which God's Wisdom gives to those who are true believers?
11. From whom does true wisdom come, and what attitude must we have to receive such wisdom? (1 Kings 4:29; James 1:5)
12. By the way of contrast, give a description of both 'Pagan Wisdom' and 'Godly Wisdom'. (Note 1 Corinthians 1:18-29 and James 3:13-18)
13. Is the 'wisdom' which God gives, limited to only religious and theological knowledge, or does this 'wisdom' encompass a wide breadth of knowledge? (Note 1 Kings 4:32-33) Tell what is meant by the statement: "All truth is God's truth." Is 'Reason' an 'enemy' or a 'friend' to 'Faith'? Can one truly experience 'Knowledge' without 'Wisdom'? Why or why not? (Note Proverbs 8:12)
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The man who is enjoying the gift of God's wisdom is the man who also is thrilled in his discovery of God's vast universe of knowledge. The best thinkers today should be Christians, for Christians know that all truth is God's truth."
15. Why is it so important for you to express your creative abilities, even if the product of your creative abilities never commands widespread recognition?
16. As in the case of Solomon (1 Kings 4:31b,34; 2 Chronicles 9:1-6), do you believe that Godly Wisdom will attract great attention? Why or why not? (James 4:17; Luke 2:47)



**CHAPTER 24**

**FAITH**

**SOLOMON (LATER LIFE) COMPROMISED FAITH**

## FAITH

### SOLOMON (LATER LIFE) COMPROMISED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** I Kings 11:4-13

**TEXT:** *"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."* (I Kings 11:4)

**INTRODUCTION:** Do you know what some of the greatest perils in life are? The peril of over-confidence! The peril of resting on the 'laurels of past accomplishments', and 'letting down your guards' and 'relaxing your personal disciplines'. The peril of growing complacent and lukewarm! The perils of 'growing weary in well doing' and abandoning the effort when the struggle becomes intense! The peril of misplaced loyalties and unguarded affections! In short, the peril of idolatry!

Notes Alexander Whyte, "If ever a blazing lighthouse was set up in the sea of life to warn every man and to teach every man, it was Solomon."

Great was the punishment which Solomon received from the Lord when Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following other gods!

Solomon's problem was one of spiritual compromise! Solomon compromised his faith in God!

**PROPOSITION:** There is need for, not only a glorious beginning, but for a faithful ending of life's spiritual pilgrimage. Compromise is a lifetime threat to any believer. Keeping one's heart devoted to the Lord God alone is indispensable if one is to maintain victory throughout his lifetime!

#### I. GREAT INDULGENCE IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT COMPROMISE

- A. The Disentanglement In Material Pursuits (I Kings 10:14-22)
- B. The Danger of an Independent Authority (I Kings 9:17-19)
- C. The Damage of A Forbidden Alliance (I Kings 3:1;7;7, 2 Chronicles 8:11)
- D. The Deception of A Dishonest Transaction (I Kings 9:10-14)

- E. The Destruction of Unrestrained Sensuality (I Kings 11:1-3)
- F. The Disillusionment of An Indulgent Life-Style (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)
- G. The Deterioration of An Unholy Idolatry (I Kings 11:4-11)

II. GREAT REBELLION IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT JUDGMENT

- A. The Hardening of A Rebel Heart (I Kings 11:4)
- B. The Incitation of Divine Anger (I Kings 11:9-13)
- C. The Agitation of Human Adversaries (I Kings 11:14-25)
- D. The Rebellion of A Trusted Subject (I Kings 11:26-39)
- E. The Anger of A Falling King (I Kings 11:40)

III. GREAT FAILURE IS THE BASIS FOR GREAT ADVICE

- A. The Dead-End Road of Materialism
- B. The Dead-End Road of Pleasure
- C. The Dead-End Road of Popularity and Power
- D. The Dead-End Road of Knowledge

**CONCLUSION:** The roads of the world are all dead-end roads!  
The way of Christ is open-ended and leads to an abundant life here and to eternal life hereafter!

## FAITH

### SOLOMON (LATER LIFE) COMPROMISED FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** I Kings 11:4-13

**TEXT:** *"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."* (I Kings 11:4)

**INTRODUCTION:** Do you know what some of the greatest perils in life are? The peril of over-confidence! The peril of resting on the 'laurels of past accomplishments', and 'letting down your guards' and 'relaxing your personal disciplines'. The peril of growing complacent and lukewarm! The perils of 'growing weary in well doing' and abandoning the effort when the struggle becomes intense! The peril of misplaced loyalties and unguarded affections! In short, the peril of idolatry! *"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."* (I Kings 11:4)

Notes Alexander Whyte, "If ever a blazing lighthouse was set up in the sea of life to warn every man and to teach every man, it was Solomon."

Notes James, *"When we teachers of religion, who should know better, do wrong, our punishment will be greater than it would be for others."* (James 3:2, Living Bible)

Great was the punishment which Solomon received from the Lord when Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following other gods!

Solomon's problem was one of spiritual compromise. Solomon compromised his faith! "How ever polished his granite character, Solomon - like all of us - had feet of clay. And those feet of clay were slowly beginning to wash out beneath him. Very few things deteriorate suddenly. No child suddenly becomes delinquent. No friendship suddenly ends. No marriage suddenly dissolves. No building suddenly collapses. It happens slowly....compromise by compromise." (Solomon; by Swindoll; page 17,18)

Notes William Barclay, "Even the man with the greatest privilege can meet with disaster before the end, if he falls away from obedience and lapses from faith. Dr. Johnstone Jeffrey tells of a great man who absolutely refused to have his life-story written before his death. 'I have seen', he said, 'too many men fall out on the last lap.' It was John

Wesley's warning, 'Let, therefore, none presume on past mercies, as if they were out of danger.' In his dream John Bunyan saw that, even from the gates of heaven, there was a way to hell." (Barclay's Jude; page 215)

It is still true that "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom!"

There are three lessons we ought to learn from the latter part of Solomon's life: (1) Great Indulgence Is the Basis of A Great Compromise; (2) Great Rebellion Is the Basis For a Great Judgment; (3) Great Failure Is the Basis For A Great Advice.

**PROPOSITION:** There is need for, not only a glorious beginning, but for a faithful ending of life's spiritual pilgrimage. Compromise is a lifetime threat to any believer. Keeping one's heart devoted to the Lord God alone is indispensable if one is to maintain victory throughout his lifetime!

#### I. GREAT INDULGENCE IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT COMPROMISE

Solomon's personal indulgence can be described in a variety of ways.

A. THE Disentanglement In Material Pursuits. The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land. King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles were gold, in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. (I Kings:14-22)

It says in I Kings 10:23 that "*King Solomon was greater in riches....than all the other kings of the earth.*"

Nothing wrong with having lots of money, as long as one does not begin to set his affections on money. Notes Paul, "People

who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get money, things that hurt them and make them evil-minded and finally send them to hell itself. For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows." (I Timothy 6:9,10 Living Bible)

Notes William Sangster, "Anything which weakens the conviction that our security is only in God is dangerous, and nothing weakens that conviction more than the love of money." (Daily Readings; pg.347)

It is possible - and even probable - that Solomon began to be entangled in materialistic pursuits, the consequence of which was spiritual compromise of his earlier vital faith.

#### B. The Danger of An Independent Authority

*"And Solomon rebuilt Gezer. He built up Lower Beth Horon. Baalath, and Tadmor in the desert, within his land, as well as all his store cities and the towns for his chariots and for his horses whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and throughout all the territory he ruled." (I Kings 9:17-19)*

"Solomon was alone in the driver's seat of the kingdom. He was accountable to no one. He answered to no one. The words 'all that Solomon desired to do' (I Kings 9:1b) and 'all that it pleased Solomon to build' (verse 19, 2 Chronicles 8:6b) reflected the absolute nature of his rule." (Solomon; Swinidoll;pg.24)

The powerful man who is not directly accountable to anyone for his actions and his attitudes, is the man whose position is precarious and whose 'fall' is predictable!

"'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Solomon was a pure and wise man at the inception of his rule. But no man is good enough or wise enough to be trusted with unlimited power. Power is heady wine that will intoxicate the best of hearts, dull the best of minds, and blur the best of vision. History is replete with the strewn wreckage of empires driven over the cliffs by rulers made dizzy with the strong drink of unaccountable authority. And, sadly, Solomon was no exception." (Solomon; by Swindoll;pg.26)

#### C. The Damage of A Forbidden Alliance.

*Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David*

until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. "Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number." (I Kings 3:1,7:8) "Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, 'My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel because the places the ark of the Lord has entered are holy.'" (2 Chronicles 8:11)

Solomon's marriage to 'pagan' wives, as an attempt to extend his political influence over other nations, had devastating affects in Solomon's spiritual life.

Previously in Israelite history, God had made it very clear to His people that they were to make no treaties with pagan people, that they were never to intermarry with them. "Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you." (Deuteronomy 7:3,4)

"Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Exodus 34:1;2-14)

A believer has no business entering into unholy alliances with non-believers. It is always wrong for a believer to marry an unbeliever. Writes Paul, "Don't be teamed with those who don't love the Lord, for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness? And what harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a Christian be a partner with one who doesn't believe? And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For you are God's temple, the home of the living God, and God has said of you, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.' That is why the Lord has said, 'Leave them; separate yourselves from them; don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you, and be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters.'" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16 Living Bible)

#### D. The Deception of A dishonest Transaction.

"At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings - the temple of the Lord and the royal palace - King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of

*Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and pine and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. 'What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?' he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul, a name they have to this day. Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold." (I Kings 9:10-14)*

"In a business transaction with his friend Hiram, Solomon traded several cities in exchange for building materials. Hiram later inspected his newly acquired real estate and found he'd been cheated. Although he had been slighted, Hiram attempted to reconcile matters with Solomon (I Kings 9:14). However, Solomon made no effort to admit the wrong or to make things right. Again, we see signs of Solomon's character eroding in a shady business deal and ill-treatment of a friend." (Solomon; by Swindoll;pg.19)

The Bible makes it clear that integrity - honesty - is of utmost importance. Shady business deals have no place in the life of the believer. Paul wrote, "Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through." (Romans 12:17 Living Bible)

Compromised faith is a faith that is eroding because, like as in the case of Solomon, there has been actions performed that are less than totally honest. The call to holiness is the call to honesty!

One statement in one Church's Membership Covenant reads as follows: "I will be just in all transactions, faithful in commitments, and contract obligations with full intention to keep them."

#### E. The Destruction of Unrestrained Sensuality.

*"King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter - Moabittes, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Never turn your hearts after their gods. Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray." (I Kings 11:1-3)*

Failure to control one's sexual impulses and drives is one of the surest ways to a spiritual downfall! To dally with sex is to court destruction! Many a great man has fallen 'flat on his face' morally and spiritually, because he failed to guard the affections of his heart!

Wrote Paul, "Sexual sin is never right: our bodies were not made for that, but for the Lord, and the Lord wants to fill our bodies with himself....That is why I say to run from sex sin. No other sin affects the body as this one does. When you sin this sin it is against your own body." (I Corinthians 6:13,18 Living Bible)

F. The Disillusionment of An Indulgent Life-Style.

"I thought in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.' But that also proved to be meaningless. 'Laughter,' I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?' I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly - my mind sill guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects; I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well - the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)

Spiritual deterioration leads to spiritual disillusionment! Notes Chuck Swindoll, "Bored and disillusioned, nothing satisfied Solomon any longer; nothing stimulated him. His taste buds had had it! He was stuffed, nauseated. So full of himself, so full of life's pleasures, he was ready to throw up. But that all-you-can-eat buffet life-style also seems to be the diet of most Americans. Eventually it leads to heartburn. 'Americans have always been able to handle austerity and even adversity. Prosperity is what's doing us in.' Need a little relief from the heartburn of living for yourself? If so, try a change in your eating habits - for 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4) (Quoted from Solomon; by Swindoll; page 17)

Listen to the testimony of a young businessman, seeking satisfaction in earth's wealth, while at the same time, in his honest moments, realizing that God alone can really satisfy him. "In my life the process goes on. My faith is in

frequent conflict with my obsession to participate in the consumption of this world's fruit. I often feel like a child in a candy store. I wander past the fields of sweet delights, gazing at the vast assortment of choices. All the while in mind the echoes of my mother's words warn me against the consequences of over-consumption. Yet, the warnings go mostly unheeded, and I continue to confidently, if not somewhat guilt-tinged, select items which I feel sure will satisfy my desires ('surely this one will be the last...Oh, just one more'). It's only when the toothache attacks, or the stomach revolts that I consciously pursue my mother's care, knowing that her caring arms and infinite wisdom will soothe my injuries. Her loving character will forgive my errant ways and soon everything will be alright again. In chagrined humility I wish I could follow her will, knowing full well that if I don't give in to her will and wisdom completely, I will soon make the same mistakes again. Oh, the tribulations of being an undisciplined child!" (personal letter received by Ron Christian)

Over-abundance in material possessions often leads to great self-indulgence. An indulgent life-style is often the first step to hell! Why is this so? Because there is a downward progression - one bad thing leading to another bad thing! Take a look at the downward spiral:

- (1) Over-abundance leads to Presumption.
- (2) Presumption leads to Ingratitude.
- (3) Ingratitude leads to Forgetfulness.
- (4) Forgetfulness leads to Prayerlessness.
- (5) Prayerlessness leads to Compromise.
- (6) Compromise leads to Disillusionment.
- (7) Disillusionment leads to Backsliding.
- (8) Backsliding lead to Apostasy.
- (9) Apostasy leads to Hell!

Worshipping the good things that God gave to Solomon, rather than worshipping the Giver of those good things was the downfall of Solomon - and it can become the downfall of anyone!

#### G. The Deterioration of An Unholy Idolatry.

*"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. He*

*did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.'*"(I Kings 11:4-11)

What was the result of Solomon's backsliding? It was gross idolatry, worshipping foreign gods!

The first of the Ten Commandments warns us against idolatry: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) Compromise of one's faith is always dangerous, for compromise often leads to idolatry - the worship of other gods! Many are the 'gods' in our modern society that compete for the believer's sole loyalty to the true and living God. The Bible speaks of those who, in the last days, shall be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

The last verse of the book of I John (5:21) reads as follows: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." The Living Bible paraphrases this verse as follows: "Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts. Amen."

There are many false gods or idols in our society which are worshipped in place of the true God. Says G. Campbell Morgan, "The question is whether the life and powers of man are devoted to the worship of the true God or to that of a false one."

There are many false gods or idols in our society which are worshipped in place of the true God. Says G. Campbell Morgan, "The question is whether the life and powers of man are devoted to the worship of the true God or to that of a false one."

What is a god? "Whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that we do in effect make a god of." (Matthew Henry). Wrote Luther, "In what things soever thou hast thy mind's reliance and thine heart fixed, that is beyond doubt thy God."

Notes William Barclay, "A man's god dictates a man's character, consciously or unconsciously." When Solomon began to worship the pagan gods of his pagan wives and concubines, Solomon's character began to deteriorate.

The one whose god is money will become a person who will value things as of ultimate importance, and people as pawns on a 'checker board' to be used and manipulated.

The one whose god is humanity will become a person who denies the reality of personal or original sin, and who naively believes that mankind is capable of saving itself, independent of any Sovereign.

The man whose god is science is the person who believes that all of reality can be explained through the scientific method, and that all of life and institutions find their origins and meaning alone in the scientific approach. No longer should the 'Whys' of life be asked (which only Religion and Philosophy can answer), but only the 'Hows' (which is the domain of Science).

How can that indulgence which led to a great compromise, in the life of Solomon, be described?

- (1) The Disentanglement in Material Pursuits.
- (2) The Danger of an Independent Authority.
- (3) The Damage of a Forbidden Alliance.
- (4) The Deception of a Dishonest Transaction.
- (5) The Destruction of Unrestrained Sensuality.
- (6) The Disillusionment of An Indulgent Life-Style.
- (7) The Deterioration of an Unholy Idolatry.

## II. GREAT REBELLION IS THE BASIS FOR A GREAT JUDGMENT

The one who compromises his spiritual convictions and who fails deeply to repent of his sins, is the person who is courting the judgment of God! The judgment which God brought on the head of Solomon can be described in various ways.

### A. The Hardening of A Rebel Heart.

The Biblical account says, "*As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.*" (I Kings 11:4)

The one whose heart is turned away from the Lord is the one whose heart is in the process of calcifying or hardening! Only the one who stays close to God can keep a tender heart, a clear conscience, and a compassionate response to others.

Turn your heart away from God and you will turn your heart also away from people! "Such apostasy is no incidental matter when it comes to the dynamics of behavior. Never forget: we humans will always reflect the image of the god we worship. There is tremendous creative power in ultimate devotion. We

tend to take on the qualities of that which is most important to us. Thus, when Solomon was young and utterly open to Yahweh and to other people, he was a sensitive and insightful responder to human need - as his handling of the famous case between the two harlots reveals. But when a love of material things began to escalate, and many concerns divided his heart, the kind of hardness and insensitivity that is a characteristic of the inorganic began to characterize Solomon's behavior. He could enslave a vast segment of his own people - why? Because he had become a thing himself, and was willing to use people to enhance the material side of life rather than using things to enhance the human side. The acid test in this area is always the single question: What will you sacrifice - things for the enhancement of persons, or persons for the enhancement of things?" (Glad Reunion; by John Claypool;pg.101)

#### B. The Incitation of Divine Anger.

*"The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.'" (I Kings 11:9-13)*

God is a God of love, and God can do nothing that is not motivated by love. God manifests His love in mercy towards those who repent of their sins; God manifests His love in judgment and justice towards those who harden their hearts and close their ears to God's rebukes!

It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should come to true repentance. God is longsuffering! God provides numerous opportunities for one to confess his sins and to restore his relationship to God.

God could quickly and immediately pour out His judgment upon the unrepentant one. Instead, *"He is waiting, for the good reason that he is not willing that any should perish, and he is giving more time for sinners to repent."* (2 Peter 3:9, Living Bible)

*"He is merciful and tender toward those who don't deserve it; he is slow to get angry and full of kindness and love. He never bears a grudge, nor remains angry forever. He has not punished us as we deserve for all our sins."* (Psalms 103:8,9,10a, Living Bible)

It can't be denied, however, that God's anger can be incited, and that God will manifest his justice in punishment for wrong-doing. The fulfillment of God's promises is conditioned by the degree of man's obedience to God's moral standards and required conditions. Because Solomon's heart became idolatrous - i.e., because his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God - the God of Israel said to Solomon, "I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates." (I Kings 11:11)

But God's judgment, while it is manifested in just and decisive punishment, is nevertheless always tempered with God's mercy. "Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son." (I Kings 11:12)

God's wrath, unlike the wrath of pagan deities, is redemptive, not vindictive. The full outpouring of God's judgment, comes only after every offer of God's mercy is totally spurned by hardened sinners. God has no pleasure in punishment! God takes no delight in the death of the wicked! He delights in saving the sinner, i.e., in sparing his wrath and in extending his mercy!

#### C. The Agitation of Human Adversaries.

"Then the Lord raised up against Solomon an adversary, Hadad the Edomite, from the royal line of Edom. Earlier when David was fighting with Edom, Joab the commander of the army, who had gone up to bury the dead, had struck down all the men in Edom. Joab and all the Israelites stayed there for six months, until they destroyed all the men in Edom. But Hadad, still only a boy, fled to Egypt with some Edomite officials who had served his father. They set out from Midian and went to Paran. Then taking men from Paran with them they went to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave Hadad a house and land and provided him with food. Pharaoh was so pleased with Hadad that he gave him a sister of his own wife, Queen Tahpenes, in marriage. The sister of Tahpenes bore him a son names Genubath, whom Tahpenes brought up in the royal palace. There Genubath lived with Pharaoh's own children. While he was in Egypt, Hadad heard that David rested with his fathers and that Joab the commander of the army was also dead. Then Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me go, that I may return to my own country." "What have you lacked here that you want to go back to your own country?" Pharaoh asked. "Nothing," Hadad replied, "But do let me go!" And God raised up against Solomon another adversary, Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled from his master, Hadadezer king of Zobah. He gathered men around him and became the leader of a band of rebels when David destroyed the forces of Zobah; the rebels went to Damascus, where they settled and took control. Rezon was

*Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad. So Rezon ruled in Aram and was hostile toward Israel."*  
(I Kings 11:14-25)

When a man is not at peace with God in his vertical relationship, there is also disquiet and disruption in his human horizontal relationships. The reason for this is at least twofold. First, the man who is alienated from God is the man who tends to alienate people from himself, for such a self-centered person is not attractive and winsome and magnetic in his personality. The payoff of sin is in the person himself who sins. Self-centeredness repels rather than attracts people. Thus, self-centeredness brings its own judgment.

Second, God sometimes directly raises up human adversaries to use as His instruments of judgment against unrepentant sinners. *"Then the Lord raised up against Solomon an adversary....Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad."* (I Kings 11:14,15)

Notes Chuck Swindoll, "When we seek to elude God by walking down the dark streets of defiance, He has ways of calling dogs from all sorts of alleys. Often we don't even know they're there. They just sort of skulk in the shadows, gnawing on some garbage bone - until God whistles. Then, like bloodhounds, they're off and running, hot on the scent. Baying and barking, they sniff us out wherever we may be hiding. Tenacious. Tireless. At times, terrifying. These wild dogs may take the form of a memory....a face from the past....a bankruptcy...an illness.." (Solomon; by Swindoll; page 33)

#### D. The Rebellion of A Trusted Subject.

*"Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah. Here is the account of how he rebelled against the king; Solomon had built the supporting terraces and had filled in the gap in the wall of the city of David his father. Now Jeroboam was a man of standing and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph. About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, 'Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But*

*for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statues and laws as David, Solomon's father did. But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who observed my commands and statues. I will take the kingdom from his son's hands and give you ten tribes. I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. However, as for you, I will take you and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statues and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not forever.'" (I Kings 11:26-39)*

Do you have trusted friends in your life? Solomon admired and trusted a very able man - a friend - whose name was Jeroboam. *"Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph."* (I Kings 11:28)

But the young man whom Solomon favored and put in charge of his whole labor force, became the very friend of Solomon's whom God incited to rebel against the king! Said God to Jeroboam, *"See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes...I will do this because they have forsaken me."* (I Kings 11:31,33a)

Not only did God use long-standing enemies to bring trouble to Solomon, but God used even one of Solomon's trusted subjects to accomplish God's greater judgment against Solomon - to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands!

The 'pleasures of sin' - i.e., an indulgent life-style - will eventually burn to ashes! Solomon's world around him is crumbling - God's favor toward Solomon has been turned to judgment, Solomon's old enemies have returned to reap vengeance, Solomon's one-time trusted subject has turned into a rebel whose divinely-assigned task is to become the new leader of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel!

When one's God is angry with him, and when one's enemies are revengeful towards him, and when one's friend becomes a rebel

against him, what security is left for such a person? Great is the judgment of God against the sin of idolatry!

There is a Proverb (ironically enough, probably written by Solomon) which states: "*When a man is trying to please God, God makes even his worst enemies to be at peace with him.*" (Proverbs 16:7, Living Bible)

When one looks at the rebellion of one of Solomon's trusted friends against Solomon, one feels justified in writing another Proverb: "When a man fails to please God, God makes even his best friends to be at war with him."

#### E. The Anger of A Falling King.

*"Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death."* (I Kings 11:40)

Sin pays terrible wages! The one whose heart is unrepentant is the one whose heart becomes hardened and insensitive, resulting in the 'thingification of people' around him. Failure to repent brings the judgment of God upon the backslidden! That judgment is seen in various ways: The incitation of divine anger (I Kings 11:9-13), the agitation of human adversaries (I Kings 11:14-25), the rebellion of a trusted subject (friend) (I Kings 11:26-39).

One of the last statements written about Solomon is most sad! Hate for Jeroboam was driving Solomon to kill Jeroboam!

If sin is allowed to have it's full way, the hate which sin produces will produce murder!

The wages of sin is death, not only eternal death (hell) hereafter, but death to the personality of the person who nurtures resentment in his heart. Resentment destroyed the good that had previously blossomed in Solomon's heart. Hate is like poison in the inner life of a person, gradually or quickly destroying that person! The payoff of sin is in the person himself who allows himself to hate!

Sin brings its own judgment, for sin destroys everything that is beautiful in life. Sin, i.e., the sin of idolatry, changed Solomon from a highly-favored and powerful king (blessed greatly by God), into a sadly-rejected and hate-filled king (judged greatly by God).

The resentment caused by sin is one of sin's own judgments, inflicted upon the human personality to change a one-time loving servant into a hate-filled tyrant! Never trust sin, for sin has terrible consequences! Sin turns a beautiful

person into an ugly person, a loving person into a hateful person, a compassionate person into a hardened person, a trusting person into a suspicious person, a great person into an ignoble person!

### III. GREAT FAILURE IS THE BASIS FOR GREAT ADVICE

Solomon compromised his faith, hardened his heart, and, as a result, brought the judgment of God upon his head. Solomon learned some lessons the hard way. It is hard to understand why Solomon, who wrote so wisely in the book of Proverbs, could have lived so foolishly in the latter part of his life!

There were four roads in life which Solomon travelled, all of which proved to be 'dead-end roads'. The book of Ecclesiastes describes the disillusionment and despair at the end of these roads.

#### A. The Dead-End Road of Materialism

Solomon was exceedingly wealthy, but all the wealth in the world cannot satisfy the soul of man. Life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses.

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, first, because of the inheritability of laboriously-gained riches. Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes, bitterly proclaimed this fact when he wrote, *"And I am disgusted about this, that I must leave the fruits of all my hard work to others. And who can tell whether my son will be a wise man or a fool? And yet all I have will be given to him - how discouraging! So I turned in despair from hard work as the answer to my search for satisfaction"*. (Ecclesiastes 2:18-20, Living Bible)

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, secondly, because riches cause sleepless anxiety. "He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth - except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers! The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia." (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12, Living Bible)

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, thirdly, because riches can be easily lost. "There is another serious problem I have seen everywhere - savings are put into risky investments that turn sour, and soon there is nothing left to pass on to one's son. The man who speculates is soon back to where he began - with nothing. This, as I said, is a very serious problem, for all his hard work has been for nothing; he has been working for the wind. It is all swept away. All

the rest of his life he is under a cloud - gloomy, discouraged, frustrated and angry." (Ecclesiastes 5:13-17, Living Bible)

The road of materialism is a dead-end road, fourthly, because material possessions do not have the ability to satisfy the inner longings of the soul. Too many learn too late that 'the lover of money shall not be satisfied with money nor the lover of wealth with his gain; this, too, is futility.' (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

#### B. The Dead-End Road of Pleasure

The second road we must consider is the road of Pleasure. Solomon traveled the road of 'wine, women and song'. Wrote Solomon, "I explored in my heart to stimulate my body with wine and to lay a hold of frivolity.....I acquired singers, both men and women and the delights of men - mistresses galore." (Ecclesiastes 2:3,8)

There are many people today who are 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'. The philosophy of many is: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die". Such pleasure-obsessed persons engage in endless attempts to gratify their lusts, only to find themselves forever frustrated and heaven-starved. Feeding on the sensual husks around them, they could be feeding on heavens's satisfying manna. God created mankind, male and female, and intends for the human couple to find fulfillment within the bonds of a God-established marriage. But, seeking to be free from the restraints of marriage, many have found themselves slaves of passion--lonely, isolated, unloved and guilt-ridden!

The road of Sensual Pleasure is a dead-end road! Wrote Solomon, "Of laughter I said, 'It is madness', and of amusement, 'What does it accomplish?' "Solomon found out that the temporary sweetness of sensual pleasure turned to the bitterness of remorse.

There is pleasure in sin only for a short time (Hebrews 11:25). Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'". One who continues to pursue the world's pleasure, independent of God, will eventually awaken to the fact that the 'evil days' have come and he no longer has pleasure in them. These words will come from the disillusioned sensualist: "Laughter is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" (Ecclesiastes 2:2) The temporary sweetness of sensual pleasure turns to the bitterness of remorse!

### C. The Dead-End Road of Popularity and Power

The road of popularity and power is a dead-end road. Fame is elusive and short-lived. The Miss America of last year is soon forgotten, as a new Miss America takes her place. One's accomplishments, even though they are spectacular, are soon forgotten by future generations which become preoccupied by their own selfish interests. The world's fame is subject to the whims of the shallow-minded crowd. One who is popular to the crowd today, may be despised by that same crowd tomorrow. What is 'In' today may be 'Square' tomorrow! The world's styles, tastes and modes are constantly changing. A ballerina dancer was asked if her fame had not given her much pleasure. She replied,, "It is a strange thing, but after many curtain calls, much applause and tremendous acclaim, I go to my room. There, when alone, I feel a desert in my heart". A popular 'rock-and-roll' recording artist, whose record sales numbered in the millions, was asked what he thought about his unusual success. He replied, "I feel like 'warmed-over death'!" A great actor was dying and said, "Let down the curtain, the farce is over. There is no reality in life; it is a farce." The modern-day 'success syndrome' leads to bitter disillusionment!

*Wrote Solomon, "So I became greater than any of the kings in Jerusalem before me, and with it all I remained clear-eyed, so that I could evaluate all these things. Anything I wanted, I took, and did not restrain myself from any joy.....But as I looked at everything I had tried, it was all so useless, a chasing of the wind, and there was nothing really worthwhile anywhere." (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11, Living Bible)*

### D. The Dead-End Road of Knowledge

Knowledge is not to be despised, but knowledge apart from God is both dangerous and futile. The road of knowledge is a dead-end road, for knowledge separated from God leads to madness and folly. Man has never had greater knowledge than he has today, but that knowledge can become man's curse! Knowledge of Means without understanding of Ends can result in mankind destroying itself! Science, divorced from Morality and Theology, can result in the total destruction of the human race!

For too long the 'sacred cow' in the West has been Science. Science as a methodology is fantastic, but science as a god is folly! An 'emancipated' Hindu religion who repudiated the ancient gods of his people turned cynically against all religion, said, "The real gods worshipped in the West are chemistry, electricity, nuclear fission. Let us fall down and

worship them". However, as Sangster reminds us, "The swift and terrible destruction of all our civilization is at the end of that road". (Sangster's Daily Readings; page 81)

Wrote Solomon, "I said to myself, 'Look, I am better educated than any of the kings before me in Jerusalem. I have greater wisdom and knowledge.' So I worked hard to be wise instead of foolish - but now I realize that even this was like chasing the wind. For the more my wisdom, the more my grief; to increase knowledge only increases distress." (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18, Living Bible)

Solomon learned that the person who seeks meaning in life without God will only find disillusionment and despair. The ways of materialism, pleasure, power, and knowledge are all futile!

God alone can enable one to turn materialism into compassion for the poor, to turn self-centered pleasure into self-giving sacrifice for the needy, to turn the pride of power into the humility of service, and to turn worldly pursuits of knowledge into godly pursuits of wisdom.

CONCLUSION: The writer of Ecclesiastes could find meaning in nothing except God. God, he declared, was his only hope. "To sum up the whole matter, all that was heard; revere God and keep His commandments, for this is every person's duty. For God shall bring every work into judgment, even everything hidden, whether it be good or bad." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

To revere God is to profoundly venerate, worship, adore, and respect Him. The ways of God and the happenings of life are sometimes past finding out--incomprehensible. Nevertheless, man is to submit to God and to serve Him. (Ecclesiastes 8:17; 11:5)

We are to keep God's commandments, despite oppression, for God sees the unrestrained oppression to the lonely. He knows that there are many injustices, that right too often goes unrewarded and wrong often goes unpunished. But God is still Ruler and He ultimately directs circumstances: "In the day of prosperity enjoy life, and in the day of adversity observe that God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not uncover anything that will be after him". (Ecclesiastes 7:14) Be assured that God will redress wrongs and that He will 'balance the books'. "Again I observed under the sun that place of judgment -- there was wrong; and the place of righteousness--there was wickedness. I said to myself, 'God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.'" (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17) "Although the sinner commits evil a hundred times and his life is prolonged to him, even so I know

*that it will be well with those who revere God, who are in awe before Him. It shall not be well with the evildoer; he shall not prolong his days as a shadow, because he does not revere God." (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13)*

The roads of the world--the road of Materialism, the road of Sensualism, the road of worldly Fame, the road of Knowledge--are all dead-end roads! These roads appear to be broad and expansive and delightful. But, in reality, they increasingly become narrow and finally lead to nowhere. They all come to an end!

The man without Christ is a loser. He loses in this life and he will lose eternally! "The way of the transgressor is hard." "But, in contrast to the roads of the world, the road of Christ leads to a happy end! The road of Christ is easy compared to the roads of sin! Said Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) Christ's yoke is our yearning, and His burden is our blessing!

After Solomon had travelled the hard roads of the world, he wrote: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment ...Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." (Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:1)

The day comes in the life of the unbeliever when he no longer has pleasure in his sins! The roads of the world are all dead-end roads! The way of Christ is open-ended and leads to an abundant life here and to eternal life hereafter!

## FAITH

### "SOLOMON (LATER LIFE) - 'COMPROMISED FAITH'"

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. From your perspective, what are some of the greatest perils which believers face in their lives?
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by Alexander Whyte, "If ever a blazing lighthouse was set up in the sea of life to warn every man and to teach every man, it was Solomon."
3. Does 'spiritual compromise' usually happen suddenly or quickly?
4. Are believers ever 'out of danger' spiritually during their earthly pilgrimage? Why or why not? As it applies to the Christian life, tell what the following popular statement means: "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom!"
5. Why does the possession of great riches pose such a great threat to a believer? (Note I Timothy 6:9,10; Matthew 19:16-26; Deuteronomy 8:13-14; Psalms 62:10; Proverbs 28:20; Mark 4:19). Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Anything which weakens the conviction that our security is only in God is dangerous, and nothing weakens that conviction more than the love of money."
6. Why is it so dangerous for a leader (including a religious leader) to be in a place of power and authority, without a direct accountability to others? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following popular statement: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."
7. From Solomon's example of intermarriage (I Kings 3:1; 7:8), what warning should a young person who, is anticipating marriage, take to heart? (Note Deuteronomy 7:3,4; Exodus 34:12-14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16).
8. What is the significance of the following statement, as it relates to maintenance of a vital relationship with God: "The call to holiness is the call to honesty?" (Note I Kings 9:10-14; Romans 12:17)

9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Failure to control one's sexual impulses and drives is one of the surest ways to a spiritual downfall." (Note I Corinthians 6:13,18; I Thessalonians 4:3-8; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-6)
10. From your own personal experience, or from your observation of others, how would you describe the disillusionment of an indulgent life-style, characteristic of many modern-day Americans? (Note Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "An indulgent life-style is often the first step to hell!"
12. From your personal observations, would you agree that compromise of one's faith often leads to idolatry? What are some of the 'gods' in our modern society that compete for the believer's sole loyalty to the true and living God? (Note Exodus 20:3; I John 5:2)
13. Illustrate the practical truthfulness of the following statement: "A man's god dictates a man's character."
14. Why is it true to say that when one turns his heart away from God, he also turns his heart away from people? (Note I Kings 11:4; I Kings 9:15)
15. If God is a God of love and can do nothing that is contrary to love, then how do you explain the fact of God's Wrath (I Kings 11:9-13)? What makes God's Wrath different from the wrath of so-called 'pagan deities'? (Note 2 Peter 3:9; Psalms 103:8-10; I Kings 11:12)
16. Why is it true to say that, when a man is not at peace with God in his vertical relationship, there is also disquiet and disruption in his human horizontal relationship? (Note I Kings 11:14-25)
17. What unsuspecting persons does God sometimes use to bring discipline or punishment to disobedient believers? (Note I Kings 11:26-39)
18. In terms of sin's consequences, explain the meaning of the following statement: "The payoff of sin is in the person himself who allows himself to hate!"
19. Give at least four reasons why the 'road of materialism' is a 'dead-end road'.

20. What warnings does the Bible give regarding the 'road of Sensual Pleasure'? (Hebrews 11:25; Ecclesiastes 2:2; 12:1; Luke 12:15-21; Luke 16:19-26)
21. Why does the 'road' of Popularity and Power lead to such futility and despair? (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11)
22. Before what 'sacred cow' in the West are many people bowing, and why is this 'god' so dangerous to serve?
23. By what means, and to what ends, can Money, Pleasure, Power and Knowledge be transformed.
24. What did the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes conclude was the whole purpose of life and the chief duty of man? (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)
25. What consolation and encouragement can you give to one who is distressed because wrong goes unpunished and right goes unrewarded often in this life? (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17; 8:12-13)



CHAPTER 25

FAITH

ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CAUSES)

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CAUSES)

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 18:30-19:5

INTRODUCTION: Emotionally-speaking, are you like a roller-coaster or like an escalator? Most, if not all people, including Christians, have 'ups' and 'downs' in their emotional life. It is possible for believers to become weary in their ministry, to lose hope in their future, to become discouraged over the seeming triumph of evil in their society, and even to despair and to give up their walk with Christ or their ministry for Christ.

It has been pointed out by sensitive counsellors that so-called 'Burnout' comes, not because of outside pressures, but because of failing adequately to cope with inward tensions.

PROPOSITION: Understanding some of the leading causes of discouragement, as seen in the life of Elijah, will help us to identify our own weaknesses and to avoid 'Burnouts' in our own lives.

#### I. CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT (Burnout)

- A. Physical Body - Exhausted
  - 1. Evil Circumstances (I Kings 16:29-33)
  - 2. Courageous Assignment (I Kings 17:1)
  - 3. Undeserved Loss (I Kings 17:2-7)
  - 4. Emotionally-Intense Ministry (I Kings 17:8-18:46)
- B. Mental Expectations - Disappointed (I Kings 19:1-3)
- C. Spiritual Fellowship - Disrupted
- D. Assigned Mission - Unfulfilled
- E. Human Companionship - Abandoned (I Kings 19:3-4)
- F. Clear Perspective - Distorted
- G. Optimistic Faith - Shattered (I Kings 19:4)

CONCLUSION: In the midst of a very active and intensely emotional ministry, Elijah grows weary physically. In the face of strong opposition and threats from evil Jezebel, Elijah becomes mentally disillusioned and spiritually disoriented. Temporarily losing his grip on God and his sense of the Divine Presence, Elijah's clear perspective on life becomes clouded and distorted. He feels that his mission in life has become sadly unfulfilled, and he feels that he alone in all of Israelite society has been faithful to his God. Losing faith in God and in God's sovereignty, he also loses faith in himself and in other people!

Yes, Elijah was a man of like passions as we are, a man who could be on the mountaintops of joy one day and in the valley of despondency the next day. His life was not an escalator, but instead it was, at times, like a roller coaster.

And so it is with us! But, even though we too, like Elijah, have our 'down' times, our 'blue' days, our 'emotional blowouts', the Lord never abandons us! The Lord tells us, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Comforting are the words of the Lord to the troubled soul! The Lord did not abandon Elijah, and He will never abandon you!

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CAUSES)

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 18:30-19:5

INTRODUCTION: Emotionally-speaking, are you like a roller-coaster or like an escalator? Most, if not all people, including Christians, have 'ups' and 'downs' in their emotional life. Hopefully, the older and more mature one becomes, the less drastic will be the changes in the emotions that he will experience. However, regardless of your age or experience, you are not immune to discouragement.

Disappointment leads to discouragement, and discouragement can lead to despair! It can happen to the best of Christians! It happened even to the great prophet Elijah!

It is possible for believers to become weary in their ministry, to lose hope in their future, to become discouraged over the seeming triumph of evil in their society, and even to despair and to give up their walk with Christ or their ministry for Christ.

It has been pointed out by sensitive counsellors that so-called 'Burnout' comes, not because of outside pressures, but because of failing adequately to cope with inward tensions. As in the case of Elijah, inward tension comes from doing God's work, but not doing it in God's way!

From a study of the life of Elijah, we can learn about the CAUSES and the CURES for discouragement or 'Burnout'.

Because there are many scenes (at least 13 scenes) in the fast-moving life of Elijah which are recorded in the Bible, time will not permit us to look at each of these scenes in detail, but we will endeavor to look specifically for the causes of his great discouragement, and (in the next lesson) for the God-given cures for his discouragement.

It is significant first to mention a couple important facts about Elijah. Elijah is considered to have been one of the greatest prophets of Israel. He represents all of the great prophets who spoke out boldly for the cause of righteousness and integrity and moral purity. But even though Elijah was, doubtless, one of the greatest persons of the Old Testament, nevertheless, before we begin to become too awe-struck by his greatness, let us also remember that he was very 'human', very 'earthy', very 'vulnerable' to discouragement, just like we are! Yes, we ought to respect him greatly for the mighty prophet of God that he was, but we ought also to identify with him because of the weak and fallible human being that he was.

Here is what James wrote about Elijah: "*Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves.*" (James 5:17a RSV) The New English Bible says: "Elijah was a man with human frailties like our own." The Living Bible says: "Elijah was as completely human as we are."

**PROPOSITION:** Understanding some of the leading causes of discouragement, as seen in the life of Elijah, will help us to identify our own weaknesses and to avoid 'Burnout' in our own lives.

## I. CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT (Burnout)

There are many causes for discouragement, despair, and 'Burnout'. As we survey the life of Elijah, we shall discover what some of those causes are.

### A. Physical Body - Exhausted

Try to follow in the footsteps of Elijah for awhile, and you too will become physically sapped of your energy! Not only was his pace fast, but the nature of his mission and work was intense!

#### 1. Evil Circumstances (I Kings 16:29-33)

The times in which Elijah lived were very evil! The king who was reigning over God's chosen people Israel was very wicked! "*Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him...Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.*" (I Kings 16:31,33b)

Elijah, as a devoted man of God, was deeply disturbed because of all the evil that surrounded him. Distress which one legitimately feels because of gross iniquity, can eventually cause one to feel physically drained! A rejoicing spirit creates physical strength, but a distressed spirit saps one of his energy. The Bible says that the righteous man rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. How easy it is for a Christian to concentrate so much of his energy in battling against sin, that he finds himself becoming weary in his body, distressed in his spirit, and anxiety-ridden in his mind. This happened to Elijah, and it can happen to any sincere servant of God today.

A well-known pastor, Eugene Peterson, "Tells how he was at a Red Cross bloodmobile to donate his annual pint, and a nurse was asking him a series of questions to see if

there was any reason for disqualification. `The final question on the list was "Do you engage in hazardous work?" Eugene remembers, `I said, "Yes." (Secrets of Staying Power; Kevin Miller; page 35)

Elijah's time were evil, and Elijah's task was hazardous - the task of being a prophet!

## 2. Courageous Assignment (I Kings 17:1)

What was the courageous assignment of Elijah? To confront wicked King Ahab with the God-given message that, because of his great moral transgressions (idolatry), a great physical punishment was impending - a nationwide draught! Said Elijah to Ahab, "*As the Lord, the God of Israell, livies, whomo I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.*" (I Kings 17:1)

Let none think that Christians are the weaklings of the world. It will take all the courage you can muster to serve the Lord and to obey the Lord! To confront evil tyrants or hardened sinners with "Thus saith the Lord" is not easy! Let only the most courageous - like Elijah - make application to be in the 'Lord's Army'!

It is true that difficult assignments from God can be exhilarating, thus creating energy to do even greater tasks, but it is also true that there can be a physical toll on the body of believers who work long and hard on the 'front lines' of spiritual battle!

## 3. Undeserved Loss (I Kings 17:2-7)

As soon as Elijah left the King, he was directed by God to turn eastward and hide in the Kerith ravine, east of the Jordan, where God miraculously provided for him. Elijah drank from the brook and God ordered the ravens to feed him! Amazing provisions - enough to encourage anyone!

How wonderful when believers feel daily that God is caring for them, even though they may not have great wealth materially, or great recognition and companionship socially. Elijah was alone with God, hidden from the evil king, being fed in nature by God's appointed creatures - the ravens - being refreshed by God's little brook! What a picture of simple, yet heavenly provision, in the midst of a society that is bent on evil.

But, alas!, "*some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.*" (I Kings 17:7)

Such disappointment! When a believer has "the rug pulled out from beneath him", i.e., when he loses a job which he felt God gave to him, or when he loses a friend that he felt God sent to him, etc., what thoughts come to his mind? We don't know what Elijah's initial thoughts were, but if he was as 'human' as we are, perhaps he had a variety of doubts that came to him.

When the 'brooks', which God has provided in our lives, suddenly go dry, sometimes we are tempted to ask questions: "Did the 'brook' go dry because God no longer loves me?" "Did the 'brook' go dry because God is punishing me for some sin of which I am not aware?"

But, even though these questions may have come to Elijah's mind at first, it did not take long for Elijah to realize that the 'brook' went dry for the same reason that all the other brooks went dry - because of God's punishment of Israel for their sin! God's physical punishment - nationwide drought - for Israel's nationwide moral transgression - idolatry!

"Elijah, therefore, was suffering from a guilt not his own. He was sharing their pain and the tragedy of the sinning nation of which he was a part ....Elijah's calamity, then, came to him at the hands of his sinning people." (Sermons on Old Testament Characters; Clovis Chappell; page 164)

Elijah could have become bitter when the God-provided brook went dry, for Elijah was bearing the consequences of other's sins!

Why do some grow weary in well-doing? Because they are experiencing 'pain' as the result of other people's sins! Bearing suffering unjustly will make you either bitter or better, either more trusting in God or more cynical towards others!

Although it appears that Elijah passed this test of unjust suffering nobly, is it possible that this trying experience was only one of many experiences that contributed to his eventual physical exhaustion?

One thing for sure that we must say: Be careful how you handle the pain that you experience as the result of other people's sins. If you allow yourself to become bitter or hardened when your 'brook' goes dry, you are on your way to a spiritual blow-out, a 'burnout'!

#### 4. Emotionally-Intense Ministry (I Kings 17:8-18:46)

The majority of chapter 17 of I Kings relates the personal ministry of compassion which Elijah had to a certain widow. Compassion in one's heart must find an object, and the object of Elijah's compassion was a poor woman who, with her son, was on the verge of physical starvation. When Elijah approached this poor woman with a request for food, the woman replied, "*As surely as the Lord your God lives, I don't have any bread - only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it - and die.*" (I Kings 17:12)

Through a mighty miracle, the woman's needs were not only immediately met, but her long-term physical needs continued to be met. "*For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'*" (I Kings 17:14)

Even though the 'brook', where Elijah earlier received sustenance from, went dry, nevertheless, God used Elijah to perform a miracle for the woman that was so great that the jar of flour and the jug of oil was not depleted until the national drought was over!

But Elijah's ministry to this one widow was not over! Great as the miracle of physical sustenance was, the miracle that followed this one was even greater! The widow's son became ill and eventually died. The pastoral care of Elijah for this heartbroken woman was unmatched anywhere in the Bible, excepting the compassionate ministry of Jesus. "*Elijah took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord. 'O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?' Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!' The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.*" (I Kings 17:19-22)

With all the thrill that came to Elijah when he saw the results of human compassion and divine power combined, is it possible that, nevertheless, this intensely-personal and emotionally-draining ministry of Elijah to the widow contributed to the eventual physical burnout that he experienced?

One of the contributing factors of 'Burnout' is emotionally-intense ministry to hurting people. Dealing with troubled people can drain you!

Those who are intent on helping people and intense in their ministry to the troubled one, are the very persons who can become physically exhausted and emotionally drained.

Even the greatest saints can become frayed in their nerves and depressed in their spirit! "They tell us that Francis Asbury used to preach with great unction and power, and then go to his room and have spells of melancholy until he would feel that he was lost and there was no hope for him at all. Now this feeling came from the fact that his body was exhausted and his nerves frayed." (Earthen Vessels, John Church; page 44,45)

Not only did Elijah have a one-to-one ministry of compassion to a poor widow whose needs were abundantly met through God's great power, but Elijah had a public ministry of confrontation with Ahab and his 850 false prophets on Mount Carmel, the result of which was great victory for the cause and reputation of Jehovah. The story is popular (I Kings 18) and need not even be summarized at this point. Suffice it to say that confrontation with evil is both exhilarating and exhausting! Yes, a paradox! In living for Christ, there are times we must confront evil and battle the forces of darkness! We must put on the whole armor of God and face the enemy head on! Elijah did this. He challenged the false prophets! He wrestled with the forces of evil and won! He not only upheld the reputation of Jehovah, but he destroyed (literally killed) the prophets of Baal!

After such a miraculous feat, he interceded before God that it might rain once again and that the national drought might come to an end (I Kings 18:41-46). "*Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.*" (I Kings 18:42) The answer to Elijah's prayer did not come immediately, but God did eventually answer the prayer. "*And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."* So Ahab sent off to eat and drink, but *Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."* The seventh time the servant reported, "*A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.*" So Elijah said, "*Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'*"

*Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezebel. (1 Kings 18:41-45)*

Someone said, "Prayer Works. Prayer is Work. Prayer leads to Work." As exhilarating as intercessory prayer is, is it not also true to say that persistent and earnest prayer can also be physically exhausting? Have you often, during your prayer life, bent down to the ground and put your face between your knees? Great is the physical energy that is involved in such wholehearted praying! Elijah prayed with great passion!

I know from personal experience that when I have prayed earnestly or when I have preached several messages consecutively, there is (paradoxically) both great exhilaration and great physical exhaustion!

How could Elijah not be tired physically, after he had given himself as God's tool to perform the mighty miracle on Mount Carmel, after he had overseen the slaughter of 850 false prophets, and after he had prayed earnestly for the end of the national drought? Then, after these physically-exhausting ministries, Elijah decided to involve himself in a foot race! *"Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the winds rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel."* (1 Kings 18:46) Elijah outran the chariot!.

Talk about physical energy! Elijah had it! Elijah had a day of ministry that was most glorious - packed with activities and anointed with God's power!

How wonderful that God sustains and energizes His servants - servants like Elijah and servants like you and me! But, without minimizing the enabling power and grace of God, let us also not be oblivious to the human frailty of man. We are not made of steel! The best of Christians still have only a temple of clay in which they live! None is limitless in his reserves of physical energy and strength!

In trying to discover the causes of discouragement ('Burnout'), we have gone into considerable detail to point out that Physical Exhaustion is one of the leading causes. Even though 'on the surface' it may not appear that this was one of the leading causes of depression in Elijah's case, we have tried to point out possible evidences that show that, indeed, this was one of the contributing causes for eventual 'Burnout' in Elijah's

life. The evil society in which he lived, the difficult assignment by God that he was given, the undeserved loss which he experienced (the 'brook' drying up), and the multi-faceted and emotionally-intense ministry that was his to perform, all combined (in my evaluation) to bring physical and mental exhaustion to Elijah.

B. Mental Expectations - Disappointed (I Kings 19:1-3)

After you have won a major battle against evil, you are physically weary perhaps, but you are excited emotionally and abounding in joy. But be careful, for it is after the 'mountain-top' experiences that the 'valley' experiences often come. It was after Jesus was baptized that He was led into the barren wilderness to be tempted of the devil for forty days! It was after Elijah experienced the unusual victory on the top of Mount Carmel, and after he had seen the miracle of the return of rain to the land in answer to prayer, that he went into the 'valley of despair'.

*"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.' Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep." (I Kings 19:1-4)*

"He had expected, of course, that the men who had shouted 'The Lord He is God' would stand by him. But they did not. He had expected that even Jezebel would be afraid to lift her voice in defense of the old defeated heathenism of the past. But here again he was much mistaken...Jezebel's threat totally upset the prophet's sense of victory." (Sermons on Biblical Characters; Clovis Chappell; page 119)

One contributing factor of discouragement and eventual 'burnout' is the shattering of hopes and the disappointments of unfulfilled dreams. Having unrealistic expectations can be dangerous! We must realize that our battle against evil is a lifelong battle. The Enemy (like Jezebel) does not give up easily. Sinful institutions are not destroyed overnight! Sin is tenacious! The tentacles of evil are long! Christians are engaged in a lifelong campaign, not a short battle. The victory is the Lord's and the ultimate victory has conclusively been won by our Lord through the cross and the Empty Tomb, but that victory has to be claimed in time, over and over again, on every occasion when a new evil threatens

us. The Bible often speaks of Christians suffering for the cause of Christ.

Elijah won the battle on ONE front and mistakenly thought the battle was over, but a 'Jezebel' does not give up that easily. There are many 'fronts' in the spiritual battles of life.

### C. Spiritual Fellowship - Disrupted

When Elijah heard of Jezebel's threats to kill him, his heart panicked, and he fled in terror. What happened to Elijah is what often happens to us during a crisis. As Elijah, we focus outwardly on the threats of men rather than focusing upwardly on the power of God. Focusing on the evil around us will always bring discouragement! "Up to this time Elijah's every step had been ordered of the Lord. He had a sense of the Divine Presence that was wonderful. But Jezebel's treats had made him believe that he must look out for himself. So he took his case into his own hands. And that is the road that must always lead to the juniper tree." (Sermons on Biblical Characters; Clovis Chappell; page 120) Elijah made the same mistake that the disciples made, while they were in a boat during a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was asleep, but the disciples were panic-stricken. They had their eyes on the threatening storm, not on the calming presence of Jesus whose power was greater than the threatening power of the wind and the waves. They temporally lost their sense of the Divine Presence.

When our spiritual fellowship is disrupted, i.e., when we are not daily reading the Bible and praying and communing with our Lord, we are more vulnerable to Satanic attacks and to discouragement. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, not on the storms of life, if we are to remain strong and encouraged!

Notes Donald Demaray, "A student at Seattle Pacific College came into the office, slumped down into a chair, and said, 'I thought I was filled with the Spirit, but apparently I haven't been. I see none of the fruit of the Spirit in my life.' I said, 'What kind of devotional life do you have?' She replied, 'Hit and miss'. 'Do you eat your meals that way?' She answered with a half smile, 'I used to and I nearly lost my health.' It was not necessary for me to say, 'Is it any wonder you have lost your spiritual health?' The Bible is food for the Spirit. In order to maintain the Spirit-filled life one must have a beefsteak-sized portion of God's Word daily." (Alive To God Through Prayer; Demaray; page 21)

"Practicing the Presence of God" means that we cultivate our spiritual relationship with God through prayer and Scriptural meditation. It means that we learn to see the world's events and calamities through the 'eyes' of God. It means that we

learn to pray rather than to worry, that we learn to remain calm rather than to panic during the storms of life, that we remind ourselves that God is in total control of all circumstances of life and that God has the 'final word' in the affairs of men, that God will allow the 'Jezebels' of life to go only so far and no farther!

D. Assigned Mission - Unfulfilled

In the midst of his discouragement, "he came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said, 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'" (I Kings 19:4)

Elijah was the champion for righteousness. He sought to bring the nation of Israel back to the living God. Killing the false prophets, he thought that he had cut the 'main nerve' of heathen idolatry, but alas!, he found that the task of nationwide revival was far from accomplished. As a perfectionist, he felt his mission had been a failure. He compared himself with his ancestors, and felt that he was a failure!

One of the leading causes of discouragement and 'burnout' is 'perfectionism', i.e., feeling that we are never successful in the mission that we have set out to accomplish for God, that we are never adequate for the assigned job, that we are inferior to others (including our ancestors), that our mission is totally unfulfilled!

"Have you ever had a feeling that you were of no account and never would be; that in spite of all that God had done for you, you were a failure? There are few things more fraught with heartache and bitterness and discouragement than that. That is something that makes you want to sob and give over the fight utterly. And there are a lot of folks that allow themselves to come to that dismal conviction. They work, and nobody seems to appreciate it. They toil, and nobody compliments them. Then they decide that they do not amount to anything, and they feel like giving over the fight." (Sermons on Biblical Characters; Chappell; page 121)

E. Human Companionship - Abandoned (I Kings 19:3-4)

"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert." (I Kings 19:3,4a)

One of the worse things you can do when you are discouraged is to isolate yourself from others who could help you if you would allow them to help you! Elijah, in his fear of Jezebel,

fled quickly, taking with him only one other person - his servant. But before long, Elijah left even his own servant behind and went alone into the desert. Yes, there is a legitimate time for solitude - getting alone to be with your God in sweet communion. We sing, "I come to the Garden alone". But to be alone very long while you are discouraged is a most dangerous thing! You are more vulnerable to Satan's temptations, the temptations to bitterness and despair and self-pity. When you are discouraged and downhearted, you need the companionship of fellow believers, the counsel of loving friends, the listening ear of a caring family, the comfort of a worshiping congregation!

#### F. Clear Perspective - Distorted

*"And the word of the Lord came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too.'" (I Kings 19:10)*

In his despair, Elijah believed he was the only one left who had not bowed his knee to the heathen gods. Filled with self-pity, he failed to see reality - that thousands of others like himself had also remained true to Jehovah!

"Not only did Elijah for the moment lose faith in himself, but he lost faith in others as well. He thought there was not a good man in all Israel. And if you want a short cut to wretchedness, get to a place where you do not believe in anybody." (Sermons On Biblical Characters; Chappell; page 122)

"A major cause of burnout is our separateness, our willful independence. We all need people who can help us realize that what we are feeling they have felt. Discouragement deepens in the false idea that no one else feels the way we do." (Lord Of The Impossible; page 172; Ogilvie)

#### G. Optimistic Faith - Shattered (I Kings 19:4)

Running away from life and life's challenges, and feeling that one's life work is futile and that the future is dark and hopeless - these actions and attitudes are the antithesis of faith. Faith is aggressive and forward-moving. Faith believes that the future is bright. Faith believes that the disciplined life is fruitful and that one's moral efforts are not expended in vain!

Elijah's aggressive offensive turned into a passive defense. Elijah's optimism and belief in a victorious future, turned

into pessimism and a prayer for death! "He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die." (I Kings 19:4)

When you feel that life is no longer worth living, and when you feel that your efforts are useless and that nothing will ever change for the better, then it is a sure evidence that Despair has you in its 'death grip'.

Why do people have burnouts? One reason is that they have lost faith in God's power to change people and to change circumstances. They believe that their efforts are powerless to bring about any lasting changes. They have succumbed to their feelings of despair and futility.

Someone has wisely written, "There are no hopeless situations in life, only people who have grown hopeless about those situations."

People who have lost faith in themselves, and who have lost faith in others, and who have lost faith in God's sovereign power and control of life, are people who, like Elijah, wish that they could die. Life becomes too big for them to handle, and they believe that God is either incapable of changing people and circumstances, or that He is indifferent to their problems and burdens.

To lose faith in God, in others, and in yourself is to succumb to cynicism and to an eventual 'burnout'.

The words from Ecclesiastes vividly describes the feelings of futility and hopelessness which the man, who has lost faith in God, feels. "*Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless ... What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the steams came from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say....So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:2-8a;2:17)

**CONCLUSION:** What are the CAUSES for discouragement and 'burnout'? There are many causes, but some of the main causes are vividly seen in the life of Elijah.

In the midst of a very active and intensely emotional ministry, Elijah grows weary physically. In the face of strong opposition and threats from evil Jezebel, Elijah

becomes mentally disillusioned and spiritually disoriented. Temporarily losing his grip on God and his sense of the Divine Presence, Elijah's clear perspective on life becomes clouded and distorted. He feels that his mission in life has become sadly unfulfilled, and he feels that he alone in all of Israelite society has been faithful to his God. Losing faith in God and in God's sovereignty, he also loses faith in himself and in other people!

Yes, Elijah was a man of like passions as we are, a man who could be on the mountaintops of joy one day and in the valley of despondency the next day. His life was not an escalator, but instead it was at times like a roller coaster.

And so it is with us! But, even though we too, like Elijah, have our 'down' times, our 'blue' days, our 'emotional blowouts', the Lord never abandons us! The Lord tells us, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Comforting are the words of the Lord to the troubled soul! The Lord did not abandon Elijah, and He will never abandon you!

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed;  
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,

Upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand."  
"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CAUSES)

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "'Burnout' comes, not because of outside pressures, but because of failing adequately to cope with inward tensions."
2. Why is a study of the life of Elijah should a helpful study for one who is experiencing discouragement and despair? (Notes James 5:17)
3. From your own personal experience and from observation of others, have you found that it is possible for a Christian to concentrate so much of his energy in battling against sin, that he finds himself becoming weary in his body, distressed in his spirit, and anxiety-ridden in his mind?
4. Why is 'courage' such an important quality to cultivate in the life of the believer who wishes effectively to be used by God in Christian service? (Note I Kings 17:1)
5. When the God-provided 'brooks' go dry in a believer's life (I Kings 17:7), what is a believer tempted to think about life and about God?
6. How should a sincere follower of Christ react or respond when he experiences 'pain' and 'suffering' as a result of other people's sins?
7. If it is true that "compassion and courage in one's heart must always find an object", describe the set of circumstances in I Kings 17 in which Elijah's compassion and courage found expression. Is it possible for an emotionally-intense ministry, motivated by compassion and calling for courage, to lead to an eventual 'Burnout'? Why or why not?
8. Give your explanation and interpretation of the following statement: "After you have won a major battle against evil, be careful, for it is after the 'mountaintop' experiences that the 'valley' experiences often come." Give illustrations of this principle from the lives of Elijah, Jesus, John the Baptist, and your life.

9. Following Elijah's great victory on the top of Mount Camel, what 'high expectations' in the mind of Elijah were greatly disappointed? What 'realistic expectations' should Christians have regarding the nature of sin and the extent of evil, in the world where he seeks to minister?
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The victory is the Lord's and the ultimate victory has conclusively been won by our Lord through the Cross and the Empty Tomb, but that victory has to be claimed in time, over and over again, on every occasion when a new evil threatens us."
11. What factors caused Elijah's close spiritual fellowship with God temporarily to be disrupted, following the great victory on the top of Mount Camel? What are various causes for disruption of our spiritual fellowship with God in our modern day?
12. What does it mean to 'practice the presence of God' in your daily life?
13. What is 'perfectionism' and why is 'perfectionism' one of the main causes of discouragement and 'burnout' in the Christian life? Why is it so dangerous for us, as believers, to compare ourselves favorably or unfavorably with other persons (including our 'ancestors')? (Note I Kings 19:4) How do you distinguish between feelings of inferiority and feelings of humility? What results come with the full outward expression of each of these feelings? Is it possible to 'learn' from others, without at the same time comparing yourself with others or competing with others?
14. Why is it dangerous (as in the case of Elijah) for a believer to isolate himself from other persons during a time when he is discouraged? What is the difference between helpful 'solitude' and hurtful 'isolation', as these relate to living the Christian life?
15. As in the case of Elijah, when one loses faith in himself, is it almost inevitable that he will lose faith in others? Why or why not?
16. Based on personal experience, tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements: "A major cause of burnout is our separateness, our willful independence. We all need people who can help us realize that what we are feeling they have felt. Discouragement deepens in the false idea that no one else feels the way we do."

17. What attitude does the faith-filled person have regarding his disciplined life, and his moral efforts, and his future, and God's transforming power?
18. Is the following statement a statement of naive optimism or a statement of genuine faith: "There are no hopeless situations in life, only people who have grown hopeless about those situations."
19. For the sake of review, list the seven causes for Elijah's 'burnout'.
20. How does God respond or react to believers who experience 'down' times, 'blue' days, and 'emotional blowouts'?



**CHAPTER 26**

**FAITH**

**ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CURES)**

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CURES)

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 19:3-18

**INTRODUCTION:** What do you do when you get up in the morning and you feel like you never went to sleep the night before? What do you do when you feel like a 'ton of bricks' has fallen on you, and you wonder if you will ever feel the 'zip and vigor' for living that you once felt? What do you do when you feel that you are all alone in a big world with no one around you who understands? What do you do when you feel that you have expended your last ounce of energy, but for every 'two steps forward' you feel like you have taken 'three steps backward' in your attempts to reach your noble goals? How do you cope with your feelings of discouragement and despondency and despair?

**PROPOSITION:** Just as there were several Causes for Elijah's discouragement, so there were several Cures for his despondency.

#### II. CURES FOR DISCOURAGEMENT (Burnout)

- A. Physical Body - Renewed (1 Kings 19:5-9)
- B. Mental Expectations - Corrected (1 Kings 19:10)
- C. Spiritual Fellowship - Revived (1 Kings 19:11-13a)
- D. Assigned Mission - Shared (1 Kings 19:19)
- E. Human Companionship - Reaffirmed (1 Kings 19:14-18)
- F. Clear Perspective - Restored (1 Kings 19:18)
- G. Optimistic Faith - Recovered (1 Kings 19:15-19)

**CONCLUSION:** Elijah was as completely 'human' as we are. He, too, had his 'ups-and-downs', but just as he recovered from discouragement, so we too can recover! Be encouraged!

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CURES)

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 19:3-18

**INTRODUCTION:** What do you do when you get up in the morning and you feel like you never went to sleep the night before? What do you do when you feel like a 'ton of bricks' has fallen on you, and you wonder if you will ever feel the 'zip and vigor' for living that you once felt? What do you do when you feel that you are all alone in a big world with no one around you who understands? What do you do when you feel that you have expended your last ounce of energy, but for every 'two steps forward' you feel like you have taken 'three steps backward' in your attempts to reach your noble goals? How do you cope with your feelings of discouragement and despondency and despair?

Understanding of the possible causes of discouragement and depression, is the first step in solving this problem. Understanding, by itself, will solve no problem, for understanding must give way to activation of the will and to change in one's practice. But understanding of possible causes is the first step toward a solution.

In the last lesson on Elijah, we analyzed several reasons why Elijah had an emotional 'burnout'. (1) Physical Body - Exhausted, (2) Mental Expectations - Disappointed, (3) Spiritual Fellowship - Disrupted, (4) Assigned Mission - Unfulfilled, (5) Human Companionship - Abandoned, (6) Clear Perspective - Distorted, (7) Optimistic Faith - Shattered.

**PROPOSITION:** Just as there were several Causes for Elijah's discouragement, so there were several Cures for his despondency. Let us offer a cure for each one of the causes, as we look again at the life of Elijah.

#### II. CURES FOR DISCOURAGEMENT (Burnout)

##### A. Physical Body - Renewed (1 Kings 19:5-9)

We noted that, because of the taxing nature of Elijah's multi-faceted, emotionally-wrought ministry, it was inevitable that Elijah would become physically exhausted.

One of the most important and initial steps towards Elijah's recovery, was to get some badly-needed sleep. "Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep." (1 Kings 19:5) Notes Lloyd Ogilvie, "He (Elijah) was too physically depleted to be open to reason or new hope. There are times when we get so down that rebuilding our physical strength is absolutely

essential. The first step out of discouragement is to love ourselves enough to reorder our lives so we can get adequate sleep, recreation, exercise, and times away from demanding schedules." (Lord Of the Impossible; page 172,173)

Following a sound and badly-needed sleep, the Scriptural account tells us that Elijah got up and ate food - food that had been prepared by God's angel.

*"All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.' So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forth days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night." (I Kings 19:5b-9)*

Adequate sleep and nutritious food are absolutely essential for a follower of God. Also, it should be noted that it is most likely that Elijah actively involved himself in physical exercise. The fact that Elijah ran ahead of Ahab, who was in a chariot, *"all the way to Jezreel"* (I Kings 18:46), and the fact that Elijah *"traveled (probably by foot) forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God"* (I Kings 19:8), indicates that Elijah regularly exercised physically. Perhaps he got his exercise simply because of the nature of his work as a traveling prophet, but, nevertheless, he was physically strong.

If you want to guard yourself against discouragement and eventual 'burnouts', you must keep your body physically fit. Among the effective ways to cope with stress in your life, physical exercise and good diet are two of the ways. Says one modern writer, "The best stress fighter is aerobic exercise, because it counteracts every harmful effect of stress. Don't be intimidated by the term 'aerobics'. A brisk twenty-minute walk three times a week will do the job, as will bicycling or minitrampolining. Any aerobic activity will lower pulse and blood pressure, regulate blood sugar, and strengthen and relax muscles. Other physical means of coping with stress include a well-balanced diet high in natural foods but low in fat, salt, sugar, and additives. Adequate sleep and rest are also beneficial." (Light and Life Magazine; August 1988; page 8)

"John Wesley, though no physician, gave this simple prescription for good health. It includes helpful spiritual advice. 'Observe...exactness in your regimen or manner of living, Use plain diet. Go to bed early. Above all, add.....that old unfashionable medicine, prayer. Be as clean

and sweet as possible in houses, clothes, and furniture. Water is the wholesomest of all drinks, quickens the appetite, and strengthens the digestion most. Spirituous liquors are a certain, though slow, poison. Exercise is indispensably necessary to health and long life. Walking is the best exercise. All violent and sudden passions dispose to....acute diseases. The love of God...prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds.'" (Alive To God Through Prayer; page 101,102; Demaray)

One reason why some Christians become despondent and depressed emotionally and spiritually is that they have neglected proper care of their body. "Someone has said we function best spiritually when we function best physically. That is not a necessarily true statement, but it has its point. God can seem deaf because we have deadened the line through physical neglect." (Alive To God Through Prayer; Demaray; page 126)

Notes Dr. David McKenna, "Angels fed Elijah to restore his physical strength as the starting point for renewing his mind and refreshing his spirit. We are responsible for our own bodies..`Get in touch with your body before it gets in touch with you.' Your spiritual, mental and spiritual health depends on it.." (Renewing Our Ministry; page 59)

#### B. Mental Expectations - Corrected (I Kings 19:10)

After Elijah was restored physically through sleep and through angel-prepared food (I Kings 19:5-9), the Lord asked him a very important question: "What are you doing here Elijah?" Lloyd Ogilvie believes this question was asked of Elijah to help him to "get in touch both with what was happening to him and with his real feeling.." Notes Ogilvie, "A crucial dimension of the healing of our discouragement is to spread out before the Lord exactly how we feel and the things that caused our condition." (Lord Of The Impossible; page 173)

Mental reflection regarding our depressed condition is important as a means of regaining mental balance and objective thinking. Sometimes we get so caught up in the 'hustle-and-bustle' and in the 'rat race' of life that we have to learn to 'slow down'. There is something 'healing' about being alone with the Lord, where we can pour out honest feelings before Him.

To slow down and to be alone in our thoughts and in our dialogue with the Lord, is essential for our restoration to mental and spiritual health.

"Give me, amidst the confusion of my day  
the calmness of the everlasting hills.  
Break the tension of my nerves and muscles

with the soothing music of the singing streams  
     that live in my memory.  
         Help me to know  
 the magical restorative power of sleep.  
 Teach me the art of taking minute vacations...  
     of slowing down to look at a flower,  
         to chat with a friend,  
             to pat a dog,  
 to read a few lines from a good book.  
     Slow me down, Lord,  
 and inspire me to send my roots deep  
 into the soil of life's enduring values,  
     that I may grow  
 toward the stars of my greater destiny.  
                     Amen. (Quoted in  
                     Sangster's Daily  
                     Readings, Epilogue II)

In answer to the Lord's question "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*", *Elijah answered "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."* (I Kings 19:10)

Carefully considering Elijah's answer, it appears that Elijah was depressed because his expectations for nationwide revival had been shattered. He cannot be faulted for his great zeal for the Lord and for the Lord's cause which motivated him to confront the wicked king Ahab with God's pronouncement of nationwide draught (I Kings 17:1), and which motivated him to kill the 850 false prophets on Mount Carmel. His great distress over idolatry and his combined sorrow and anger because of the martyrdom of Jehovah's prophets is very understandable. His evangelistic preaching was decisive, calling for a commitment. To the backslidden, idolatrous Israelites, Elijah said, "*How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.*" (I Kings 18:21)

The purpose for which Elijah put Ahab and the idolatrous Israelites to a test on Mount Carmel, was to incite repentance in the heart of the people and to turn the entire apostate nation back to God. Elijah's prayer indicates this: "*Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.*" (I Kings 18:37)

Following the miracle, the backslidden Israelites fell prostrate and cried, "*The Lord - he is God! The Lord - he is God!*" (I Kings 18:39)

Elijah rejoiced greatly when he witnessed God's great power and the wonderful response of repentance in the lives of the prostrate Israelites, following the miracle!

Why then did Elijah become greatly depressed later? Probably because he expected the entire nation to turn back to God, as a result of God's mighty demonstration of power in the miracle on Mount Carmel. Elijah thought that Mount Carmel was the final battle with evil, but Jezebel saw it as a skirmish! Elijah expected idolatry to be wiped out decisively, but he failed to realize that national evil is not that easily dislodged and destroyed.

When believers today, like as in the case of Elijah, fail to realize the tenacious nature of sin, they too can become 'weary in well-doing' and fall into the 'Slough of Despond'.

There will always be a 'mixed multitude' in the world and even in the Church. Not all will repent when the Gospel is preached. Thank God, there will be some who will cry out for forgiveness when they see evidence of God's power (as on Mount Carmel), but there will be others who will, like Jezebel, become more stubborn and more hostile when they are confronted with the challenge to repent. The child of God needs always to remind himself that spiritual warfare is a lifelong campaign, not one mere battle. Children of God must rejoice greatly in the victory of one decisive battle (like that which was on the top of Mount Carmel), but they must never forget that there are many battles that have to be fought throughout life, on many different battle 'fronts'. The Enemy (devil) does not give up easily or quickly. He has many strategies and tricks! If one way doesn't work, he will try another way! He is subtle and tenacious, and so are his evil followers on earth. The 'Jezebels' of life are merely infuriated when their cause is hurt and their prophets are killed!

Jesus reminded us that there will be wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, i.e., there will be hypocrites to deal with in this life. He reminded us that there will never be a totally pure company of people with whom we may dwell, until we get to heaven. In heaven, there will be nothing impure. Nor will anyone dwell there who does what is shameful or deceitful (Revelation 21:27). However, here on earth there will always be those who, like Jezebel, refuse to repent. Jesus called these kind of people 'tares'. The 'tares' will grow together with the 'wheat'. In Jesus' parable of the 'Tares', the servants asked, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" Jesus answered, "No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters:

*First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."* (Matthew 13:28-30)

A pastor who is zealous to get rid of all carnal Christians in his congregation or all 'tares' in his constituency, is a pastor who is on his way towards a 'burnout'.

As leaders, we (like Elijah) are to work hard and to be zealous for the Lord's work. However, we are to be realistic in our expectations. Not even Jesus had 100% maintenance! He lost one of His precious disciples - Judas Iscariot! Jesus said that only one of the four soils (in His Parable of the Soils) ultimately was fruitful. Those planted in the wayside soil and the stony soil and the thorny soil were unproductive. Not all who hear receive, and not all who initially receive remain true to the Lord. (Matthew 13:1-23)

Leaders must not become discouraged because all to whom they minister do not become fully dedicated. There are some who never receive the message. Others receive it in part and become stunted in their growth (carnal Christians). Others receive it but grow very slowly. There are many different levels of maturity with which a leader must deal. There were those 'fair-weather followers' of Jesus who eventually abandoned Him. *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."* (John 6:66) *The great apostle Paul learned that not all will remain faithful during times of persecution. He wrote; "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me."* (II Timothy 4:16)

Not everyone followed Jesus or Paul or Elijah, and not everyone will follow you or listen to your message.

Elijah's expectations were shattered! He expected a greater and more lasting response from the common people of Israel and from the leadership of Israel. We too may be disappointed because of a lack of response or because of only partial or shortlived responses to our message, but we must not allow our disappointment to drive us to despair, worse yet, to a burnout. We must take heart! Paul wrote for our encouragement: *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* (I Corinthians 15:58) *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* (Galatians 6:9) To children of God who, like Elijah, are weary and worn, the analogy of the 'Harvest' can be most helpful. Recall, again, Jesus' Parable of the Four Soils (Matthew 13). What lessons can the disheartened learn from this parable. Notes Barclay, "The lesson is clear

- the harvest is sure. For discouraged preachers of the word the lesson is in the climax of the parable, in the picture of the seed which brought forth abundant fruit. Some seed may fall by the wayside and be snatched away by the birds; some seed may fall on the shallow ground and never come to maturity; some seed may fall among the thorns and be choked to death; but in spite of all that the harvest does come. No farmer expects every single seed he sows to germinate and bring forth fruit. He knows quite well that some will be blown away by the wind, and some will fall in places where it cannot grow; but that does not stop him sowing. Nor does it make him give up hope of the harvest. The farmer sows in the confidence that, even if some of the seed is wasted, none the less the harvest will certainly come....It is our task to sow the seed, and to leave the rest to God. When a man sows the seed, he must not look for quick results. There is never any haste in nature's growth. It takes a long, long time before an acorn becomes an oak; and it may take a long, long time before the seed germinates in the heart of a man. But often a word dropped into a man's heart in his boyhood lies dormant until some day it awakens and saves him from some great temptation or even preserves his soul from death. We live in an age which looks for quick results, but in the sowing of the seed we must sow in patience and in hope, and sometimes must leave the harvest to the years." (Barclay's Matthew; Volume 2; page 62,63)

C. Spiritual Fellowship - Revived (I Kings 19:11-13a)

*"The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.'" Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."* (I Kings 19:11-13a)

One reason Elijah had become so depressed, is that he had taken the focus of his attention off of the God of Israel and had become preoccupied with the wickedness of Israel and with

the murderous threats of Jezebel. He focused too much on the evil of men, and not enough on the goodness of God. He temporarily lost a sense of the Unseen Divine Presence.

Strange that he who took on Ahab and the 850 false prophets in a grand test on Mount Carmel, the result of which was a mighty display of God's sovereign power, would now cower before one

woman - Queen Jezebel! God, who seemed so close to Elijah on Mount Carmel, now seemed so far removed from Elijah in the desert.

To the one who is experiencing discouragement, God seems so far off! Such a person has more questions than answers, more problems than solutions, more sadness than gladness, more groans than praises, more doubts than faith.

William Sangster, the renowned minister of Great Britain, shares a time in his life when he was very discouraged..."...I felt I had lost God. Spiritual things had become unreal to me. Doubts darkened my mind. I lost appetite for the holy vocation to which I believed God had called me. The conviction grew in my heart that the one thing an honorable man could do would be to give it up. And yet I wanted God. In those months of awful darkness, nothing was more sure to me than my hunger for Him. All the varied wants of my heart had become resolved into the one cry of the questioning soul, 'Oh, that I knew where I might find him!' One night I had reached the breaking point. My mind was wearying with the effort of pondering these problems over and over again. My heart was sick with hope long deferred. I sat at midnight in the darkness of my study on the border of despair, when a friend came to me with words of unsurpassed comfort. He knew my need. He said, 'You are chasing your shadow: the hunger within you is a mark of His presence'. I know those words will not seem magical to you, but I have no language to describe the effect they had then upon me. To my poor soul they were the authentic words of the living God. I grasped the truth of what he said. This hunger! - the one consuming passion of my soul - a mark of His presence. The God I had sought for was here at home. He was in my heart: the hunger as well as the food. He seemed to say 'Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me?' In that moment I knew the trembling joy of having God in my heart and knowing He was there. And that was the real beginning of an intimate experience of God in me. If you deeply want Him, in some measure you already have Him. Turn and recognize His presence." (Daily Readings; page 164)

When doubts assail and fears annoy, and when there appears to be no rational explanation for the seeming triumph of evil in society, it is then that the weary saint of God needs reassurance of the presence of God. Even the great John the Baptist needed such a reassurance during a time when he was confined in prison for his faith. He had previously seen great demonstrations of Jesus' messianic power, but John's imprisonment caused doubts to arise in his mind. In a topsy-turvy world where wrong seems often so strong and right seems often to go unrecognized and unrewarded, believers today need reassurance that God is still on the throne and that believers

are not forgotten by a God of love and justice. Being reminded of God's miracles, and seeing new demonstrations of God's present-day power - these are ways that God renews the fainting heart and reassures the doubt-plagued mind.

This was the answer for John the Baptist. *"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him. 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'"* (Matthew 11:2-6)

"He needed a demonstration of the Lord's power, a reassurance that in spite of all that happened, the Lord was still in control. That's exactly what happened. First there was a mighty wind which split the mountains, breaking the rocks around the prophet. Then an earthquake made the earth beneath Elijah's feet tremble. Finally, a fire leaped up out of the mountainside. The prophet was shaken and shocked at the physical manifestations of Yahweh's presence. But greater than the wind, earthquake, and fire was the internal experience of grace in Elijah's soul. The Spirit of God spoke to him in a still small voice - a quiet whisper - which brought calm and assurance. The outward displays of power were matched by an inner manifestation of love and encouragement." (Lord Of The Impossible; Ogilvie; page 174) When you are discouraged, remind yourself (as John the Baptist was reminded) that God has in the past done great and wonderful miracles in and through your life and all around you. (Keeping a 'spiritual journal' is a good way to ward off discouragement, for reading past entries of God's power in your life will give you renewed faith in God's sovereign power in the present). Also, as in the case of Elijah, a fresh demonstration of God's power will do wonders to restore you. David McKenna points out that Elijah needed to get up and eat in order that he might refresh his body and mind and spirit. It was also important for him to go up and stand on the mountain so that he might re-enter God's presence and regain a perspective of God's sovereign power at work.

When you are discouraged, don't run from God; rather, run to God. Seek Him in prayer. Listen for Him in the quietness of the early morning. Record your thoughts. Read and memorize His Word. Ask God to demonstrate His presence and power in your life. Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you. As one said, "If you take one step towards God, He will take a thousand steps towards you." Hope again in God

and He will renew your strength. Confess all known sins to Him, plead His blood for your total cleansing, and listen for the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit.

D. Assigned Mission - Shared (I Kings 19:19)

From a careful study of Elijah, it appears that he suffered 'burnout' because of feelings of failure. He believed there should have been total repentance by the total nation - immediately! There were some, following the miracle on Mount Carmel, who repented immediately, but even those who immediately turned from Baal to worship Jehovah did not later defend Elijah before Jezebel.

Why do some believers suffer 'burnout'? Because they believe they have failed to fulfill their God-given mission. They do not see immediate results from their efforts, and even those who do respond positively do not always 'carry through', i.e., they do not always become stalwart disciples! In short, Christian leaders, like Elijah, become too 'results-oriented,' too 'numbers-oriented'.

'Fear of failure' in ministry, or 'feelings of failure' based on small visible results, usually take their toll in discouragement and low self-esteem.

In a recent survey which listed a variety of the 'top' discouragers' to pastors, the following was identified as their greatest discourager than any other item: "The rate of my church's growth". Writes a Church minister on the West Coast: "In spite of ten years of hard work, there's been a lack of visible church growth in my present ministry." (Secrets of Staying Power; Kevin Miller; page 35)

"Now, what the Lord wanted Elijah to learn is just what He wants you and me to learn, that our job in this world is not bookkeeping. It is not for us to try to sum up the amount of good we have done. It is not for us to test whether we have succeeded or whether we have failed. The truth of the matter is that we are not always competent to tell the difference between success and failure. There are some seeming successes that in reality are failures and there are some of the supreme failures that have turned out to be the most glorious successes.....One of the sanest things I ever heard was spoken by an able preacher who came one day to preach in my town. There was almost nobody out to hear him. And he preached a wonderful sermon and closed with this most sensible word: 'I don't know what I have accomplished by coming to this town. I only know that I have come with God in my heart and have done my best. I am not keeping books. God is doing that. Some day on the other side of the River I am going to take down my book and look at it, - God will let me, - and I am

going to see just what I accomplished when I came to your town.' That is sensible....God doesn't fail and the man who walks with him will not fail. He may not accomplish his ambition. He may not realize many of the great hopes of his life, but if he lives in the secret place of the Most High his life will never be a failure." (Sermons On Biblical Characters; Chappell; page 226,227)

E. Human Companionship - Reaffirmed (I Kings 19:14-18)

Persons who are discouraged tend to withdraw from others. In this deliberate isolation, discouraged believers are most vulnerable. Their wandering, negative thoughts are unshared, and thus unchecked. Their reactionary movements are private, and thus uncorrected. Their bleeding emotions are unobserved, and thus unhealed. It is only in the warm fellowship of a caring group (a family, a small group, a living congregation) that one's thoughts can be purified, and one's actions can be guided, and one's emotions can be healed. Withdrawal from the fellowship of caring people not only makes one unaccountable, but it causes one to become nearsighted in his perception of reality. Elijah's problem was not only one of mental confusion and emotional hurt, but his problem was one of spiritual pride as well! Closed away from society in general and from fellow believers in specific, Elijah came proudly to believe that he was the only one left in the entire nation who had not bowed his knees to Baal! Such blindness, such presumption, and such pride! A martyr-complex is bad enough, but when you add pride to this complex, you have become a real problem to yourself and to others! "*I am the only one left (pride), and now they are trying to kill me too (Martyr-complex).*" (I Kings 19:14)

Notes David McKenna: "In response to Elijah's withdrawal from human relationships that produced the sad cry, 'I alone am left,' God restores his network of human relationships. At the center of the network is his relationship with his friend, Elisha, who will also become his successor. Related to the center is the functional relationship to the kings whom he will anoint. In the larger relationship then, there is the fraternal relationship with 7,000 men who remained true to God. We need all three - friend, functional and fraternal relationships - as the life-support system for our ministry.....To prevent or cure burnout, a well-defined social support system of enduring interpersonal relationships is essential. Family, friends and colleagues are needed to: listen to us, appreciate us, challenge us, support us and test us. A wife, husband and family are closest to the center of the circle, especially for listening, emotional support and reality testing.....Elijah has to relearn how to relate to people as the cure for trying to do it all alone.": (Renewing Our Ministry; page 62,63)

F. Clear Perspective - Restored (I Kings 19:18)

Closed away by himself, Elijah developed a martyr-complex, succumbed to feelings of self-pity, and even fell into spiritual pride! "*I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*" (I Kings 19:10b, 14b) He lost a clear sense of reality. The Lord had to correct his faulty judgment and his near-sighted perspective. Said the Lord to Elijah: "*Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.*" (I Kings 19:18)

All who are wallowing in the mire of discouragement and despair have lost a clear sense of reality. As in the case of Elijah, downhearted people often see society as totally wicked, one-time believers as totally backslidden, the wicked rulers who reign as unconquerable and unredeemable, the 'prophets' of God as all slain, the God of Israel as uninformed and unconcerned, and themselves as helplessly the object of murderous plots!

Weary servants of God tend to carry the whole weight of the world on their own shoulders. They tend to feel that no one could be as faithful as they are, and that none could suffer as greatly as they have had to suffer.

A clear perspective of reality must be restored to them if such sincere persons are to recover from their despondency and burned-out condition! What lesson must we all learn? We must learn that "God has more servants than we know of. Let us beware of feeding either our self-righteousness or our narrowness, or our faintheartedness with the fancy that we have a monopoly of faithfulness, or are left alone to witness for God." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; Alexander Maclaren; Volume 2; page 268)

When one wise leader was asked to say in one sentence what advice he would give to seminary graduates who are about to begin their pastoral ministry, he answered quick as a wind, "I would put this sign on the wall of their study;; 'Remember, God has other workers.'" (Renewing Our Ministry; McKenna; page 63)

To the 'burned-out' leader, these are words of both rebuke and comfort: "God has other workers." No one serves alone, and no one is indispensable! The ministry continues even when the ministers die! God is on the throne, even when evil seems to have the upper hand! God always has a remnant through whom He gets His work done! There may be many who have bowed the knee to Baal, but never forget - God has thousands who have not! There are more followers of God in our world today than we realize, many of whom are 'out of sight' in Russia and in

China and in Third World countries.

G. Optimistic Faith - Recovered (I Kings 19:15-19)

Those who have experienced 'Burnout' feel so discouraged and disheartened that they wish at times that they could die! On one hand, they feel personally useless, that they are a failure! On the other hand, they feel that others have abandoned God, that they are the only ones who have remained faithful during unbelievably difficult circumstances. They feel the Church of Christ is powerless to destroy evil, that the tyrants of the world have 'won the day'. Feeling helpless and hopeless, they see the future as dark and forbidding. To them, life is a sunset, not a sunrise! They have lost the zest for living!

Recovery from burnout involves restoration of faith in God, faith in yourself, faith in others, and faith in the future.

To help Elijah regain faith in himself, faith in others, and faith in the future, God gives Elijah a specific assignment. This assignment requires Elijah to leave his solitude to go to establish contact with others.

There is nothing quite so therapeutic as re-entry into interpersonal relationships to accomplish a creative and challenging task which God has given to us! "The final cure for Elijah's discouragement was to put him back to work. The Lord gave him specific instructions that would solidify the prophet's assurance that God was not finished with Israel or the unfolding drama of history. He was told to anoint his successor. Elijah's work would go on! Then he was to anoint Hazael king over Syria and Jehu king over Israel. The Lord had plans for his chosen people." (Lord Of The Impossible; Ogilvie; page 174)

To get back into the 'harness' and to begin working again for the Lord is most healing. To know that you have not been 'put on the shelf' of inactivity, but that God has an important new job for you to do - this spells 'relief' and this spells 'recovery from burnout'!

**CONCLUSION:** What is the answer to 'burnout'? As illustrated in the life of Elijah, here is the 'formula':

- (1) Physical Body - Renewed.
- (2) Mental Expectations - Corrected.
- (3) Spiritual Fellowship - Revived.
- (4) Assigned Mission - Shared.
- (5) Human Companionship - Reaffirmed.
- (6) Clear Perspective - Restored.
- (7) Optimistic Faith - Recovered.

Elijah was as completely 'human' as we are. He, too, had his 'ups-and-downs', but just as he recovered from discouragement, so we too can recover! Be renewed! Be encouraged!

## FAITH

### ELIJAH - DISCOURAGED FAITH (CURES)

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Share briefly how you cope with your own feelings of discouragement and despondency and despair.
2. What aspects of bodily renewal are vitally essential if one is to avoid 'burnout', or recover from 'burnout'? (Note I Kings 19:5-9)
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We function best spiritually when we function best physically."
4. Tell what is meant by the statement: "Get in touch with your body before it gets in touch with you."
5. What is the significance of the Lord's question to Elijah, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"? (I Kings 19:9)
6. What were the likely expectations that Elijah had, regarding the nation of Israel, following the great miracle on the top of Mount Carmel?
7. In order to avoid discouragement and 'burnout' why is it important for believers to have a realistic understanding regarding the tenacious nature of sin and of sinful institutions?
8. Why is it important for believers to recognize that on the earth there will always be a 'mixed multitude' among whom they serve the Lord? (Note Matthew 13:28-30)
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A pastor who is zealous to get rid of all carnal Christians in his congregation or all 'tares' in his constituency, is a pastor who is on his way towards a 'burnout'."
10. How can a spiritual leader remain encouraged, in spite of the fact that he does not 'see' much lasting 'results' from his diligent labors in loving service? (Note Matthew 13:1-23; I Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9).
11. As in the case of Elijah, why is it important for us to "go out and stand on the mountain"? (Note I Kings 19:11-13a).

12. Why is it important for us, as believers, to 'gaze' at God rather than to 'gaze' at 'Jezebel' and the evil she represents?
13. When a believer has more questions than answers, more problems than solutions, more sadness than gladness, more groans than praises, more doubts than faith, what should he do? (I Kings 19:11-13a; Matthew 11:2-6)
14. What comfort can a deeply discouraged, but nevertheless a God - hungry, soul take refuge in, as he is seeking to regain spiritual equilibrium and vitality in his life? Give your explanations of the following statement: "The hunger within you is a mark of His presence."
15. With your own personal experience in mind, tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "When you are discouraged, don't run from God; rather, run to God." What, practically-speaking, can you do to demonstrate to yourself and to others, that you are running to God during discouraging times.
16. Give your interpretation and application of the following statement: "God wants you and me to learn that our job in the world is not bookkeeping."
17. When a believer is discouraged, why is it so important for him not to withdraw from others into a lonely isolation?
18. As the life-support system for ministry, what specific functions can close friends and family members fulfill in your life?
19. What conclusions did Elijah draw as a result of his distorted (near-sighted) perspective regarding himself, his God, his fellow believers, and the general Israelite populace?
20. In restoring a clear spiritual perspective, why is it so important for us, as in the case of Elijah, to realize that God has more servants than we know of? (Note I Kings 19:18)
21. In recovering from 'Burnout', why is restoration of faith in one's God, in one's own self, in others, and in the future so important and indispensable?
22. What was the final cure for Elijah's discouragement, and why is this cure so important in restoring a person to a life of vitality and joy?

**CHAPTER 27**

**FAITH**

**AMOS - JUST FAITH**

## FAITH

### AMOS - JUST FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Amos 5:14-15

TEXT: *"Let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream!"* (Amos 5:24, Phillips)

INTRODUCTION: Amos analyzed specific problems of his day, and defined these problems, not in political or economical terms, but in moral terms. Amos speaks to every pleasure-loving, indulgent, and secularized society which has sold its spiritual heritage for material gain.

PROPOSITION: Amos show us what is God's reaction to a sinful society and to the rebellious people of that society.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. GOD'S EXPOSURE
  - A. Social Injustice
  - B. Personal Indulgence
  - C. Pretentious Sacrifices
- II. GOD'S THREAT
- III. GOD'S MERCY

CONCLUSION: God judges a man on the basis of how he treats his fellowman, and not alone on the basis of how devoutly he performs religious acts. All of life is sacred, and therefore man cannot make a separation between secular life and religious life.

## FAITH

### AMOS - JUST FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Amos 5:14-15

**TEXT:** *"Let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream!"* (Amos 5:24, Phillips)

**INTRODUCTION:** From 850-800 B.C. Israel experienced defeat. Damascus was at the height of her strength and Israel couldn't cope with this power. However, during this period of time a nation which had been on the stage of history for many centuries, was increasing in power and military conquests. This ancient nation was Assyria, whose shadow in the East was beginning to be seen in the West. By 805 B.C. Assyria conquered Damascus and laid it under heavy tribute. Israel escaped the Assyrian blow and remained free and independent. During the next half century (800-750 B.C.), Assyria was weakened and lost nearly every foothold west of the Euphrates.

Through the combined efforts of Jeroboam II, King of Israel (786-750 B.C.), and Uzziah (783-742), King of Judah, the area of the combined kingdoms was extended to include almost as much territory as was included in Solomon's realm, a century earlier.

A rich and prosperous society resulted when the trade routes which Solomon had controlled were again in Israelite hands. Great palaces were built and fine ivories were the possessions of the wealthy. Materially-speaking, the period was one of the richest in the history of Israel.

Riches often corrupt a society, and Israel was no exception. Wealth produces greed, and greed often results in great class distinctions which are based upon the degree of wealth a group enjoys. Many were very wealthy; others were extremely poor. The rich became richer, at the expense of the poor man who was driven to further poverty. Religion tolerated social injustice, and the religious shrines became the centers of gross immorality. Society and religion were both sick and needed desperately to be awakened and renovated.

It was this society - affluent, corrupted, complacent - that Amos was called to proclaim God's Word.

Little is known about Amos' background, or personal life. We do know that Amos was a stern, austere, rustic shepherd from the wilderness of Tekoa, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Amos had probably travelled north to Bethel to sell his bales of wool. In Bethel, Amos became deeply stirred as he viewed the idolatrous practices in this capital city of

Israel. Realizing the great social injustices that existed in Israel, this wilderness man felt an inner compulsion to announce God's message to Israel. Amos justifies his prophecy: *"The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?"* (Amos 3:8)

Amos was bitterly opposed because of the truth he stood for and which he fearlessly proclaimed. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, said to Amos: *"Get out, you silly dreamer! Run away to Judah. Earn your bread and make your prophecies there."* (Amos 7:12, Phillips)

On the basis of God's call, Amos defended his actions: *"Then Amos replied to Amaziah: I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet - I am a shepherd and I tend sycamore trees. But it was the Lord who took me from herding my little sheep, and it was the Lord who said to me, Go and prophesy against my people Israel."* (Amos 7:14-15)

Amos analyzed specific problems of his day, and defined these problems, not in political or economical terms, but in moral terms. Amos laid bare the sins of Israel and exposed the true character of Israel's God, whom Israel had forsaken. Through Amos, God issued forth severe warnings of Judgment, but these were tempered with interspersed pleas of mercy and love.

Amos' message is extremely relevant to the twentieth century. Amos speaks to every pleasure-loving, indulgent, and secularized society which has sold its spiritual heritage for material gain.

PROPOSITION: Amos' message is about God's relationship to Israel. Amos shows us what is God's reaction to a sinful society and to the rebellious people of that society. Let us understand Amos' message from three viewpoints, all in terms of God as the Initiator: (1) God's Exposure, (2) God's Threat, (3) God's Mercy.

#### I. God'S EXPOSURE

As a light shines in the darkened corner of a musty attic, exposing filth and dirt, so the light of God's truth exposed the corruption and sin of Israelite society. Fearlessly, Amos lashed out against (a) Social injustice, (b) Personal indulgence, and (c) Pretentious sacrifices.

#### A. Social Injustice

Through Amos, God exposed the dishonest practices of the rich, who oppressed the poor.

*"They hate the honest witness in the court,  
And loathe the man of integrity.  
Therefore, because you trample on the weak,  
And compel him to give you loads of grain,  
You may have built stone houses,  
But they will never be your home.  
You have planted vineyards for your own pleasure,  
But you will never drink their wine.  
For I know how wilful are your crimes,  
And how determined are your sins -  
You browbeat honest men, you take bribes,  
And ignore the poor man's claim for justice. (Amos 5:10-12)*

*"This is what the Lord says:  
Because of outrage after outrage committed by Israel  
I will not relent!  
For they have sold the innocent for a handful of silver,  
And needy men for a pair of shoes.  
They grind the faces of the poor into the dust,  
And force the humble out of his rightful path. (Amos 2:6,7a)*

*"They have forgotten how to do right, says the Lord.  
They maintain their palaces by the fruit of violence and robbery. (Amos 3:10)*

*"Listen to this, you who trample upon the needy,  
And grind the faces of the poor!  
You who say, When will the new moon be past,  
So that we may sell our grain?  
When will the sabbath be over,  
So that we may offer our corn for sale?  
While you make your measure short  
And your prices high,  
And cheat with biased scales,  
And all to possess the poor for silver,  
And the needy for the price of a pair of shoes,  
Selling for grain the sweepings from your floor.  
The Lord has sworn by the glory of Jacob,  
Never will I forget what you have done. ((Amos 8:4-7)*

Amos speaks to every society in the twentieth century which puts gain above integrity. To every society where people are preoccupied with materialistic pursuits rather than filled with compassion for people, Amos gives serious rebuke and warning. When people are treated as things or as cogs in the machine, depersonalization has set in which eventually leads to social and moral disintegration. The 'thingification' of a person - treating one as a means to an end - is a renouncement of individual sanctity, and thus the worst sort of sin.

Selfishness is often bred by riches. Wealth often does not give comfort but anxiety. The rich man thinks that more money would give him more security, and therefore there is continual striving to greedily amass greater riches, even at the expense of other people.

#### 1. Social Injustice

*Now listen, our rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.*  
(James 5:1-6)

Exploitation of poor by the rich; using the poor to advance the selfish pursuits of the Rich. Failing to treat the poor with dignity - looking at the poor as objects to be used rather than as subjects to be loved. Using people as cogs in the machine in order to produce more wealth for the already wealthy

"The explosive message of the prophets is that God destroyed Israel because of mistreatment of the poor. The Word of the Lord is this: Economic exploitation sent the chosen people into captivity." (Ron Sider)

#### B. Personal Indulgence

The undisciplined, indulgent society is the society which is sick. Comfort, luxury, and ease are the idols of such a society. The austere Amos spoke with sternness to this luxury-loving society.

*"You put off the day of reckoning,  
Yet bring ever nearer the days of misrule!  
You who lie on beds of ivory,  
And sprawl upon your couches,  
Eating choice lamb and farm-fed veal.  
Who croon to the music of the harp,  
And compose melodies as though you were David  
himself!*

*You who drink wine by the bowl-full,  
And anoint yourselves with the finest oils.  
But never a thought do you spare  
For the terrible miseries of Joseph!  
For these very reasons you will be the first to go  
into exile,  
While the revelry of the dissolute shall die away -  
By order of the Lord, the God of hosts! (Amos 6:3-7)*

Amos' message is relevant indeed to us Americans. We are the richest people on earth, and enjoy unprecedented prosperity. We gorge ourselves with more food in one day than many people have in a week. We drink every kind of beverage imaginable. We love the latest fashions in clothes. We make more money in a shorter work week and spend more money on entertainment than any other people. We live in homes that most people in the world consider to be mansions. We take glamorous trips in fashionable cars.

The present era in our history might be entitled the era of consumption. As a people, we feel that everything has its price. Anything can be bought with money, we think, whether it is tangible or intangible. We think even of love in terms of mechanical techniques and think that it can be consumed like anything else.

May God help us to turn from our indulgent, pleasure-loving practices to God, lest God say to America as He said to Israel, "*For these very reasons you will be the first to go into exile.*" (Amos 6:7)

Food Consumption: "The United Nations reports that livestock in the rich countries eat as much grain as do all the people of India and China....The facts are clear. North Americans, Europeans, Russians, and Japanese devour an incredibly unjust share of the world's available food. Whether measured in terms of GNP or energy and food consumption, we are many, many times more affluent than the poor majority of our sisters and brothers. And the chasm widens every year." (Ron Sider)

### C. Pretentious Sacrifices

Religion of the Israelites was externally extravagant but inwardly shallow. The Israelites disregarded God's moral law which always defines right as right and wrong as wrong. They failed to realize that no amount of religious acts will substitute for the need of treating ones fellowman with mercy and justice. They attempted to bribe God, but God wholly rejected such attempts. Through Amos, God said:

*"O do hate, I do despise your pilgrim feasts,*

*take no pleasure in your high holy days,  
Though you offer to me (your) burnt offerings  
and your meal offerings, I won't accept them;  
And to the peace offerings of your fat animals I'll pay  
no attention.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I'm not listening.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream." (Amos  
5:21-24) (Translated by John Bright)*

The pure covenant religion of Israel became contaminated with the lustful practices of paganism. Such tolerance for evil is shown in Amos' comment on the practice of temple prostitution: "Father and son use the same temple-girl, And so defile my holy name." (Amos 2:7)

Amos teaches every society, that "unless man's worship of God is matched by his just and fair treatment of his neighbor, then ceremonies, rituals, observances and sacrifices are nauseating to God." (Four Prophets by J.B. Phillips, pg.xic) Many people adhere to a secularized religion, which does not impose regulations on personal conduct. Churches are full in many places, but it is possible for a person to attend a church for ulterior motives - to enhance social prestige. Many have a form of religion, but have denied the power of religion which issues forth in personal integrity and social justice. God has an absolute standard of right and wrong.

Religious ceremony had become an end within itself rather than as a means to the end of serving God more effectively in common life. There is still the peril of making means into ends in religious ceremony and observances.

"A liturgy is a means of worshipping God; but an elaborate liturgy can become an end in itself, so that the means and the method of worship end by becoming more important than the worship itself. Any system of Church government is a means towards the welfare of the Church; but a system of Church government is a means towards the welfare of the Church; but a system of Church government can and does become an end in itself, so that people end by being more concerned with the way in which the Church is governed than with the Church itself. A Church building is a means whereby a group of people can worship God; but people can end by worshipping the building itself, so that they become more concerned with the place of worship than the worship itself." (The Ten Commandment for Today; Barclay;pg.21,22)

Jeremiah wrote, "These people honor me (God) with their lips but their heart is far from me."

Church services are for the worship of the living God and for the fellowship of believers, but Church services are not meant to be an end within themselves, but only a means to an end to becoming a better servant of God within the marketplace and in common life. The Church service ends in order that service in the world can begin. The 'Church Gathered' on Sunday for worship becomes the 'Church Scattered' on Monday morning to realize its God-given purpose of being 'lights' in a darkened world and 'salt' in a corrupting society!

It is blasphemy to go through the motions of worship on Sunday and then to go out on Monday morning to mistreat our fellowmen - to lie, or cheat, or steal, or slander!

Life dare not be divided into the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. All of life is sacred. How we carry on our daily activities Monday thru Saturday is just as important to God as how we carry on our personal and corporate worship on Sunday. In fact, the quality of our worship is measured by the quality of our work, for personal integrity and justice in common life is part of the essence of true religion. It was James, the brother of Jesus, who wrote (in the same vein as Amos): *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."* (James 1:27)

Religious ritual means nothing if it does not issue forth in loving relationships!

The most religious people of Jesus' day were the Pharisees and it was this group of people who were more often than any other group the object of Jesus' criticism. Why? Because, while they were the most religious of Jesus' day they were also the most hypocritical. A hypocrite can be described as a 'deceptive play-actor' - one who acts the part of a religious person while all the time cherishing sin in his life. Said Jesus concerning the Pharisees: *'they do not practice what they preach'* (Matthew 23:4)!

Said Jesus, *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."* (Matthew 23:23-24)

Jesus was not criticizing the Pharisees for tithing: He was simply saying that tithing (a religious observance) is no substitute for a godly character which issues forth in justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The essence of true

religion is the practice of justice, mercy, and faithfulness within the context of common human relationships! The same message as that of Amos who wrote: *"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream."* (Amos 5:24)

Religious observances on the Sabbath, followed by dishonest practices on the day after the Sabbath was severely condemned by Amos as the epitome of hypocrisy.

*Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land saying, "When all the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" - skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. (Amos 8:4-6)*

Notes one, Jesus was a Hebrew prophet in the tradition of Amos and Isaiah. Like them, he announced God's outrage against those who try to mix pious practices and mistreatment of the poor." (Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger; Sider;pg.81)

What is the essence of true religion? It is having and maintaining a vital loving relationship with God every day of the week, under all circumstances. This means cultivating our relationship with God at all times, learning to practice and presence of God in all situations, never dividing life into the 'secular' and 'sacred' but instead seeing all of life as 'sacred'.

Brother Lawrence, a great saint of the 1600's had only one desire, and that was to commune constantly with God, even while he worked in the monastery kitchen.

"Lord of all pots and pans and things.....  
Make me a saint by getting meals  
And washing up the plates!

He would say: "The time of business does not with me differ from the times of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament." He learned to practice the presence of God in his daily life.

Notes Barclay, "We cannot separate the church and the marketplace....This is something that even yet so many fail to see. Religion, worship, God, are things confined and even imprisoned within the church. Max Warren in 'The Christian

Imperative' tells how an African headmaster wrote to thank a friend of his for a course of talks he had given in an African school. 'We greatly appreciate your helpful talks,' he wrote, 'on the application of the teaching of Jesus in our agricultural work and hygiene, as well as in spiritual things. Until now we regarded agriculture and hygiene as secular subjects, without any connection with Christianity.' The real, acid question is not, What does Christianity make a man within the church? but, What does Christianity make a man in the office, the shop, the factory, the shipyard, the school, the golf course...the home? It is life that Jesus promises, and life cannot be confined to any part of life; life permeates all life. The challenge to the Christian is to make all life one continuous act of worship to God." (The All-Sufficient Christ; Barclay;pg.138)

Notes Seth Parker: "If I were asked what I thought was the greatest failing of Christian people I would say it was the leaving of religion in the racks with the hymn books. Too long God's been confined to the portals of the church. He belongs in business, at banquets; He belongs in daily life. I'd feel terribly disappointed if I didn't think God was with me when I was milking just as much as when I's in church." (Golden Moments of Religious Inspiration;pg.83)

If all of life is sacred, and if God is just as present on Monday morning in the office of the businessman as He is present on Sunday in the sanctuary, then it follows that God's call for a man to become a banker is just as sacred as God's call for a man to become a preacher. "The message is that the world is one, secular and sacred, and that the chief way to serve the Lord is in our daily work. The missionary task is not merely that of India and Africa, but that of America and Europe as well. The conversion of the world will not come by the efforts of clergymen merely, but by the efforts of all who are deeply committed. Thus there can be one central vocation, while there are many professions. Some persons can contribute most to the conversion of the world by working in banks, and some can do most by working in hospitals. We need the religious job to those who are supposed to be professionally religious. 'It's their responsibility, isn't it?' But decline comes this way. The task is far too large for any one group, no matter how deeply dedicated and able they may be. The idea of being professionally religious is really a pernicious idea, anyway, because of the degree to which it seems to excuse the rank and file of a solemn sense of responsibility. Nobody can have my religion for me any more than he can have my health for me. It is wholly proper that some men should give themselves to the professional task of preaching or of counseling, but it is pernicious to suppose

they are thereby in more sacred callings than others or that the responsibility of others is thereby lessened." (The Common Ventures of Life;pg.87,88; Trueblood)

In light of all we have said, the message of Amos is very relevant: Religious ceremony must not become an end within itself but must be seen as a means to the end of helping us serve God more effectively in our common life and relationships, with moral integrity the hallmark of all of our relationships.

## II. God'S THREAT

The Israelites believed that God was eternally married to Israel and that Israel was unconditionally favored by God above all other nations. They felt that God would be especially lenient toward Israel because of her covenant relationship with God. Amos agreed with the premise of Israel's special election, but drew an opposite conclusion from this premise. Amos says, "*Listen, you people of Israel, to the charge which the Lord brings against you - against the whole nation which I brought up out of the land of Egypt! You only have I chosen from all the nations of the earth. Therefore it is you whom I will punish for all your wrongdoing.*" (Amos 3:1-2)

Because Israel had flaunted her special privileges, she must bear special responsibility and undergo special judgment unless she repents.

This static, naive trust in the covenant, caused Israel to long for the Day of Yahweh. Israel failed to realize that the covenant was conditionally maintained on the basis of obedience. The covenant was based upon the brotherhood of men. When inhumanity existed, this covenant was broken and Israel no longer remained the true people of God. "Thus it was that Amos leaped upon the popular desire for the Day of Yahweh, the day when Yahweh would intervene in history to establish his rule and to judge his foes. Israel has nothing to hope for from that day - for Israel is herself among Yahweh's foes"! (The Kingdom of God; J. Bright, 66)

*"Alas for those who long for the day of the Lord! Why long for such a day? The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness, not a day of light. It will be like a man running from a lion, Only to find himself clutched by a bear. Like a man who runs into his own home, And as he leans his hand against the wall is bitten by a snake. Is it not true that the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light, Pitch-darkness with no brightening gleam?"* (Amos 5:18-20, Phillips)

Israel failed to repent, even though God had sent lesser judgments upon Israel in five different ways ((Amos 4:6-13).

Because Israel rejected God's offer of mercy, devastating doom was pronounced upon Israel. As a shepherd, Amos used a common analogy from shepherd life to convey this dark message.

*"As a shepherd may snatch from the mouth of a lion no more than two bits of bone or a torn piece of an ear, So shall the children of Israel be rescued - All that will be left of*

*Samaria will be a scrap of couch or a tattered piece of pillow."* (Amos 3:12)

After seeing two visions (Famine 7:1-3 and Devouring Fire 7:4-6), Amos interceded and God withheld His hand of judgement.

In a vision Amos saw a plumb line in God's hand. *"And the Lord replied, See, I test my people Israel by the straightness of this line, And I will not relent again. For Israel's high places shall be razed to the ground, the shrines of Israel reduced to ruin, And I will draw the sword against the house of Jeroboam."* (Amos 7:8-9)

Israel's coming doom was further confirmed when Amos had another vision. *"Then the Lord God made me see this sight: there was a basket full of ripe fruit. Then the Lord said to me, so are my people Israel ripe for destruction. I will not relent again."* (Amos 8:1-2)

Amos mournfully prophesied of Israel's fall. *"Listen while I denounce you, And hear this funeral dirge, you house of Israel! The virgin Israel shall fall to rise no more - Deserted on her own soil, with none to lift her up."* (Amos 5:1,2)

The prophecy of Amos came true less than fifty years after he gave it. The kingdom of Assyria in the north grew powerful and eventually overswept the small nations in the West - including Israel. In 721 B.C. Samaria, the capital of Israel, was destroyed and many Israelites were taken captive to Upper Mesopotamia where they were intermingled with foreign people. These captive Israelites lost their identity and never returned to their homeland. The patience of God was great, but the consequence of continued rebellion was fatal.

What does Amos have to say to America today? In America we can be thankful that our nation is based upon Christian principles. We honor the dignity of man. We honor Law and attempt to avoid favoritism in correcting injustices. Churches are open to all, and humanitarian programs are in abundance.

However, it is easy for us to feel that we are favored by God because of the principles of equality and law that we stand for. It is so easy for us to look down upon other nations with disdain because they are not as enlightened as we are. We can easily empty out our poisonous venom of criticism on atheistic countries, and in turn swell with religious pride because of our Christian principles. As Israel became static in her thinking concerning her relationship to God, it is also easy for us Americans to become static and presumptuous in our relationship to God. We can so easily assume that God is eternally married to our country and unconditionally favors the destiny of our nation. We can forget, just as Israel forgot, that God will always bring judgment upon a people who have become complacent, presumptuous. God does not automatically favor our nation, but carefully considers the moral and ethical tone of our society. God demands obedience from every nation. Every nation will receive just judgment. The nation with special light and privilege, bears double responsibility for strict obedience. Unto whom much is given, from that person or nation much is required.

John Bright well summarizes the application of Amos's message to modern-day society. "Wherever. says Amos, the schism of society is set forward, there is society perishing. Wherever men who have known of righteousness can speak only of their right to crowd for what they can get; wherever men who have known of Christian brotherhood behave as if they believed in favored races; wherever men who have heard a higher calling grow soft in the enjoyment of the ease that money can buy - there is society under judgment. And the judgment is history." (The Kingdom of God; J. Bright, pg.69)

### III. God'S MERCY

Amos' message of threat to Israel cannot be fully understood without also seeing the interspersed pleas of mercy. A compassionate call to repentance is always issued forth in conjunction with a threat of judgment.

God's mercy is understood in terms of the covenant relationship which God had established with Israel. Through Amos, God reminded Israel of His past goodness to them in delivering them from their enemies and leading them to the Promised Land:

*"Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before your eyes,  
A man as tall as cedar and strong as oak.  
But I destroyed his fruit above the ground, and his roots  
below.  
And that you might inherit the land of the Amorite,  
It was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt,  
And led you in the wilderness for forty years.*

*It was I, too, who raised up some of your sons to be prophets,  
And some of your young men to be Nazirites.  
It this not true, you children of Israel?  
This is the Lord himself speaking to you."* (Amos 2:9-11)

Israel had rejected God's love through disobedience. God was grieved at their sins and sought to induce repentance in them by sending a series of disasters to Israel - famine, drought,

blight, destruction of cities. This series of reproofs was meant to bring Israel back to the God who loved them.

God never sends judgment without warning. The people of Noah's day were warned before judgment by a water deluge came. Amos declares "*Surely the Lord God does nothing without showing his purpose to his servants the prophets.*" (Amos 3:7) The Israelites had ample warning from the prophets.

Amos appealed to God's sovereignty as a reason why Israel should fear God and seek His favor. Amos contrasted the power of God with the weakness of man and thus showed the futility of rebellion.

"Fear and Reverence God. Recognize His power. Repent of sin. Obediently follow God. Seek the Lord daily. Call out to Him for mercy. Be faithful to His covenant. Return to your spiritual roots.

*"Seek the Lord and live - Lest he break out like fire, you house of Joseph, A fire which burns and burns, which no one at Bethel can quench. Listen to this, you who have made justice a bitter jest, and integrity of no account. He who made the starry universe, Who turns darkness into morning light, And darkens the day into nightfall, Who summons the waters of the sea, And pours them out upon the face of the earth, This is the One whose name is the Lord; He it is who flings ruin in the face of the strong, And rains destruction upon the fortress.'* (Amos 5:6-10)

God could not give up Israel without extending many offers of mercy and forgiveness. When Israel rejected God's offer of mercy, God could resort to nothing else but judgment.

If God's harsh judgment comes upon America or any other Western nation it will not happen because God's offer of mercy was not given liberally. With the mass media of T.V., radio, and Christian literature, as well as the thousands of open churches, Americans, of all people, cannot evade the truth.

The highly privileged and enlightened society which has continued to reject God's truth, will always suffer the most severe judgement.

**CONCLUSION:** Amos teaches us important truths about man's relationship to God. God wants to save our nation - as He did 18th century England; as He did Ninevah during Jonah's time. If we accept His mercy, He will spare His judgment!

- (1) The essence of true religion is social in nature and consists of mercy and love. God judges a man on the basis of how he treats his fellowman, and not alone on the basis of how devoutly he performs religious acts. All of life is sacred, and therefore man cannot make a separation between secular life and religious life, and hope to justify practices in the former by unusual zeal in the latter. God cannot be bribed by religious ritual, but will bring judgment upon the man who deals dishonestly with his fellowman.
- (2) God has no favorite nation which He will unconditionally bless and promise a happy destiny. The destiny of every nation will be determined on the basis of obedience or disobedience to God's laws. A nation which has received special privileges, also bears special responsibility, and will be inflicted with special judgment if those privileges are flaunted.
- (3) God never sends judgment without first warning men and offering them forgiveness and life. It is only when God's mercy is callously spurned, that God's terrible judgment will be devastatingly inflicted on a nation or person.

## FAITH

### AMOS - JUST FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Materially - speaking, what similarities can you note between the Israelite society during Amos' life and the American society of our time? What evidence can you cite to document the claim of some who declare that our present American society and American institutions are greatly suffering because of widespread moral corruption (similar to that which Israelite society experienced during the days of Amos)?
2. Should not the fact that God called an unordained man, Amos, to be His special spokesman (prophet) to Israel, justify those who declare that God wishes to use every believer (clergy and laity) to declare His message to our contemporary society? (Amos 7:12-15)
3. As in the case of the Israelite society of Amos' day, could it also be said of our modern American society that it is a pleasure-loving, indulgent, self-centered, secularized society which has sold its spiritual heritage for material gain?
4. Specifically, what were the cruel rich men doing to exploit the suffering poor during Amos' time? (Note Amos 2:6,7;3:10;5:10-12;8:4-7)
5. If a personal life of indulgence brings the judgment of God upon a society, should not American Christians reduce their standard of living and begin living a simpler lifestyle, characterized by generosity and compassion? (Amos:3-7)
6. Why, according to Amos 5:21-24, is religious ritual and ceremony never a substitute for personal moral integrity and social justice? Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "Unless man's worship of God is matched by his just and fair treatment of his neighbor, their ceremonies, rituals, observances and sacrifices are nauseating to God." To what extent should believers be conscientious in regularly attending church services?
7. Based on the fact of God's special election (choice) of Israel, what faulty conclusion did the people of Israel draw? According to Amos 3:1-2, what will be God's reaction to those who fail to exercise great responsibility because of their great privileges?

8. What judgments do you believe God has sent on our contemporary society, with the divine intention of inciting repentance in the lives of our people?
9. Is it true to say that, with every threat of God's judgment on a nation, God also extends an offer of mercy and forgiveness to those who truly repent of sin? (Amos 5:6-9)
10. Put a check beside those statements which you believe reflect reality from the Biblical viewpoint:
- \_\_\_\_(a) The essence of ~~the~~ religion is social in nature and consists of mercy and love.
- \_\_\_\_(b) God judges a man on the basis of how he treats his fellowmen, and not alone on the basis of how devoutly he performs religious acts.
- \_\_\_\_(c) God favors the Jewish people and the nation of Israel, and God will unconditionally bless and prosper this nation, regardless of the moral condition of its people.
- \_\_\_\_(d) The destiny of every nation rests in the hands of Almighty God, and the destiny of every nation will be determined on the basis of obedience or disobedience to God's laws.
- \_\_\_\_(e) To whom much is given, much is required. A nation which has received special privileges, also bears special responsibility, and will be inflicted with special judgment if those privileges are flaunted.
- \_\_\_\_(f) God never sends judgment without first warning men and nations, and without offering them forgiveness and life.
- \_\_\_\_(g) God has chosen from all eternity to save some persons and to condemn other persons, and individual response to God has no ultimate affect in determining a person's final eternal destiny.
- \_\_\_\_(h) The explosive message of the prophets is that God destroyed Israel because of mistreatment of the poor.

- \_\_\_\_(i) Because God has commanded that all persons should worship Him in "spirit and in truth", there is no necessity for church buildings as places for corporate worship.
- \_\_\_\_(j) Church services are not meant to be an end within themselves, but only a means to an end to becoming a better servant of God within the marketplace and in common life.
- \_\_\_\_(k) How we carry on our daily activities Monday thru Saturday is just as important to God as how we carry on our personal and corporate worship on Sunday.
- \_\_\_\_(l) Religious ritual means nothing if it does not issue forth in loving relationships.
- \_\_\_\_(m) Since hypocrisy is considered a serious sin, a person, whose practice comes short of his religious profession, should decide that he is not worthy regularly to attend church services.
- \_\_\_\_(n) The essence of true religion is having and maintaining a vital loving relationship with God every day of the week, under all circumstances.
- \_\_\_\_(o) A sincere believer should discontinue attending his local church services, if he discovers that he is often sitting beside "hypocrites" at those church services.
- \_\_\_\_(p) God expects all of His followers to make all of life, both religious and secular, one continuous act of worship to God.
- \_\_\_\_(q) God's call for a man to become a banker is just as sacred as God's call for a man to become a preacher.
- \_\_\_\_(r) A Christian can worship God just as effectively in the mountains alone on Sunday mornings, as he can with a crowd of believers in a formal worship service; therefore, regular attendance at church services is not very important.
- \_\_\_\_(s) The chief way to serve the Lord is in our daily work.

\_\_\_\_\_(t) The message of Amos declares that religious ceremony must not become an end within itself but must be seen as a means to the end of helping us serve God more effectively in our common life and relationships, with moral integrity the hallmark of all our relationships.

**CHAPTER 28**

**FAITH**

**HOSEA - SUFFERING FAITH**

## FAITH

### HOSEA - SUFFERING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 14:4-7

**TEXT:** *"How, oh how, can I hand you over, Israel! My heart recoils within me, all my compassion is kindled."* (Hosea 11:8; Phillips)

**INTRODUCTION:** Hosea was well aware of the social injustice in Israel, and vividly described it just as Amos described it. However, Hosea was more immediately concerned with the cause of such injustices which he attributed to the breaking of God's covenant.

**PROPOSITION:** Hosea vividly exposed the nature of God's love. God is long - suffering in His love. Hosea shows us that, although God's judgment on sin is harsh, God's mercy is great and his pardon is complete for the repentant backslider.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. ISRAEL'S SIN
  - A. Meaning of Covenant
  - B. Breaking of Covenant
  
- II. ISRAEL'S JUDGMENT
  - A. Gomer's Desertion
  - B. Gomer's Slavery
  
- III. GOD'S LOVE
  - A. Gomer's Restoration
  - B. Israel's Restoration

**CONCLUSION:** God's suffering love is extended to the backslider. If the backslider repents, he will be restored; if he does not repent, he will be cast off, and that without remedy. The cost of love is suffering, but love will ultimately triumph!

## FAITH

### HOSEA - SUFFERING FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 14:4-7

**TEXT:** *"How, oh how, can I hand you over, Israel! My heart recoils within me, all my compassion is kindled."* (Hosea 11:8; Phillips)

**INTRODUCTION:** Hosea was a contemporary of Amos and his ministry covered much of the same time in Israel's history as Amos' ministry. Hosea spoke, however, to Israel at a little later time when, as a nation, Israel was fast declining in power and prosperity. Assyria's increase in power was accompanied by imperialistic endeavors, which was a consequent threat to the small western nations - including Israel and Judah.

Amos' message of judgment and justice was more universal in scope, and included many of Israel's surrounding nations. Hosea, however, focused most of his attention on Israel's social, political, and religious conditions. Several of the prophecies of Amos against Israel's neighbors had partly been fulfilled, and Hosea apparently saw no need to repeat Amos' judgments.

Hosea was moreover preoccupied with Israel's advanced state of corruption. Disintegration in Israel was much more obvious in Hosea's day than it was in Amos' day, although Amos was convinced that this disintegration was no less real in his own day.

Hosea was well aware of the social injustice in Israel, and vividly described it just as Amos described it. However, Hosea was more immediately concerned with the cause of such injustices which he attributed to the breaking of God's covenant. Idolatry was the most obvious manifestation of unfaithfulness. International treaties with pagan nations was a denial of faith and a sign of instability. Israel's idolatry and foreign policy were both evidences of spurning God's love. Infidelity to love was the most heinous sin of Israel.

**PROPOSITION:** Hosea vividly exposed the nature of God's love. God is long-suffering in His love. Hosea shows us that, although God's judgment on sin is harsh, God's mercy is great and his pardon is complete for the repentant backslider. God promises that he will heal Israel's backsliding, and love them freely:

*"I will heal their unfaithfulness,  
I will love them with all my heart  
Now that my anger has turned away from them." (Hosea  
14:4)*

Let us look carefully at the notes of Hosea's message -- Sin, Judgment, and Love, and see how that love will ultimately triumph. "Hosea blended wonderful tenderness with unflinching decision in rebuke, and unwavering certainty in foretelling evil with unfaltering hope in the promise of possible blessing." (Alexander McClaren)

#### I. ISRAEL'S SIN

Hosea accuses Israel of sinning against God which will bring certain destruction to the nation. Hosea defined sin in terms of Israel breaking God's covenant which He had made with Israel. To understand what Hosea meant by sin, let us first see what was the meaning of the covenant, and secondly what was the result of breaking this covenant.

##### A. Meaning of Covenant

Basic to Israelite faith was the doctrine of God's election of Israel as his special instrument, through which He would accomplish His purposes. God established a covenant with Abraham, and God promised Abraham that his descendants would be favored by God. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He established a covenant with Israel, based on love and grace, not on any merit of Israel. Israel pledged obedience to Yahweh, and received from God the law which was to control the conduct of Israel, socially and religiously. The covenant was a creation of God out of his heart of love. Israel, in return, was to love God and remain loyal to God. Loyalty to God meant denying all other gods and worshipping only Yahweh. Loyalty to God meant complete dependence upon Yahweh. Loyalty to God meant obedience to social regulations, which involved benevolence to one's fellowmen. To keep the covenant, then, was to maintain "utter loyalty to the covenant of God and obedience to his will." (The Kingdom of God, John Bright;pg.28)

##### B. Breaking the Covenant

To break the covenant was to no longer be loyal to God. It meant disobedience to His commandments. To disobey God's commandments was to spurn God's love. Through Hosea, God tells of his love for Israel, and how Israel rejected this love:

*"When Israel was young I came to love him,  
And I called him out of Egypt to be my son.  
But the more I called them  
The further they went from me. (Hosea 11:1,2)*

God's love could be spurned in several ways: (1) By denying God's sovereignty and worshipping other gods, (2) By depending upon other gods for life sustenance, (3) By denying the established social and religious code of conduct.

Israel had broken God's covenant in each of these three ways. During Amos' ministry, Israel had experienced prosperity that was unprecedented since the time of Solomon. Hosea, however, spoke to a society that was no longer completely prosperous and optimistic, but to one that was presently in a state of disintegration. Israel had broken God's covenant and the dire consequence of such gross unfaithfulness was religious and political upheaval.

#### 1. Religious Upheaval

Hosea spoke to a people who had disregarded their greatest heritage - that of being an elected people with a special covenant with God. Israel incorporated paganistic ideas and acts into their religious worship, and even depended upon the Baal for supplying daily substance (as shown by the fertility cult existent in Israel).

Israel had forsaken the moral and intellectual elements in religion and became preoccupied with mere ritual.

*"Israel is a lush and lusty vine  
Which bears him luscious grapes!  
The more his fruit increased  
The more altars did he build;  
The more his land prospered  
The more he beautified his heathen pillars.  
They are false at heart  
And now they must face their guilt.  
The Lord will split their altars  
And shatter their pillars." (Hosea 10:1-2)*

Even the priests, whose chief duty was to impart religious instruction, were complacently neglecting their duties, resulting in poverty of religious knowledge among the people. These priests will not escape the judgment of God.

*"My people are dying for lack of knowledge,  
And because you have rejected knowledge  
I reject you from being priest to me.*

Because you have forgotten the Law of your God  
I, for my part will forget your children.  
For the more they grow in numbers,  
The more they have sinned against me.  
They have changed a glorious calling into a  
shameful trade.  
They feed on my people's sins  
And lick their lips over the guilt to come.  
There is nothing to choose between priest and  
people.  
I will punish them for their ways  
And repay them for their deeds.  
They may eat but they will not be satisfied,  
They may commit adultery but they will have no  
children.  
Because they have forgotten the Lord.  
Lust and wine have taken away their senses.  
(Hosea 4:6-11)

Disintegration in true Yahweh worship and adherence to  
the gross practices of Baal worship, resulted in ruthless  
acts of transgression.

"Now hear what the Lord says, you people of Israel,  
For the Lord has a quarrel with the inhabitants of  
the land!  
There is no honesty nor compassion nor knowledge of  
God,  
But an outbreak of cursing, murder, stealing and  
adultery,  
And bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
This is why the land is withered,  
And everyone who lives in it has lost heart,  
Yes, even the beasts in the field and the birds in  
the air,  
While the fish have disappeared from the sea."  
(Hosea 4:1-3)

"Gilead is a city of evil men, stamped with bloody  
footprints.  
As bandits lie in wait for their victim,  
So a gang of priests murder those who go to  
Shechem.  
Yes, they are criminals indeed!" (Hosea 6:8-9)

Material prosperity became all-important even if one must  
resort to cheating and lying:

"Swindler! He loves to cheat  
With false balances in his hand.  
And does Ephraim say, Yes, but I have grown rich,  
I have made myself wealthy?

*All his gains can never outweigh the guilt that he has amassed." (Hosea 12:7-8)*

*"Ephraim surrounds me with lies  
And the house of Israel with deceit:" (Hosea 11:12a)*

## 2. Political Upheaval

Closely accompanying religious disintegration, is political disintegration. Law and order became divorced from society at the same time that purity and sincerity became divorced from religion. Crime, as has been described, is the result of both. When the organized political structure crumbles, it is because the nation's moral foundation has become rotten. The political tone of a nation largely depends upon its moral tone.

Plots and counter plots rent the nation asunder. Hosea began his ministry about four years before the death of Israel's king Jeroboam II, and within ten years after Jeroboam's death, Israel had had five kings, three of them seizing the throne by violence through assassination of the preceding king. God speaks through Hosea in denouncing this violence:

*"They have set up kings, but they are not mine;  
They have made princes, but I never knew them."  
(Hose 8:4a)*

Corruption among the highest political leaders breeds a society in which life nor property is safe:

*"When I long to make Israel whole,  
Then the guilt of Ephraim is exposed and all the  
evil of Samaria.  
For there is not an honest man among them -  
Thieves walk in and out of houses,  
And bandits roam the streets.  
They are a faithless people,  
But I shall faithfully record all their evil.  
Now they are hemmed in by their own deeds and they  
must face me.  
Their evil deeds amuse their king,  
And their treacheries entertain their leaders.  
For they are all adulterers;  
Inside they are burning hot as an oven;  
The baker has ceased to stoke the fire  
Yet the kneaded dough is rising.  
At the king's festival the leaders made themselves  
sick,  
They are inflamed with wine,*

*While the king joined hands with the loose and worthless.  
Their hearts burn like an oven with their intriguing,  
Their fury smolders all night long,  
And in the morning blazes into a flaming fire.  
They are all as hot as an oven,  
They consume their own rulers -  
King after king has fallen -  
And not one of them called for me." (Hosea 7:1-7)*

Rebellion against God's covenant law, which issued forth in idolatry, was the chief sin of Israel, Rebellion is the offspring of pride. Pride was the disease of Israel.

In such a degenerate society a prophet who proclaims God's truth is not popular. In fact he is despised. However, true prophets speak not of themselves but by the authority of God, and thus their judgment on sin will surely come to pass:

*"The prophet is a fool, is he,  
And the man inspired is a man insane?  
This shows the depth of your iniquity,  
The depth of your bitter hatred!  
The prophet is God's watchman over Ephraim,  
Even though there are snares for him everywhere  
And he meets fierce enmity in the temple of his God.  
They have depraved themselves as deeply  
As they did in the days of Gibeah;  
He will remember their guilt,  
And punish them for their sins." (Hosea 9:7b-9)*

## II. ISRAEL'S JUDGMENT

### Hosea's Marriage

Hosea was commanded to marry 'a wife of whoredom' to symbolize Israel's disloyalty to God in his own day.

*When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord." (Hosea 1:2)*

This was the best way to illustrate Israel's present religious state of promiscuity. Rowley comments on Hosea's marriage to Gomer in these words: "He could best symbolize God's present relationship to Israel by marrying a woman whom he knew to be of an evil past, and

of whose immediate loyalty he had little hope. It is well known that the prophets performed many strange symbolic acts, acts which may well have seemed revolting to them as they do to us....Hosea could well have found this marriage loathsome, even though he felt a constraint, which he believed to be of God, to enter into it." (Men of God, Rowley, 92-93)

Hosea came to love Gomer deeply despite her immoral life. However, Gomer continued to be unfaithful - first child born was Hosea's but next two weren't. The allurements of other lovers caused Gomer to desert Hosea.

A. Gomer's Desertion (Symbolical Meaning) (Sin Separates One From The 'Lover of His Soul')

Gomer's desertion of Hosea symbolizes Israel's desertion of God. Hosea lovingly pled with his wife not to leave him. He came to love her intensely, and couldn't bear to see Gomer leave him.

God also pleads with Israel to come back to Him and no longer to forsake Him. God loved Israel and felt that He was married to Israel. Israel had been unfaithful and was being allured by other lovers - the Baals. God could not bear to see Israel forsake Him and to go after other Gods.

God tells of his love for Israel:

*"When Israel was young I came to love him,  
And I called him out of Egypt to be my son.  
But the more I called them  
The further they went from me.  
They made sacrifices to the Baals  
And burnt incense to idols.  
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
Picking them up in my arms.  
Yet they never knew that it was I who healed their  
bruises.  
How, oh how, can I give you up, Ephraim!  
How oh how, can I hand your over, Israel!  
(Hosea 11:3-8)*

There is a way that seems right to men, but the end there of are the ways of death!

The way of Christ is the way to live. There is more joy in the square inch in living for Christ than in the square mile outside of Christ. The right thing morally is always the healthy thing physically and economically and socially. Jesus came to give life more abundantly! Sin pays terrible wages!

The way of the transgressor is hard! There is pleasure in sin for only 'a season'.

The deceitfulness of sin which 'promises' pleasure a fulfillment, but sin leaves the sinner destitute and depraved!)

B. Gomer's Slavery (Symbolical Meaning) (Sin Leads To Bondage and Misery)

Gomer deserted Hosea because of the allurements of other lovers. Gomer thought that she would receive more and better gifts from her new lovers.

She, however, became greatly disillusioned when she was finally sold into slavery. Her lovers who promised so much, failed to fulfill their promises. Gomer descended to a life of misery and remorse. The consequence of sin was not joy, satisfaction, and freedom, but instead was heartbreak, shame, and bondage.

Gomer represents Israel who also was allured by the promises of the Canaanite fertility gods - the Baals. The Canaanites worshipped this god of fertility at the time when the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan. The natives of Canaan felt that their local Baal gave fertility to the soil and to their flocks. To gain the favor of the Baals, the Canaanites carried on fertility rites in their worship, which involved sacred prostitution. Sacred prostitution symbolized fertility and was a means of pleasing the gods in order that the gods would especially bless their fields and make their flocks especially fertile. Corn, wine, wool, and flax were considered to be gifts from the fertility gods.

The elected nation of Israel was supposed to be enlightened and greatly aware that the Canaanite land itself was given to Israel by God. They should have known that Yahweh alone was the God of the soil. However, the Israelites became victims of paganistic superstition and began worshipping Baal, in hopes that their land and flocks would be more fertile:

*"I discovered Israel like grapes in the wilderness.  
I looked upon your fathers  
As the first fruit on the fig-tree in its first season.  
But when they arrived at Baal-peor  
They surrendered themselves utterly to Baal.  
They became as abominable as the thing which they loved."  
(Hosea 9:10)*

Israel's worship of Baal involved sacred prostitution:

*"They make their sacrifices on the mountain-tops  
And their offerings on the hills,  
Beneath oak-trees of poplars or willows  
Because of their pleasant shade.  
And so your daughters become prostitutes  
And your married women commit adultery.  
I will not punish your daughters for their prostitution  
Nor your married women for their adultery,  
For the leaders themselves go off with prostitutes  
And to sacrifice with the harlots of the shrines -  
No wonder the senseless people are brought to ruin!"  
(Hosea 4:13-14)*

Just as the consequence of Gomer's sin was heartbreak and bondage, so the destiny of unrepentant Israel would be hardship and eventually captivity. The inevitable consequence of sin is judgment. God must show Israel that Yahweh alone and not the Baals, was able to assure the gifts for which Israel had followed the Baals. God will bring judgment upon the unfaithful nation, first by withdrawing his gifts of corn, wine, wool, and flax from the land.

One way in which God seeks to evoke repentance in the hearts of backsliders is to turn the pleasures of sin into the pains of sin. God alone can give the pleasure and fulfillment to persons who are looking to sin's ways for fulfillment. God must let people (backsliders) reap some of the dreadful consequences of their sinful lifestyle, with the hopes that backsliders will turn alone to God for the joy and pleasure they are so desperately seeking. In God, there are pleasures forevermore, not outside of God!

*"Therefore when the corn is ripe I shall take it away,  
And when the wine is ready, I will take it back.  
And when the wool and flax are ready to clothe her,  
I will snatch them away.  
And I shall expose her for what she is  
In the eyes of her lovers,  
And no man shall expose her for what she is  
In the eyes of her lovers,  
And no man shall rescue her from my hand.  
For I will put a stop to her pleasures;  
Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths.  
And all her ceremonial feasts.  
I will blast her vines and her fig trees,  
Of which she used to say, This is what I have earned  
These are the gifts which my lovers gave me.  
I will turn them into a jungle  
And wild beasts shall devour them."  
(Hosea 2:9-12)*

*Secondly, God will bring judgment upon Israel by*

eliminating her idolatrous practices which God hates. Idolatry, the principle sin of Israel, must be justly punished, and the fate of individual Israelites who practiced idolatry would be slavery and death. (Hosea 10:5-6,8)

"Whenever Ephraim spoke, men trembled;  
He was a prince in Israel!  
But the worship of Baal made him guilty and he died.  
And still they continue in their sinning,  
Casting for themselves idols in silver,  
Made to their own design;  
Just the work of clever fingers,  
Yet they call them gods and worship them,  
With men giving kisses to calves!  
Therefore they will vanish like the morning cloud,  
Like the misty dew which disappears so soon;  
Like chaff that swirls up from the threshing-floor  
Or the smoke out of the window." (Hosea 13:1-3)

"Do not rejoice, Israel,  
Do not celebrate like pagans!  
For you have played the harlot in forsaking your God.  
You have enjoyed a harlot's fee  
On every threshing floor.  
There will be no threshing floor nor wine-vat to feed them  
And the promise of the new wine will fail.  
For they will not remain in the land of the Lord-  
Ephraim will go back to a new Egypt  
And they will eat unclean food in Assyria!  
They will pour out no wine before the Lord,  
Nor will they prepare sacrifices for him.  
Their bread will be the bread which is broken for the dead  
And all who eat it shall be defiled.  
Their food will be for their hunger only-  
It cannot be offered in the house of the Lord.  
What will you do on the day of the festival,  
And on the day of the feast of the Lord?"  
(Hosea 9:1-5)

Hosea prophesied that Israel would become exiles to Assyria if Israel did not repent of her sins. Hosea's prophecy came true in less than thirty years after he made it.

In 721, Samaria, the capital city of Israel, fell to Sargon II the Assyrian ruler. Some inhabitants suffered a cruel death, just as Hosea had earlier prophesied:

*"Samaria must suffer for her guilt  
Because she rebelled against her God.  
They shall fall by the sword,  
Their children shall be dashed to pieces  
And their pregnant women ripped open."  
(Hosea 13:16)*

Israel's king Hoshea was taken prisoner. How true was Hosea's prophecy:

*"As for Samaria, her king shall be tossed aside  
like a chip on the face of the waters."  
(Hosea 10:7)*

Sargon reports that he deported over 27 thousand Israelites to Upper Mesopotamia and Media. These Israelites ultimately lost their identity among the nations. How true was Hosea's prophecy of Israel's doom:

*"My God will toss them aside  
Because they have not listened to his voice,  
And they shall become homeless wanderers  
Among the nations!" (Hosea 9:17)*

The remaining territory of Israel became the province of Samaria under an Assyrian governor, and in the succeeding years people deported from Babylonia and Hamath, were resettled there and introduced their native customs and religions. The Samaritans of Jesus' day could trace their ancestry back to these resettled people who intermingled with the surviving Israelite population.

Israel's captivity was God's judgment on rebellious Israel. Hosea's prophecy became a historical reality:

*"For the children of Israel shall live quietly for  
many days without a king, without a prince, without  
sacrifice, without a sacred stone, without idols or  
wooden images." (Hosea 3:4)*

### III. GOD'S LOVE

Mixed however with this element of justice, is an element of tenderest love. God will not altogether forsake Israel. Many of the present generation may be swept away, but Israel as a corporate existence would not be totally eliminated. This truth is vividly taught in Hosea's love for Gomer.

#### A. Gomer's Restoration

Although Gomer had been very unfaithful to Hosea and sinned grievously against this love, still Hosea could not forget

Gomer or give her a bill of divorce. Instead, he went to seek Gomer and to reclaim her as his wife. Hosea personally reveals his love for Gomer and God's command to him:

*"Then the Lord said to me, Go once more and love this woman who is loved by an evil man and is an adulteress - just as the Lord loves the people of Israel although they turn to other gods and love the raisin-cakes of idolatry. So I bought her for my self for a handful of silver and a sack and a half of barley. Then I said to her, You will live quietly with me for many days. There is to be no more playing the harlot or giving yourself to another man and I, for my part, will leave you alone." (Hosea 3:1-3)*

Hosea didn't put Gomer to death for her adultery, although the law permitted him to do so, but he rather only chastened her and lovingly took Gomer back as his wife.

Hosea's relationship with Gomer shows us that, although evil is powerful and sin has tragic consequences, love will ultimately triumph over evil. Although it is not explicitly stated, it is believed by some that Hosea completely won over the heart of Gomer, and Gomer always remained faithful to Hosea thereafter.

#### B. Israel's Restoration

If Hosea, who was but a man, could continue to love Gomer and eventually restore her to her former honor as wife, how much more would God love Israel and restore her! Hosea believed that Israel would ultimately be restored:

*"Then the time will come when the sons of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and in the end they will come in awe to the Lord and his goodness." (Hosea 3:5)*

God's love restrains Him from completely destroying His people. He will save a remnant, through whom He may continue to carry on purposes in history:

*"I will not give vent to my fierce anger -  
I will not destroy Ephraim again.  
For I am God and not man,  
I am the Holy One in your very midst,  
And I have not come to destroy.  
And I will bring them back to their homes,  
Says the Lord." (Hosea 11:9,11b)*

It is true that God must chasten his people, but through this chastisement, Israel will "learn again of her ancient purity

and loyalty". (John Bright, Kingdom of God, pg.76)

*"See, now, I will be the one who attracts her,  
And brings her into a desert place,  
And speaks gently to her inmost heart.  
From there I will give her her vineyards,  
And turn the valley of Bitterness  
Into a pass which is bright with promise.  
And there she will respond  
As she did in the days of her youth,  
As she did at the time when she came  
Out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14-15)*

No longer would Israel be called unloved or stranger, but would become lovingly reconciled to God, insomuch that once again God would claim Israel as His wife:

*"I will take you to be my wife forever.  
I will take you to be my wife rightly and justly,  
I will take you in kindness and mercy.  
I will take you to be my wife in faithfulness,  
And you shall know the Lord.  
And I will sow her for myself in the land.  
For I will love Unloved  
And I will say to Stranger,  
You are My People,  
And they will say, You are My God."  
(Hosea 2:19,20,23)*

How beautiful will be the restored state of Israel, the new Israel which will be forgiven by God.

*"I will heal their unfaithfulness,  
I will love them with all my heart  
Now that my anger has turned away from them  
I will fall like dew upon Israel;  
He shall bloom like a lily,  
He shall strike roots like the trees of Lebanon;  
His shoots shall spring up,  
His beauty will be like the olive-tree  
And his scent like the scent of Lebanon.  
They shall come back and live beneath his shadow,  
They shall flourish like a well-watered garden,  
They shall blossom like a vine,  
And their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon."  
Hosea 14:4-7)*

How meaningful is the Prophet's foresight of Israel's eventual triumph!

*"Nevertheless the number of the people of Israel shall surely be like the sands of the sea, which can neither be*

*measured nor counted. And in the very place where they were called Strangers to me, they shall be called Sons of the living God. Both the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and shall appoint for themselves one leader. And they shall rise up from the land, for glorious and terrible shall be the day of Jezreel."* (Hosea 1:10-11)

Through the restored remnant of Israel, God was able to fulfill this prophetic prediction. It is true that Israel had to learn the hard lesson that she as a nation was not identical with the kingdom of God. However, the restoration of the remnant was necessary in 'salvation history', for through this remnant, God's greatest Gift was realized. That Gift was Jesus Christ!

The people of Israel would someday not be identified with a nation but by a faith. All who would exercise faith in that Gift of God, could claim to be a true Israelite. Although the prophet could not fully realize the significance of his prophecy - "the number of people of Israel shall surely be like the sands of the sea" - it is clear now that the members who would constitute this group, would not be identified by race or by nation, but by faith in the one who would truly fulfill this prophecy.

What a beautiful unity is found in God's Word, and how perfectly God fulfills his promises! The covenant with Abraham was founded on faith:

*"For what does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:3)*

Israel learned that the children of the covenant are those who are faithful to God. The Kingdom of God, as represented not only in the Old Testament, but even more completely in the New Testament, is made up of those who do God's will on earth. We see then that both in the Old and New Testament the Covenant relationship is based on obedience and in the New Testament the Covenant comes to include people of all nations. In the true Israel - which Hosea verily hinted at, - all peoples can be members. The people of the true Israel are children of faith:

*"Just as Abraham had faith in God and it was accredited to him for righteousness. You notice, therefore, that those who are sons of Abraham are such from faith. But in anticipation that God justifies the Gentiles through faith, the Scripture foretold the Gospel to Abraham in*

*the promise, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed,' so that they are blessed through faith with the believing Abraham". (Galatians 3:6-9)*

And the children of Israel shall "be like the sands of the sea." (Hosea 1:10)

**CONCLUSION:** The message of Hosea to Israel has permanent applications to every person who calls himself a Christian, or to any organized group - locally, nationally, or internationally - which calls itself the church.

Lessons that one may learn from Hosea about sin, judgment, and love are these:

(1) Just as Israel broke God's covenant of love, and thus denied God's sovereignty by turning to the worship of other gods, so it is possible for Christians or organized church to be overcome by the evil influences of the world. Israel rejected her greatest heritage and depended upon Baal for her life sustenance. Israel indulged herself in shallow ritualism, expecting thereby to appease God. It is possible for a Christian or a church to break her covenant of love with God, and begin to worship gods of materialism, secularism, or ritualism. Compromise with the world is the Church's greatest danger. Morgan says, "The most heinous and damnable sin of which man is capable is that of infidelity to love." (The Minor Prophets, G.C. Morgan, pg.27)

(2) The inevitable result of apostasy is social and religious disintegration in a society. This is the first stage of sin's judgment. Just as there are inviolable laws of purity, so there are inviolable laws of sin. The society that is crumbling at its foundation, is the society that is permeated by compromise and paralyzed by sin. It is the picture of the nation which is facing impending doom. Disintegration is the natural judgment of sin.

Destruction is the ultimate form of judgment which is visited upon an unrepentant people of God. When a Christian or Church doesn't respond to the chastening of God, that person or group will be cast off.

(3) The greatest message of Hosea is love. Love will triumph even over judgment, for God's ultimate purposes cannot be frustrated. Man may reject God's promises, but these promises cannot be destroyed. God will always have a purged, restored remnant upon whom he pours out mercy and through whom He will carry out His decrees.

God's mercy is everlasting and He will heal the sinner's backsliding and restore him to wholeness. However, the inviolable consequence of advance apostasy is complete destruction. God's suffering love is extended to the backslider. If the backslider repents, he will be restored; if he does not repent, he will be cast off, and that without remedy. Hosea urges all men to heed God's message:

*"Let the wise man understand these things, Let the thoughtful man know them. For the ways of the Lord are fair and straight: Good men shall flourish in them but sinners shall stumble and fall." (Hosea 14:9)*

Every Christian must listen carefully to every note in Hosea's message - the notes of sin, judgment and love. The cost of love is suffering, but love will ultimately triumph!

## FAITH

### HOSEA - SUFFERING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Because the covenant which God initiated with Israel was based on God's love and grace, how did God expect Israel to respond, socially and religiously? From both an Old Testament and New Testament perspective, is it accurate to say that loyalty to God means obedience to social regulations which involves benevolence to one's fellowmen?

2. As it was during the time of Hosea, so it is also true today, God's covenant of love can be broken in the following ways:

(a) By denying God's sovereignty and worshipping other gods, (b) By depending upon other gods for life sustenance, (c) By denying the established social and religious code of conduct.

Give specific illustrations of how God's covenant can be broken, in each of these three ways, in the lives of professing Christians in contemporary society.

3. As in the case of Israel during Hosea's time, is it possible today for professing Christians to neglect the moral and ethical and intellectual elements in religion, as they become preoccupied with mere religious ritual? (Note Hosea 10:1-2)

4. According to Hosea 4:6-11, what sins of the priests were inciting the wrath of God and inviting the judgment of God? Are religious exploitation and personal indulgence sins which modern-day ecclesiastical leaders can so easily fall into? Why or why not? (Note Hosea 4:1-3; 6:8-9; 12:7-8)

5. In light of the message of Hosea, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "When the organized political structure crumbles, it is because the nation's moral foundation has become rotten. The political tone of a nation largely depends upon its moral tone."

6. Cite evidence to support the following statement: "Corruption among the highest political leaders breeds a society in which life nor property is safe." (Note Hosea 7:1-7)

7. What is the typical reaction of a rebellious society to the prophet of God? (Note Hosea 9:7-9) Cite illustrations from contemporary society that demonstrate this same ancient reaction of scoffing of the prophets (ministers and evangelists) of God. How did Jesus say His suffering servants should react to persecution? (Note Matthew 5:11-12)
8. According to Hosea 11:3-8, what affect does spiritual backsliding have upon God?
9. As in the case of Gomer when she left Hosea to follow other 'lovers', is it also accurate to say that most professing Christians who leave Christ and His church, backslide because they are deceived in thinking that the world of sinful pleasures has more to offer than the way of Christ which involves sacrifice and surrender?
10. Check only those statements with which you strongly agree, and which describe what you have personally experienced:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (a) The 'way of Christ' is the only meaningful way to live.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (b) There is more joy in the 'square inch' in living for Christ, than there is in the 'square mile' outside of Christ.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (c) The right thing morally is always the healthy thing physically and economically and socially.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (d) The way of the transgressor is hard, for there is pleasure in sin for only 'a season'.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ (e) Sin is deceitful, for it promises pleasure and fulfillment, but instead it leaves the sinner destitute, disappointed, and depraved.
11. According to Hosea 2:9-12, what action did God take as an attempt to incite repentance in the hearts of the backslidden Israelites?
12. From your own life or from your observation of the life of another, give an illustration which demonstrates the truth of the following statements: "One way in which God seeks to incite repentance in the hearts of backsliders is to turn the pleasures of sin into the pains of sin. God must let backsliders reap some of the dreadful consequences of their sinful lifestyle, with the hopes that backsliders will turn alone to God for the joy and pleasure they are so desperately seeking in the pathway of sin."

13. What is the eventual fate of backsliders who refuse to repent and return to God? (Note Hosea 9:1-6; 10:5-8; 13:1-3)
14. How did Hosea respond to Gomer's adulterous lifestyle, and how does this dramatic response illustrate God's grace initiative towards wayward, backslidden persons? (Note Hosea 3:1-3)
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Although evil is powerful and sin has tragic consequences, love will ultimately triumph over evil." (Note Hosea 3:5; 11:9-11)
16. Through God's chastisement of Israel, what does God intend ultimately to accomplish? (Note Hosea 2:14-15) What redemptive purpose does God have in mind when He chooses to chastise His disobedient children today? (See Hebrews 12:5-11)
17. When God's initiating love is received by the repentant sinner, the result is glorious reconciliation. Describe the beautiful restored relationship which God will eventually enjoy with repentant Israel, and share your understanding of how this restored relationship applies to the restored relationship between an individual backslidden Christian and his God. (Read Hosea 1:10-11; 2:19-20,23; 14:4-7)
18. Who today compose the "children of Israel" who are "like the sands of the sea"? (Hosea 1:10) Through what means was God able to include Gentiles (non-Jews) among the "children of Israel"? (Galatians 3:6-9)
19. Check those statements with which you strongly agree:
  - \_\_\_\_(a) Just as Israel broke God's covenant of love, and thus denied God's sovereignty by turning to the worship of other gods, so it is possible for any Christian or organized church to fall into the evil influences of the world.
  - \_\_\_\_(b) The most heinous and damnable sin of which man is capable is that of infidelity to love.
  - \_\_\_\_(c) Social disintegration is the natural judgment of sin.
  - \_\_\_\_(d) Love will triumph even over judgment, for God's ultimate purposes cannot be frustrated.
  - \_\_\_\_(e) God will always have a purged, restored remnant upon whom he pours out mercy and through whom he will carry out His decrees.

\_\_\_\_\_(f) If the backslider repents, he will be spiritually restored; if he does not repent, he will be cast off, and that without remedy.

**CHAPTER 29**

**FAITH**

**UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH**

## FAITH

### UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:32-40

INTRODUCTION: Faith is one of the greatest themes of the New Testament. The word 'Faith' appears 234 times in the New Testament, and the word 'Believe' appears 251 times in the New Testament.

PROPOSITION: Faith sometimes removes the darkness, and at other times faith simply enables us to rejoice in the midst of the darkness. Sometimes Faith releases believers from death, and at other times faith releases one into heaven through death!

- I. FAITH SOMETIMES CHANGES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES
- II. FAITH SOMETIMES DOES NOT CHANGE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES
- III. FAITH DOES NOT JUDGE GOD
- IV. FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO ULTIMATE VICTORY

CONCLUSION: Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change and whether or not we can understand the present purposes in the present God-allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God knows that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith - partially on earth and totally in heaven!

## FAITH

### UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

**SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 11:32-40

**INTRODUCTION:** Faith is one of the greatest themes of the New Testament. The word 'Faith' appears 234 times in the New Testament, and the word 'Believe' appears 251 times in the New Testament. In other words, 'Faith' and 'Belief' together appear 485 times in the New Testament! Hebrews 11:6 says, "And 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."

'The Just shall live by faith' was the declaration of the prophet Habakkuk in the Old Testament. It was the same declaration made by Paul in the New Testament, and this was the resounding theme of the great Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther in the 16th century!

The book of Hebrews is the great book of faith, especially Hebrews 10:19-11:40.

How To Cultivate Your Faith: (Shared by John Maxwell)

- (1) Remember the times that God has honored your faith (Hebrews 10:32-34).
- (2) Look for opportunities to use your Faith (Hebrews 10:22-24).
- (3) Associate with people who will strengthen your faith (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- (4) Study the lives of Great Men of faith (Hebrews 11 is a documentary of great men of faith).
- (5) Understand the characteristics of faith (Hebrews 11:1-6).
- (6) Ask God to increase your faith (Note Mark 9:24 'Lord, help thou mine unbelief').

**PROPOSITION:** Faith always changes persons. Sometimes Faith directly changes our circumstances. Sometimes Faith changes only us. But Faith is the key to living successfully. Faith sometimes removes the difficulties. Faith can move mighty mountains or faith can enable us to climb over the mountain! Faith sometimes removes the darkness, and at other times faith simply enables us to rejoice in the midst of the darkness. Sometimes Faith releases believers from death, and at other times faith releases one into heaven through death!

## I. FAITH SOMETIMES CHANGES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Hebrews 11:1-34a shows the power of faith to change circumstances.

*And what more shall I say? Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (Hebrews 11:32-34)*

Faith has the power to change everything around us - to level our mountains and to elevate our deep valleys. Faith in a Sovereign God is faith in one who has power to change the course of history and to turn bad circumstances into good circumstances. He has power to heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, and to give transformation to the fallen.

However, when God does change our circumstances, he first changes our attitudes, our very selves. He first changes believers before He changes the believers' circumstances. He changes doubt into faith, pride into humility, grumbling into gratitude.

After God changes us, then we are prepared to receive a miraculous change of circumstances, if such a change of circumstances is in God's will.

Also, being changed persons, we are now prepared to cooperate with God to change our circumstances if God wills for our external circumstances to change.

Many times God changes circumstances WITH us, not FOR us. While it is God's power alone that changes our circumstances, it is God's power that is coupled with man's obedience that produces miraculous changes in our circumstances. God's power coupled with Noah's obedience in building an ark, resulted in change of circumstances around Noah (i.e., destruction of evil inhabitants and a new beginning of the world through the flood). God's power was seen in sending the rain; Noah's obedience was seen in building the ark. Noah could not have sent the rain, and God chose not to build the ark. God and man worked together to produce the miracle!

## II. FAITH SOMETIMES DOES NOT CHANGE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

*"Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging,*

*while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."* (Hebrews 11:35b-38)

Some men of great faith are delivered from the jaws of physical death; some other men of equally great faith are not delivered from death. Look at Acts 12:1-7. Both James and Peter were men of great faith, but James was killed for his faith at this time; Peter was miraculously delivered from prison.

The highest purpose of faith is not to change my circumstances (Although faith often does change my circumstances). The highest purpose of faith is to change me!

Paul was sent to prison in Rome because of his faith in Christ. His faith did not deliver him from prison, but Paul's faith enabled Paul to use his adverse circumstances in a most positive way. (Read Philippians 1:12-18)

Paul's difficult circumstances were not changed because of his faith. Rather, Paul's faith changed Paul into a most positive person, regardless of his circumstances. *"I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel."* (Philippians 1:12) How did Paul's imprisonment enable Paul to advance the Gospel? (1) Roman pagans were converted, (2) Timid Christians were encouraged, (3) The Gospel message was spread. Paul got the best out of the worse, all because of the power of faith.

Look at Noah. The miracle of faith is first seen in the attitude of obedience demonstrated in Noah building an ark on dry ground before there had ever been a rain.

Look at Moses. The miracle of faith is seen in what faith did for Moses. The miracle was that Moses stuck out the rod, expecting the Red Sea to part! Before a miracle in circumstances took place (i.e. the parting of the Red Sea), there first had to be a miracle of changed attitudes in Moses. No longer was Moses the self-sufficient ruler as he was in his youth in Egypt. Now Moses was the mellowed and obedient servant of God who obeyed God when God told Moses simply to stick out his rod over the Red Sea and expect a miracle in changed circumstances!

Before circumstances changed because of faith, the person changed first. Faith changed Daniel before faith changed Daniel's circumstances, seen in the fact that Daniel could sleep in a lion's den. The three Hebrew children could

confidently go into the fiery furnace, not knowing when they entered whether or not they would live. The miracle is seen in the confidence of the men; later, the miracle of deliverance is realized. People themselves are changed before their circumstances, by faith, are changed.

Elijah, by faith, was a changed man before God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the alter. Elijah's faith had changed him so much that he could saturate the sacrifices with water and stand confidently and boldly before the multitudes and declare that fire was soon coming from heaven to consume the sacrifices.

Faith changes the person before it changes the circumstances. If the circumstances change before I am changed, it is not faith. And even when faith is exercised, the circumstances do not always change. Faith always changes the person, and sometimes the person's circumstances.

Faith's primary goal is not to change circumstances. Faith's goal is to please God, regardless of the circumstances!

The greatest miracle of all is to endure hardship and to be faithful to God, regardless of circumstances. The proof of faith is not changed circumstances, but changed persons! Persons who learn to trust God, with or without changed circumstances, are persons of true faith. Being grateful to God and holding on to God, regardless of external results, is evidence of true faith.

Some mistakenly say that if one is not physically healed, it means that one does not have faith or that one has unconfessed sin in his life. Sometimes, however, the greatest men of faith have not been delivered from adverse circumstances.

Even those whose circumstances were amazingly changed because of their faith, were first changed personally before their circumstances were changed.

Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I serve him." In other words, "Whether circumstances change or not, I will still serve God!"

"When Bunyan was due for trial he said: 'With God's comfort in my poor soul, before I went down to the justices, I begged of God that if I might do more good by being at liberty than in prison, that then I might be set at liberty. But if not, His will be done.'" (It was in prison that he wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress'!) (Barclay's Hebrews; page 146)

It is not wrong to pray for changed circumstances; what is wrong is to doubt God if, after praying for changed circumstances, the circumstances do not change!

Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire. Faith changes us first and oftentimes faith changes our bad circumstances into good circumstances. When that happens, let us rejoice exceedingly. When our circumstances are changed by faith, it is appropriate to rejoice exceedingly and give thanks to our God. When our circumstances are not changed, even though we have great faith, it is also appropriate to give thanks and praise to God, "In everything give thanks."

"No faith is mature if it thinks only of answers to prayer that come in the form of escape from loss and sorrow and pain. A London minister tells of a father whose son was fighting with the forces in France. 'At our prayer meetings,' said the pastor, 'he would earnestly pray that God would hide that soldier son beneath His wings. He once added with deep tenderness, "The bullet was never made that can pierce Thy wings." But the boy was killed all the same.'

"If this shakes us and threatens to turn confidence into cynicism, we should review the Bible's magnum opus on faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. True, it tells of those who 'through faith escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens' (verse 34). But have you noticed the significance of a little phrase of two words that occurs twice - 'and others'? 'And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance. And others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.' (Verses 35-37)

"No wonder George Tyrell once set it down boldly: 'To believe that this terrible machine world is really from God, in God, and unto God and that through it and in spite of its blind fatality all works for good - that is faith in long trousers.'

"The faith that escapes trouble is often honored of God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble." (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 96)

Perhaps the greatest man of faith in Christian history was the apostle Paul, and yet his faith did not deliver him from adverse circumstances. He writes. "*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times*

*I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from the rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." (II Corinthians 11:23-28)*

Suppose you have prayed and your adverse circumstances have not changed? What should you conclude? There are several possible answers to that question.

(1) It could mean that God is delaying His answer to change your circumstances, and while He is delaying, He is bringing about great and wonderful changes in YOU. Remember, the object of prayer is not primarily to give you something, but to make something out of you during the process of praying!

(2) It could mean that a lack of faith is hindering the answer. "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (James 1:7,8)

(3) It could mean that you have unconfessed sin in your life. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalms 66:18)

(4) It could mean that God intends to change you - your attitudes toward God and life and others - instead of changing your difficult circumstances. (Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) God did not remove the thorn in the flesh from the great man of faith - Paul. Why? Because God had higher purposes in mind than to simply heal Paul physically. Paul's character was perfected through his suffering. He was made more humble and more dependent upon God. Therefore, Paul's faith changed him even though it did not change his difficult circumstances. "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

One of the cruelest things you can say to a sincere believer, who is undergoing difficulty or sickness, is this: "You are not healed or delivered because you have lack of faith or you

have unconfessed sins in your life!" (This sounds like the advice and judgment that Job's 'friends' gave to Job when he was suffering adversity!)

(Illustration of a husband who said this to his dying Christian wife, who finally died, of cancer. She died without the comfort of her husband because her husband was wrongly taught that insufficient faith or unconfessed sins were the only two reasons why Christians are not healed! How sad and how unBiblical!)

### III. FAITH DOES NOT JUDGE GOD

Decisions of faith that were made in Hebrews 11, were made in less than ideal situations. Decisions of faith were not made easily or during easy times.

Noah (verse 7). He prepared the ark, before he saw the results - before he experienced the reality of a rain storm, when people mocked him, before anyone wanted to get on the 'band wagon'.

Abraham (verse 8). He went out, not knowing where he was going. Decisions of faith are sometimes - if not most of the time - made during difficult times.

Moses (verses 24-27). He left Egypt when to leave meant leaving luxury and ease and popularity and security of home and the security of familiar surroundings. Moses left Egypt when he could have had everything in Egypt - wealth, comfort, popularity, advancement, etc. (Think of some who have been called to go to the mission fields when they were at the height of their careers.) Moses made a decision to give up comfort in Egypt to go to the wilderness to herd sheep. The decision of faith, made during a difficult time, eventually resulted in a great miracle - the crossing of the Red Sea! Many times in our lives, the 'Red Sea' miracles are the results of initial decisions of faith that were made, like in the case of Moses, during difficult times and after waiting long and patiently upon God, serving Him day-in and day-out (like Moses who herded sheep for forty years before the Red Sea experience)!

The decisions of faith are made on the basis of obedience to God, leaving the details and timing to God to work out. Problems come to the greatest of Christians. Don't ever conclude, if you are going through problems, that you don't have faith (and don't conclude this about some fellow believer who is experiencing adverse circumstances). And above all, don't judge God or become bitter towards God during difficult circumstances. Those in Hebrews 11:35-38 remained faithful to God, even unto death, without judging God or holding God

responsible for their difficulties. Remember, when faith and prayers do not remove the mountains, God intends to use the mountains to strengthen our spiritual 'muscles' while we are climbing over the mountains! The problems may cause many tears and bring many questions to mind. But remember, God never allows His children to shed 'needless tears'. God is a God of perfect love - He wants what is best for you.

If you are a person of faith, God may see that it is best to remove your mountain of difficulty quickly. He may see that it is best to remove your mountain of difficulty slowly. Or He may see that it is best not to remove the mountain of adverse circumstances at all, but instead to use the mountain of difficulty for your good and for God's glory.

Faith will always change you, but faith may or may not change your particular set of adverse circumstances. God knows best, therefore don't judge God for what He does with your circumstances.

When my brother lost his 15 year old daughter so tragically and suddenly, on August 14, 1981, he said, the very night of her death, "God makes no mistakes." His faith in God did not prevent his daughter's terrible death, but my brother did not judge his God. His faith enabled him to believe in a Good God, in spite of adverse circumstances. That is the greatest miracle of all! To believe, even when circumstances defy reason!

Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances, as God's gymnasium for character development!

Faith keeps us true to God regardless of the circumstances, never judging God for our troubles and finding victory in spite of external adversities! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)

#### IV. FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO ULTIMATE VICTORY

If faith seems to go unrewarded on this planet and in this life, there will be an ultimate reward granted to the persons of faith after this life. *"And these men of faith, though they trusted God and won his approval, none of them received all that God had promised; for God wanted them to wait and share the even better rewards that were prepared for us."* (Hebrews 11:39,40; Living Bible)

Faith means being faithful to God and never judging God, regardless if the prayers of faith change the circumstances of the faithful one. The faithful one can be assured that faith will be ultimately rewarded in heaven and that God will be close to the faithful one during his pilgrimage on earth. "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you..' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6) Remember, this is God's promise to people of faith!

If you go through or are going through difficult times, keep your faith in God. He won't forsake you. He loves you. He is not removing your mountain of problems for a reason - a loving and redemptive reason. Don't fall from God. Don't start judging God or becoming bitter towards God. "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10:35-39)

We too often, during adversity, as in the case of John the Baptist when he was in prison, become discouraged and need reassurance. (Note Matthew 11:2-6)

Jesus reassured John the Baptist and strengthened John's faith, by pointing John to Jesus' greatness and miracle power. He also encouraged John not to judge God because of his present difficult circumstances. "Blessed is he who takes no offense at Me, and finds no cause for stumbling in or through Me, and is not hindered from seeing the Truth." (Matthew 11:6 Amplified).

John the Baptist's faith resulted in John being beheaded by a wicked king! His faith did not deliver him from adversity, but his faith did keep him true rather than denying the Master, and his faith ushered him into heaven with all the rewards that heaven alone can give to the man of faith!

We too often see only today with today's problems, and fail to see the ultimate victory promised to persons of persevering faith. God's purpose may be to deliver His children from the fiery furnace, or it may be to allow His children to burn up in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:16-18).

Either way, the man of faith is victorious. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." The man of faith can't lose!

It may be God's will to change our circumstances, or it may be God's will that we simply remain faithful to God in the midst of our difficult circumstances (Hebrews 11:1-34).

Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death (verses 35-38).

Whatever the immediate result of faith, the ultimate victory always belongs to God's people of faith!

**CONCLUSION:** Faith can move a mighty mountain or faith can enable us to climb over our mountains! Faith can remove the darkness, or faith can give us a song during our nights. Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change and whether or not we can understand the present purposes in the present God-allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God reassures one that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith - partially on earth and totally in heaven!

## FAITH

### UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS OF FAITH - BALANCED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. As a counsellor of someone who is seeking to cultivate his faith in God, what advice and encouragement would you give?
2. Does Faith in God always change one's external circumstances? Why or why not? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:  

"Faith sometimes removes the difficulties and sometimes faith enables us to live victoriously, in spite of the difficulties."
3. Give a personal illustration of the truth of the following statement: "When God does choose to change our circumstances, The first changes our attitudes, our very selves." Why is it important for the person himself to be changed before God miraculously changes circumstances in one's external environment? Is it true to say that often times God and Man work together to produce a miracle?
4. How do you explain the fact that some men of great faith are delivered from physical death and external adversities, while other men of equally great faith are not delivered from death, hardships, and physical infirmities? (Note Acts 12:1-7; Hebrews 11:32-40)
5. What was the miracle of changed attitudes that took place in the life of Moses, before Moses could enjoy a miracle of changed circumstances?
6. Cite several illustrations from the lives of Bible characters that demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "People themselves are changed before their circumstances, by faith, are changed."
7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Faith's primary goal is not to change circumstances. Faith's goal is to please God, regardless of the circumstances. Persons who learn to trust God, with or without changed circumstances, are persons of true faith."

8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire."
9. Tell what your response is to the following statement: "The faith that escapes trouble is often honored of God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble."
10. Did the greatest man of faith in the history of the Church - the apostle Paul - always find deliverance from his adversities and infirmities? (Note II Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-10)
11. Suppose you have prayed and your adverse circumstances have not changed? What are some possible viable answers to this important question?
12. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The object of prayer is not primarily to give you something, but to make something out of you during the process of praying!"
13. What is one of the 'cruellest' things that one can say to a sincere believer who is undergoing difficulty or sickness?
14. From your own personal experience, or from your observation of others, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Many times in our lives, the 'Red Sea' miracles are the results of initial decisions of faith that were made (like in the case of Moses) during difficult times and after waiting long and patiently upon God, serving Him day-in and day-out (like Moses who herded sheep for forty years before the Red Sea experience)!"
15. Does the following statement reflect an accurate understanding of faith as seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews: "When faith and prayers do not remove the 'mountains of difficulties', God intends to use the 'mountains' to strengthen our spiritual 'muscles' while we are climbing over the 'mountains'"?
16. How does contemplation upon God's love, wisdom, and power help you during your times of hardships and trials?
17. Illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances as God's gymnasium for character development!"

18. How can you explain the fact that sometimes faith goes unrewarded in this earthly life? (Note Hebrews 11:39,40)
19. What are the greatest perils which the faithful face during times of great trials when prayers seem to go unanswered, and when promises seem to remain unfulfilled? (Note Hebrews 10:35-39) What is the result in the life of the person who 'shrinks back' and who abandons faith, according to Hebrews 10:39?
20. Do men of great faith sometimes become greatly discouraged? (Note Matthew 11:2-6) What ministry can you, as a sincere believer, have in the life of a fellow believer who has become discouraged, despondent, and doubtful? (Note Hebrews 10:24-25) Are believers, whose lives are full of difficulty, tempted to 'judge' God or to become bitter towards God? (Note Matthew 11:6)
21. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death."



**CHAPTER 30**

**FAITH**

**ROMAN CENTURION - WORKABLE FAITH**

## FAITH

### ROMAN CENTURION - WORKABLE FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:1-10

INTRODUCTION: What is faith? Is faith a certain feeling, a certain emotion which you must somehow engender or stir up within you? Some so-called expressions of 'faith' are really no more than expressions of 'wishful thinking'! What are the characteristics of true faith? The Roman Centurion, whom Jesus highly commended is an illustration of true working faith - a faith that resulted in a great miracle. The characteristics of faith are threefold, as seen in the life and actions of the Centurion: (1) Faithfulness and compassion in daily relationships, (2) Humility in attitudes, in light of Jesus' greatness and in light of human limitations, (3) Decisiveness in action as shown by going to Jesus with human problems.

PROPOSITIONS: Faith is not a mere emotion or feeling; faith is faithfulness, faith is humility, in faith decisive action.

#### OUTLINE:

##### I. FAITH IS FAITHFULNESS

- A. The Centurion did not exploit his servant; he never used his servants as 'means to an end'.
- B. The Centurion respected those over whom he ruled.

##### II. FAITH IS HUMILITY

##### III. FAITH IS DECISIVE ACTION

CONCLUSION: The result of such characteristics in the life of the Centurion? Commendation by Jesus: "When Jesus heard this (the request of the Centurion), he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'" (Luke 7:9) Miracle From Jesus: "Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well". (Luke 7:10) Let us seek to be faithful in our compassionate treatment of our fellow men. Let us seek to be humble in our attitudes towards God, manifesting the same spirit of unworthiness as the Centurion manifested (verses 6-7). Let us seek to be faithful in our compassionate treatment of our fellow men. Let us seek to be humble in our attitudes towards God, manifesting the same spirit of unworthiness as the Centurion manifested (verse 6-7). Let us act decisively and courageously, as the Centurion did, realizing that faith is not a mere emotion of the heart

but that it is rather a decisive action of the will. Let's act upon our good intentions! The result? Jesus will commend us too for great faith! Jesus will grant to us also great miracles!

## FAITH

### ROMAN CENTURION - WORKABLE FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:1-10

INTRODUCTION: Do you wish to be a person of great faith? If you intend to please God, you must be a person of faith! The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Hebrews 11:6a)

But what is faith? Is faith a certain feeling, a certain emotion which you must somehow engender or stir up within you? Perhaps you have heard some people say, "I have faith that I am going to win the race", or "I have faith that I am going to get a lot of money", or "I have faith that my friend is going to get well", or "I have faith that a certain person is going to be saved." Usually these persons who say such things are saying, "I have a certain inner feeling which I define as 'faith'."

But is faith simply a certain feeling? A certain emotion which you must somehow engender or stir up within you?

Some so-called expressions of 'faith' are really no more than expressions of 'wishful thinking'!

What are the characteristics of true faith? The Roman Centurion, whom Jesus highly commended, is an illustration of true working faith - a faith that resulted in a great miracle.

The characteristics of faith are threefold, as seen in the life and actions of the Centurion: (1) Faithfulness and compassion in daily relationships, (2) Humility in attitudes, in light of Jesus' greatness and in light of human limitations, (3) Decisiveness in action as shown by going to Jesus with human problems.

Faithfulness in character, humility in attitude, decisiveness in action - these are the three characteristics of true faith - the faith that Jesus commends and the faith that accomplishes miracles.

PROPOSITIONS: Faith is not a mere emotion or feeling; faith is faithfulness, faith is humility, faith is decisive action.

#### I. FAITH IS FAITHFULNESS

Great faith is inseparably connected with great respect for people. Great faith is the expression of noble character, in contrast to mere ritualism or ceremonialism. The Centurion was not a Jew and therefore he was not practicing the vain

ceremonies of Jewish ritualism. Put another way, faith is inseparably connected with a life of faithfulness. Faithfully carrying out ones compassionate responsibilities to ones fellowmen. The Centurion highly valued his servant who was very sick and about to die.

A. The Centurion did not exploit his servant; he never used his servants as 'means to an end'.

He saw each servant as a person to be valued, not as a commodity to be bought and sold. He was kind to his servant, seeing his servant as a person to be cherished, not as an object to be used.

A man of faith is one who respects his subordinates. One who dominates or callously rules over others cannot be a man of faith. Only he who respects the dignity of others, however weak or undistinguished others may be, can claim to be a man of faith. Monetarily, the slave was probably considered cheap and replaceable, for many Roman officers could easily afford many slaves. But this Centurion did not degrade and demean or humiliate his slave. rather, the Centurion cherished the life and was concerned for the welfare of his slave. There was a warm and personableness, in the Centurion's relationship with his slave.

The attitude of the Centurion towards the slave is an attitude that must be evident, for instance, in the life of a Christian employer. A Christian employer, like the Centurion, must treat with dignity and respect all his employees. Warmth, compassion, caring - these are the characteristics of a good employer towards his employees. Ephesians 6:9 says, "And masters, treat your slaves (employees) in the same way (with respect). Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Masters and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

Faith is inseparably connected with respectful and compassionate treatment of those with whom we have to do in daily relationships..

B. This Centurion respected those over whom he ruled. Remember, the Jewish people were a subdued people, ruled by Rome and policed by Roman officers like the Roman Centurion. Even though the Roman Centurion did not practice the Jewish religion, he did respect the Jewish people and ruled over them, not with an iron fist but with a gentle and generous hand. Apparently he was a man of influence and wealth, for it is said that the Centurion built a synagogue for the Jews who were under his jurisdiction.

Faith is not some type of abstract, other-worldly quality, exercised by religious people who have some extra dimension in their lives that most people cannot have. Rather, faith is the practical quality of people who have faithfully walked in all the light of truth which God has given to them. Faith is inseparably connected with faithfulness. The Centurion was faithful in carrying out his daily tasks and responsibilities in the spirit of respect and generosity. Respectful not domineering, toward those over whom he ruled, his lowly slaves in one case, and subdued Jewish people in another case. Not only respectful, but also generous. Generous in his loving attitude towards his sick slave in one case, and generous in his loving actions towards those Jews over whom he ruled in another case. He was big-hearted, not calculating; compassionate, not calloused; concerned, not indifferent; unselfish, not self-centered.

What is the measure of faith? Faith is measured by God in terms of a faithful and noble character. "So much of the contemporary writing about faith gives the impression that its main ingredient is confident expectation. If you believe confidently enough, you can have anything you want, from the winning of your next game to the presidency of your company. But if we read the Scriptures far enough to catch the whole gospel, we shall see that to have faith in God, we must be the kind of persons in whom God can have faith. It is not enough merely to have faith; we must keep faith." (Whom Christ Commended; 15)

"We are counting too much on faith without faithfulness. We should count on God, but we must first be the kind of person on whom God can count...The Centurion was of such reliable character that Jesus could put trust in him." (Ibid; page 16)

A noble character is one which has demonstrated respect in relationships and generosity in behavior.

The Centurion was not only respectful in his attitudes toward his subordinates - i.e., towards the slave he owned and the Jewish people he ruled - but the Centurion expressed profound respect towards Jesus whom obviously the Centurion considered to be a superior.

This leads us to a second characteristic of great faith which is great humility.

## II. FAITH IS HUMILITY

The man of great faith is not one who seeks the attention of men or who glories in the applause of others. The Centurion believed greatly in Jesus, and manifested that great belief through actions and words of great humility. The Roman

officer did not even feel worthy to come in person to Jesus. Instead, he sent Jewish elders to Jesus with the plea to heal his sick servant. Further, he did not feel worthy to have Jesus come into his house. He believed so much in Jesus' greatness in contrast to his sense of smallness, that he wanted Jesus simply to say the word of healing from a distance. The Centurion did not want to draw attention to himself, by having Jesus come to his house.

The man of faith is one who is unpretentious and humble. He does not draw attention to himself but remains in the shadows of obscurity. His only claim on Jesus is his claim to Jesus' greatness and mercy and love. A man of faith never feels worthy of Jesus' attention, but at the same time knows that in Jesus alone is found the power of healing and deliverance and help. The elders whom the Centurion sent to Jesus besought Jesus earnestly, saying of the Centurion, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue." Others may believe that you are worthy to receive great gifts from God, but you yourself, as a humble believer, will never evaluate yourself as worthy before God. The Centurion did not feel worthy to approach Jesus in person. Neither did he feel worthy to have Jesus come personally to his home. The Centurion did not bargain with Jesus and he did not present a list of credentials to Jesus to convince Jesus of his personal worthiness. No manifestations of pride. Only humility. "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you."

The greatest men of faith are always characterized by great and genuine humility. A humble person recognizes, on one hand, that his own resources (such as position, power, reputation, wealth, education) are insufficient to meet his urgent human needs. On the other hands, a humble person of faith recognizes that Jesus alone is able to meet those urgent human needs. The humble man feels very unworthy and undeserving. A man of faith never swells with pride. He never is presumptuous. He never assumes Jesus' generosity. Rather, his actions display feelings of unworthiness.

Others told Jesus that the Centurion was worthy of Jesus' attention, based upon the fact of the Centurion's love for the Jewish nation and based upon the Centurion's generous act of building a Jewish synagogue for the Jews. But the Centurion never appealed to Jesus on the basis of meritorious deeds. The man of true faith always come to Jesus empty-handed, eager to receive good gifts from God, not because he deserves anything, but because he knows that Jesus by nature is a good God!

Paul was a man of great faith only because he was a man of great humility. Paul was a very proud man, placing confidence in himself and in his accomplishments, before he became a Christian. "If anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Philippians 3:4-9)

Paul, like the Roman Centurion, was a great man of faith because he was a man of unusual faithfulness. 'In season and out of season' Paul preached the Gospel. In times of plenty and in times of poverty, in times of persecution and in times of popularity, in times of success and in times of failure, in times of sickness and in times of health - at all times, Paul was faithful to his God-given task of sharing the Good News. At the end of his long life of ministry Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (II Timothy 4:7)

Faith is inseparably connected with faithfulness. Also, as we have noted, faith is inseparably connected with humility. Throughout Paul's life he became a man of increasingly greater faith because he became a man of increasingly demonstrated humility. At first, Paul declared that he was the least of the apostles; later he said that he was the least of the believers; finally he declared, with great humility, that he was the chiefest of sinners. Growth in humility which is evidence of growth in faith!

The ones whom I have considered to be the greatest persons of faith have been those whose lives have been faithful and whose attitudes have been humble.

### III. FAITH IS DECISIVE ACTION

Great faith is manifested by decisive action. The Centurion acted decisively because he was a man trained in disciplined action. "He said, 'I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, "Go", and he goes; and to another, "Come", and he comes; and to my slave, "Do this", and he does it.' Just as his subordinates obeyed him, he obeyed his superiors. He was a man of deeds rather than words." (Whom Christ Commended; page 17)

The Centurion had been trained to obey, and he expected obedience from the soldiers under his military leadership. "And as a soldier who knew authority, his spirit was opened to feel the authority of Christ." (Ibid; page 19) "Like a Mighty Army Moves The Church of God" we sing in the song 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. It is only when the church acts decisively and obediently that faith is demonstrated.

There is a little saying:

`A bell is not a bell, till you ring it,  
A song is not a song, till you sing it.

We can also say, "Faith is not faith until you activate it." "Faith without works is dead", wrote James.

The Centurion possessed inward faith that Jesus could heal his slave, but it was only when he gave outward expression to that inward confidence that his slave was healed.

So many Christians have inward feelings of confidence in Jesus or in His word, but they never outwardly express their inner feelings. Only when decisive action has been taken is there a true faith exercised.

Think of a common illustration: Saying that you inwardly believe that a chair can hold your weight is not enough. Your inner confidence must be outwardly expressed in the decisive action of actually releasing your weight onto a chair as you sit on it!

Think of illustrations from Hebrews 11 (the 'Great Faith Chapter'). Faith is not pictured in this chapter as merely good inward feelings, but as decisive actions of obedience. Note the verbs of action in the lives of the people of faith.

"Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain." (verse 4)

"Noah...in holy fear built an ark to save his family." (verse 7)

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." (verse 8)

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." (verse 17)

"By faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

(verse 27) "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."  
(verse 28)

"By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land." (verse 29)

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days." (verse 30)

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."  
(verse 31)

"What we do directs our thinking truly as what we think directs our doing." (Whom Christ Commended; page 15)

Some Christians strangely think that faith is measured in terms of strong feelings. But according to the Bible, faith is measured in terms of decisive actions. When one decisively acts in obedience, with or without strong accompanying feelings, faith is demonstrated and exercised. Acting in faith eventually brings feelings of faith. Doing the works of faith brings the emotions of faith. It is action that counts. It was the Centurion's decisive action in sending Jewish elders to Jesus that resulted in Jesus' healing of the Centurion's slave. Acting in the way of faith results in thinking the way of faith.

There are some Christians who are waiting for the coming of certain emotions to them which they interpret as 'feelings of faith', and, as a result, they are remaining inactive in Christian duty until they feel such emotions come over them. However, the Scriptures tell us to 'act as if' we had faith, and we will find out that the actions of faith will give birth to the emotions of faith.

Act in the way of faith. Faith is a victory of the will, not a mere emotion of the heart. The emotional surge of faith often follows the decisive act of faith, but one must never wait for the emotional surge before he decides to act decisively.

For instance, one must not wait for some emotional surge before he reads his Bible, or before he prays, or before he witnesses, or before he tithes, or before he goes to church, or before he performs an act of compassion. 'Dramatizing' ones faith means to act decisively in doing those things which the Scriptures command, whether or not the doing of those things are accompanied with emotions. The doing is the demonstration of faith.

Faith is not merely good intentions or good feelings, but faith is decisive and obedient action. An example of this principle is the Corinthian Church. The Corinthian Church had good intentions of collecting a generous offering to send to the poor Jerusalem Christians, but the intention of the Corinthians had not been fully realized in decisive actions. So Paul writes to the Corinthians: "I want to suggest that you finish what you started to do a year ago, for you were not only the first to propose this idea, but the first to begin doing something about it. Having started the ball rolling so enthusiastically, you should carry this project through to completion just as gladly, giving whatever you can out of whatever you have. Let your enthusiastic idea at the start be equalled by your realistic action now." (II Corinthians 8:10-11, Living Bible)

Faith is incomplete if it remains only an 'enthusiastic idea' without the idea issuing forth in the 'realistic action'. The Centurion had an 'enthusiastic idea' that Jesus could heal his slave, but only when the idea issued forth in 'realistic action' (i.e..., the Centurion sending the Jewish elders to Jesus with a specific request) was faith truly demonstrated and wonderfully rewarded!

Some Christians have an 'enthusiastic idea' that they will read the Bible through, but faith is only demonstrated when the intention becomes action. Some Christians have an 'enthusiastic idea' that they will witness to an unsaved friend, but only when the idea is acted upon is faith truly demonstrated. Some Christians have plans to pray more, but only when the plans for prayer become the regular practice of prayer has faith been truly exercised. There are some Christians who intellectually believe that tithing is good, but only when a good belief in tithing as a principle becomes the regular act of tithing as a practice, is faith demonstrated.

To repeat: faith is not a mere sentiment, or emotion, or intention: faith is decisive action. "The Centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant." (Luke 7:3)

**CONCLUSION:** What are three important characteristics of faith, as illustrated by the Roman Centurion? (1) Faithfulness in his character, (2) Humility in his attitude, (3) Decisiveness in his actions.

The result of such characteristics in the life of the Centurion?

**Commendation by Jesus:** "When Jesus heard this (the request of the Centurion), he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd

following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'" (Luke 7:9)

Miracle From Jesus: "Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well." (Luke 7:10)

Let us seek to be faithful in our compassionate treatment of our fellow men. Let us seek to be humble in our attitudes towards God, manifesting the same spirit of unworthiness as the Centurion manifested (verses 6-7).

Let us act decisively and courageously, as the Centurion did, realizing that faith is not a mere emotion of the heart but that it is rather a decisive action of the will. Let's act upon our good intentions!

The result? Jesus will commend us too for great faith! Jesus will also grant to us great miracles!

## FAITH

### ROMAN CENTURION - WORKABLE FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Give examples of some so-called expressions of 'faith' which are really no more than expressions of 'wishful thinking'.
2. What evidence from a study of the life of the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1-10) can you cite that validates the truth of the following statement: "Great faith is inseparably connected with great respect for people and great generosity to People?"
3. What lessons can a modern-day Christian employer learn from a study of the Roman Centurion's relationship to his subordinates during the time of Jesus?
4. What, according to your understanding, is meant by the statement: "Faith is inseparably connected with faithfulness"? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To have faith in God, we must be the kind of persons in whom God can have faith."
5. Does the fact that a person expresses strong and confident 'expectation', evidence that such an individual is a person of 'strong faith'? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If you believe confidently enough, you can have anything."
6. From a study of the Roman Centurion, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The man of great faith is not one who seeks the attention of men or who glories in the applause of others."
7. Cite evidence from the Bible (including Luke 7:1-10\_ to support the following statement: "Growth in faith is always measured by growth in humility." Why is 'humility' always a basic characteristic in the character of the person who has great faith in God? Can one have great 'faith in God' and, at the same time, have great faith in his own human resources and accomplishments (such as positions, power, reputation, wealth, education)? Why or why not?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The man of true faith always comes to Jesus empty-handed, eager to receive good gifts from God, not because he deserves anything, but because he knows that Jesus by nature is a good God!"

9. Do you think it is easier for a new believer to learn quickly to obey God's commands, if that same believer, before his personal conversion, had lived a life characterized by discipline and decisive action? Why or why not? (Note Luke 7:7-9)
10. What, according to your understanding, is meant by the statement: "Faith is not faith until you activate it?" What evidence can you cite from Hebrews 11 (the great 'Faith Chapter') to document the above statement?
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "What we do directs our thinking as truly as what we think directs our doing."
12. Is 'Faith', Biblically-defined, measured in terms of strong feelings or in terms of decisive actions? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: Acting in the way of faith results in thinking the way of faith, and in eventually feeling the way of faith."
13. Explain what is meant by the following statement: 'Faith is a victory of the will, not a mere emotion of the heart.'
14. Should a believer wait for some 'emotional surge' before he reads his Bible, or before he prays, or before he witnesses, or before he tithes, or before he goes to Church, or before he performs an act of compassion? Why or why not? What does it mean to 'dramatize' one's faith?
15. Cite an example from the corporate life of the Corinthian Congregation (II Corinthians 8:10-11) to illustrate the truth of the following statement: "Faith is not merely good intentions or good feelings, but faith is decisive and obedient action."

**CHAPTER 31**

**FAITH**

**ROMAN NOBLEMAN - HEALING FAITH**

## FAITH

### ROMAN NOBLEMAN - HEALING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: John 4:46-54

TEXT: *"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him to help you do it and he will."* (Psalms 37:5)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever personally been discouraged because you didn't seem to get any definite answers to your prayers?

To help us find a solution to this problem, let us ask the question: "What makes 'prayer' really prayer?"

- (1) A Sense of urgent need.
- (2) A Sense that only Christ can supply that need.

There are many with urgent needs - physically, mentally, socially, economically, spiritually - but who think that their needs can be supplied by their own resources.

Take an illustration of physical illness. (This same idea could be applied to other needs also). Seeking a solution to physical illness may take the common form of 'going to the doctor' or 'taking certain medications' (both of which may be God's way indeed of healing). Or 'change of climate' or physical exercise which again may be God's method of giving health and healing.

But suppose you find your physical problems not solved through these good methods. What then? One of two things - either despair, or turning directly and urgently to the Great Physician for healing. When one turns to Christ, then what is called prayer is taking place. Intercessory prayer is being exercised only when two conditions exist: (1) A sense of urgent, definite need; (2) Turning to Christ who only can fully supply that need. One who feels he can supply his own needs in life (the self-sufficient) don't really pray. Such a person may repeat pious words and phrases, but he is not really praying. *"We pray best when we are most helpless."* (Turner) *Charles Wesley thus interpreted Jacob's experience of wrestling with an angel.* (Genesis 32:25-28).

Yield to me now, for I am weak,  
But confident in self-despair;  
Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,  
Be conquered by my instant prayer:  
Speak, or thou never hence shall move,  
And tell me if thy Name is Love.'

("Come, O Thou Traveller Unknown.")

Paul expressed the same paradox by saying 'when I am weak then am I strong.' (II Corinthians 12:10)

PROPOSITION: With a basic understanding of the essence of prayer, let us ask: 'What is the relationship between exercising faith in prayer and receiving an answer to prayer?' How faith works in relationship to answered prayer is of utmost importance in living and enjoying the Christian life.

I. "LET US LEARN WELL THE LESSON OF PRAYER: FAITH MAKES IT'S PLEA AND THEN LEAVES THE HOW AND THE WHEN OF THE ANSWER IN GOD'S HAND." (Touch of the Master's Hand; Allen; pg. 24)

"The healing of the seamless robe  
Is by our beds of pain -  
We touch Him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again."

(Turner; pg. 123)

It is Christ's desire to make us whole - in mind, body, and spirit. The power is found in Christ. By touching Him we are made whole.

Healing is far more healing of the spirit than the body. It is always God's will to heal us of fears, resentments, self-preoccupation, guilt, impurities, inferiorities, jealousies, and emptiness. When these sicknesses of the soul are healed, then many sicknesses of the body are automatically healed, for many, if not most physical illnesses, have a deep-rooted cause in the spirit and mind. Physical illnesses that are the results of mental and spiritual disorders are almost never treated successfully (cured) by physicians. We can be ABSOLUTE in claiming God's healing for some types of sicknesses - those of the spirit.

However, we cannot be absolutists in regards to physical healing. Says E. Stanley Jones: "By absolutist I mean those who take the position that all diseases must be cured in this life or else there is sin or lack of faith. This leaves a lot of wreckage behind among people who are not healed by prayer or medicine or surgery. We explain that this is a mortal world and we are not supposed to be immortal in a mortal world: the body breaks down sometime, so that death is a part of life. Some diseases must await the final cure in the

resurrection when we get our immortal bodies. So God will heal us now or give us power to use the infirmity - not bear it but use it - until the final cure when we get the immortal body...This position in regard to physical healing, namely, that God will heal the infirmity now or give us power to use the infirmity until the final cure when we get our immortal body, does not leave wreckage behind. It means cure now or power to use the infirmity. But if you insist on an absolutist position, you do leave spiritual wreckage behind...Amy Wilson Carmichael in India was a saint, but for the last eighteen years of her life she suffered dreadfully from arthritis. Did she have sin or lack of faith in her life? No, she did what we suggested - she used her infirmity. She wrote her great books while on a bed of pain. She said: 'I'm in Nero's prison, but I'm not Nero's prisoner.'" (A Song of Ascents; pg. 228,229)

II. SOMETIMES THE ANSWER TO PRAYER SEEMS TO BE DELAYED. FAITH MEANS BELIEVING JESUS' WORD BEFORE SEEING ANY VISIBLE EVIDENCE THAT THE PRAYER IS ANSWERED.

*"Then Jesus told him, 'Go back home. Your son is healed!' And the man believed Jesus and started home. While he was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that all was well - his son had recovered." (John 4:50,51) It was 'while he was on his way' that the answer came. God sometimes answers immediately. However, time, as well as trust, is usually an element in the answer to a prayer.*

"Let us look at an analogy, a parable in nature that teaches exactly the same lesson. A small boy who had been born and brought up in a large city asked his parents for permission to plant some Indian corn in their little garden, and was given a few seed corn. He recalls the wonder and responsibility when he planted that corn. He committed it to the ground and buried it out of sight. He watered it, and although he hardly expected it to come up the first day or two he could not resist the temptation of digging up each grain and seeing how it was getting on. Needless to say he raised no corn from that planting. He had to begin all over and put in some new seed; and after a long while gathered the little harvest of corn...There are some requests which we commit to God that we treat exactly as he did those grains of corn. We commit them to Him and water them with our prayers and tears, but we are too impatient. It is hard to wait. We dig them up and take them in our hands to see how they are getting on. This blocks the working of God. Never dig up in unbelief what you have sown in faith. There is too much self-effort and too little real committing to God. Some prayers have to be hidden in God's hand till they die, and God wants us to leave them there by faith, for God knows that 'if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'" (The Prayer of Committal; pg. 5)

Commitment of the request to God and permitting God time to bring a harvest are essentials in getting an answer to prayer. There comes a time when you are to "release the whole prayer from your conscious thinking. If the prayer is real and has hold of you, it will be at work in the subconscious mind - there will be an undertone of prayer in all you do. But it should be released from the conscious mind lest it become an anxiety center and make you tense and wrought up. The very releasing of it from the conscious mind is an act of FAITH in God. You relax and trust God to do the right thing in the matter." (Abundant Living; pg. 231)

### III. FAITH MEANS TAKING JESUS AT HIS WORD

The Nobleman took Jesus at His word. "The man believed Jesus and started home." (v. 50) Jesus says what He means and means what He says. Jesus' character and word are trustworthy. You can take Jesus at His word.

"The story is told that while Napoleon was reviewing his troops he lost control of his horse. A private soldier stepped from the ranks and secured the steed. The Emperor, greatly pleased, said, 'Much obliged to you, captain.' The soldier, quick to notice the word 'captain', said 'Which regiment, sire?' Napoleon replied as he rode away, 'of my guards'. The soldier left his musket and walked to the officers' quarters and announced that he was now a captain of the guards. Incensed at this apparent presumption, the chief officer demanded to know on whose authority he made his claim. Pointing towards the Emperor the soldier replied confidently, 'He said it, sir!' He took the Emperor at this word." (Turner; pg. 124)

### IV. FAITH MEANS RESTING IN THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD HAS ANSWERED OUR PRAYERS.

As Allan said, "The faith to pray is only half enough. We must also have the faith to believe the answer has been given. In 'Grace Abounding', John Bunyan confesses that one abomination of his own heart is that he has not watched for the answers to his prayers." (Pg. 26 of Allan)

The Nobleman returned home, fully expecting that he would see his boy well and strong. This is the rest of Faith - knowing that one's prayer is answered before seeing the visible evidence, and watching with anticipation for the visible evidence to come at God's own time and way.

Said one, "Prayer is really the place where people are won to Christ; service is just gathering in the results of our prayer." (Bill Bright)

The Bible says, "*Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.*" (Psalms 37:5) This simply means: "Commit, trust and He worketh." As one said, "To commit anything fully to God, it is necessary to have a definite transaction with God." This is what the Nobleman had: a definite transaction with God. He committed a great need to Christ, trusted Christ to supply that need, and anticipated the visible evidence of God's working. The answer came, and came at the very moment He committed His great need to Christ - although it was the next day before he actually personally witnessed the answer visibly.

"He asked them when the lad had begun to feel better, and they replied, 'Yesterday afternoon at about one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!' Then the father realized it was the same moment that Jesus had told him, 'Your son is healed.' And the officer and his entire household believed that Jesus was the Messiah." (v. 52-54)

This Nobleman was definite in making his request known to Christ, and he was just as definite in believing what Christ said about the answer. He calmly returned home. "In fact, so convinced was he that his prayer was answered that he became relaxed and at ease. He did not rush back home that night. There was no need for that. He knew so well that everything would be all right that he went and found a bed and rested." (Allen; 26)

Think of this statement: "After praying and believing, if the answer still tarries outwardly, do not continue to pray for it in such a way that it is evident you are not believing Him for it...If God keeps you waiting for the conscious answer tell Him that you are waiting and are still believing and praising Him for the answer....Remind Him of His Word of Promise and maintain your stand of faith and say: 'Lord, I believe thee and praise thee.'"

"There is nothing that so fully clinches faith as to be so sure of the answer that you can thank and praise God for it."

But one may reply: "This sounds easy. But this method presupposes that I have really believed. How can I know that I have really believed?" "We know we have believed the Lord because after we pray we are not restlessly planning and working for the answer to our prayer but are filled with restful praise (because we have believed God's word that He 'worketh')."

When we feel this initial rest after praying for an urgent need (an evidence of true belief), then begin calling the things we have prayed for OURS and thank God for them before we feel or see the answer. "You must believe it is God's will

to answer this particular prayer. If you so believe Him you can begin to thank Him. If you can honestly thank God from your heart that He has heard you, you can be sure that your faith is sufficiently perfect for Him to work. Then you can say, 'Lord I believe Thee and praise Thee.'" (Ibid;6)

From then on (until the visible answer comes), "we are not to be occupied with our feelings or symptoms or our faith, or lack of faith, but only with what God has said." This Nobleman was preoccupied with only one thing - Jesus' Promise. "Go back home. Your son is healed." His focus of attention was on the Promise, not on his feelings, or his faith or lack of faith, not on his recurring doubts which could have come before seeing the answer to his prayer. After God has initially given us assurance that our prayer will be answered, then continue to praise and thank Him for the answer, even though we have not seen the answer yet. Remember, faith means resting in the assurance that God has answered our prayers, regardless of the outward appearance. "The simple way is to begin calling the things we have prayed for ours and to thank God for them before we feel or see the answer."

Learn to say: "Lord, I still believe thee and praise thee." This is the prayer of Committal.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable cases of this kind was that of a woman who gave a testimony in a church in a large city. She said, "I have a son who lived a life of sin. I brought him up in the right way but he, at a certain stage of his life, rejected all that I had taught him of God and started on the downward path. I did everything that it was possible for a mother to do; I pleaded with him, prayed for him, but nothing seemed to avail. After years of anguish and trial a whisper came to me....., 'Why do you not commit him to me? You cannot do anything with him.' By an act of faith I committed him to God, according to His promise to me and my children, and I told the Lord that I believed that He took him, and I thanked Him. I expected that there might be an improvement; but he seemed to become only worse. When I would get down to pray, the only kind of prayer I could pray was, 'Lord, I believe Thee and I praise Thee.' I would sit up for him at nights; he would come home late, sometimes intoxicated; it would have broken my heart if I had not believed in God, and I would quietly say, 'Lord, I believe Thee and praise Thee.'

"One night it seemed to me as though he was not coming home, but later there was a knock at the door. I looked out and saw that they were bringing my boy home on a stretcher. He had cut his own throat and was unconscious. No one can describe the feelings that came to my heart. I felt that I must pray for him, for there were still some signs of life. I knelt

down but the only prayer I could offer was, 'Lord, I still believe Thee and praise Thee.' While thus kneeling, the tears coursing down my cheeks, he opened his eyes and said, 'Mother, pray for me.' The surgeon came and finding the jugular vein had not been severed, sewed up the wound and my son recovered."

His life was changed, he gave himself to God. "That was just a few years ago." I have just received a telegram from him saying, "Mother, I have entered the ministry, and today I preach my first sermon." (Prayer of Committal by Mrs. R. G. Lindsay; pg. 9-10)

### CONCLUSION:

#### Conditions for Answered Prayer:

- (1) Really Pray - Don't just say pious phrases: Really praying means:
  - (a) Having a sense of definite need.
  - (b) Realizing that God only can supply that need.
- (2) Pray until we believe - that is, until God gives a sense of assurance and rest to our hearts. This is what the old saints used to mean when they would say: 'I've prayed through'.
- (3) Continue to believe and praise God for the answer until the answer becomes visible. This means keeping our focus on God's promise and giving no sympathy to recurring feelings of doubt or despair. Say until the answer comes; "Lord I believe Thee and Praise Thee." Really hand over the requests to God and give God a chance to work out the visible answer in His own time and way. "Every moment of this waiting is a moment of His working."
- (4) Remember, the purpose of prayer is not only the answer to the prayer, but also the development of the character of the person who prays. God wants to use the very process of prayer to develop faith in the one who Prays. Therefore, "if the realization of what we have believed for always came immediately, where would faith have any chance to grow and be perfected?"
- (5) Rejoice when the visible answer comes - and share faith's power with others. Build each new prayer adventure upon the strong foundation of past prayer answers. Call to remembrance God's past acts of power to inspire you to claim victory for the present and the future.

Remember these three simple words which spell success in getting what is important in life:

1. COMMIT
2. BELIEVE
3. PRAISE

## FAITH

### ROMAN NOBLEMAN - HEALING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Have you ever personally been discouraged because you didn't seem to get any definite answers to your prayers? If so, how have you reacted when you saw no visible evidence of a positive answer to your prayers? With resentment towards God? With feelings of despair and discouragement and doubt? With a decision no longer to pray? With a renewed determination to 'pray harder'?
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Intercessory prayer is being exercised only when two conditions exist: (a) A sense of urgent, definite need; (b) Turning to Christ who only can fully supply that need."
3. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "Faith makes it's plea and then leaves the HOW and the WHEN of the answer in God's hand."  
  
Do you believe there is a tendency, in the lives of some earnest Christians, to 'demand' from God an answer to prayer, at a 'certain time' and in a 'certain manner'?
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Many, if not most, physical illnesses, have a deep-rooted cause in one's mind or emotions or inner spirit."
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "As believers, we can be ABSOLUTE in claiming God's healing for some types of sicknesses, namely spiritual sicknesses; however, as believers, we cannot be ABSOLUTISTS in regards to physical healing."
6. How would you answer a person - a sincere believer - who takes the position that all diseases must be cured in this earthly life or else there is sin or a lack of faith?
7. If God, in His sovereign will, chooses not to physically heal one who sincerely prays for such healing, how should the suffering believer respond?

8. Illustrate from your own life, or from your observation of another, the truthfulness of the following statement: "Faith means believing Jesus' word before seeing any visible evidence that the prayer is answered." (Note John 4:50,51)
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God sometimes answers prayer immediately. However, time, as well as trust, is usually an element in the answer to a prayer."
10. Give your interpretation to the following statements: "There is too much self-effort and too little real committing to God. Some prayers have to be hidden in God's hand till they die, and God wants us to leave them there by faith, for God knows that 'if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'"
11. Why is it true to say that the releasing of an earnest prayer from the conscious mind is an 'act of faith in God'?
12. Illustrate, from a study of John 4:46-54, the truthfulness of the following statement: "Faith means taking Jesus at His word."
13. Do you ever identify, as a believer, with John Bunyan's confession that one abomination of his own heart is that he has not watched for the answers to his prayers? Is failure to watch for such answers to prayer an evidence of a lack of faith on the part of a believer? What is the difference between "exercising faith" and "manifesting presumption", as these two attitudes relate to "making requests of God"?
14. Tell of a personal time in your life when you experienced the "Rest of Faith" (the latter phrase being defined as follows: "The 'rest of faith' is knowing that one's prayer is answered before seeing the visible evidence, and watching with anticipation for the visible evidence to come at God's own time and way").
15. Give your response to the following statement by Bill Bright: "Prayer is really the place where people are won to Christ; service is just gathering in the results of our prayers."

16. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "If God keeps you waiting for the conscious answer to a prayer, tell Him that you are waiting and are still believing and praising Him for the answer. Remind Him of His Word of Promise and maintain your stand of faith and say: `Lord, I believe thee and praise thee.'"
17. In seeing an answer to a prayer, what is "God's part" and what is "Man's part"? Is perseverance an important condition for answered prayer? (Note Matthew 7:7) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We know we have believed the Lord because after we pray we are not restlessly planning and working for the answer to our prayer but are filled with restful praise (because we have believed God's word that He `worketh')." (Read Psalms 37:5)
18. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "The purpose of prayer is not only the answer to the prayer, but also the development of the character of the person who prays."
19. Why is it important to build each new prayer adventure upon the strong foundation of past prayer answers? Have you developed the `holy habit' of keeping a "daily prayer journal" (diary)? If so, share with other believers the benefits you have derived from such a practice.
20. In terms of experiencing spiritual reality, share how the following three words spell `success' in life: (a) Commit, (b) Believe, (c) Praise.

**CHAPTER 32**

**FAITH**

**PENITENT THIEF - SAVING FAITH**

## FAITH

### PENITENT THIEF - SAVING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Luke 23:32-43

TEXT: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

INTRODUCTION: "A thief! - nothing behind him but the ashes of a blasted life. Nothing before but the fires of an eternal hell! Nothing behind but the folly of a sinful life! Nothing ahead but the horrors of a sinner's hell! Nothing behind but error! Nothing ahead but terror! Nothing behind but gloom! Nothing ahead but doom! No angels of consolation will speak his name when he goes shuddering through the gates of death. Dark, very dark, it will be there. Dreadful, dreadfully dreadful, it will be there. Lonely, terribly lonely, it will be there - so, he puts all his tangled threads into one prayer: 'Lord, remember me when thou cometh into thy kingdom!'" (Robert Lee)

PROPOSITION: The plea of the thief is the plea of every true penitent. His plea met with a positive response in Christ, and so will the plea of every true penitent today, regardless of how young or old he is. The conversion of the thief teaches us that it is never too late to be saved, if there is true repentance.

#### OUTLINE:

- I. THE THIEF'S PLEA (Man's Steps Toward Salvation)
  - A. Fear God
  - B. Acknowledgement of Personal Guilt and Moral Responsibility
  - C. Acknowledgement of Jesus' Sinlessness and Lordship
  - D. Faith in Jesus' Person and Power
  
- II. THE SAVIOURS' RESPONSE

CONCLUSION: As long as there is time, there is hope! But to 'put off' your salvation could be most dangerous! Declare your personal helplessness - your moral bankruptcy. Look to Christ as your only source of help and salvation.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I Find;  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, Heal the sick, and lead the blind,  
Just and holy is Thy name, I am all unrighteousness;

False and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace."

"Plenteous grace with Thee is found, Grace to cover all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound, Make and keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art, Freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart, Rise to all eternity."  
(Jesus, Lover of My Soul)

## FAITH

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#### I. THE THIEF'S PLEA Man's Steps Toward Salvation

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23:39-42*

A. Fear God. *But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? Luke 23:40*

When coming to God, there can be no sentimental view of God. One must recognize both the seriousness of sin and God's hatred for sin. Sin is so serious that it nailed the most beautiful life in the universe to a cross! Sin alienates people from God. God loves the sinner, but God hates sin. One cannot 'whitewash' his sin or deny his sin or rationalize his sin. He must fear God, and he must know that God cannot

even look upon sin. "God is of purer eyes than to behold sin." The wrath of God is the reverse side of the mercy of God, and wrath towards unrepentant sinners is one manifestation of holy love and divine justice. God does not will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance; however. God will not force His will on any person. But, he who spurns God's mercy will reap God's judgment!

God is not some 'softy' who takes no notice of man's rebellion. He is not an 'indulgent father' who simply 'pats' the heads of his erring children, begging them not to be so 'thoughtless' in their 'naughty ways'. He is not a 'celestial Santa Clause' who overlooks wrongs because of His big-heartedness. No, God is One before whom humans are to 'tremble' because of His holiness. God is not to be taken lightly. To ignore or to reject God and God's Son - Jesus - has most serious consequences. *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him"* (John 3:36). There will come a time "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed." (2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; NIV). Said Jesus, *"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28) Says Proverbs: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."*

God is the author of life and death. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Wrote Solomon: Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

To fear God is to reverence Him, obey him, and follow Him every day. "Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28,29)

#### B. Acknowledgement of Personal Guilt and Moral Responsibility

*But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."* Luke 23:40-41

At three I had a feeling of ambivalence toward my brother,  
And so it follows naturally I poisoned all my lovers.  
But now I'm happy; I have learned  
The lesson this has taught;  
That everything I do that's wrong  
Is someone else's fault"

Notes C.S. Lewis about the modern-day attitude toward sin and the general sense of irresponsibility regarding sin: "A sense of sin is almost totally lacking. Our situation is thus very different from that of the Apostles..We address people who have been trained to believe that whatever goes wrong in the world is someone else's fault...They approach God Himself as His judges. They want to know, not whether they can be acquitted for sin, but whether He can be acquitted for creating such a world...I cannot offer you a water-tight technique for awaking the sense of sin...Whatever method we use, our continual effort must be to get their mind away from public affairs and 'crime' and bring them down to brass tacks- to the whole network of spite, greed, envy, unfairness and conceit in the lives of 'ordinary decent people' like themselves (and ourselves)." (God In The Dock C.S. Lewis; pg. 95,96)

Remember, Adam blamed Eve for his sin, and Eve in turn blamed the serpent. Each was seeking to escape personal moral responsibility. Many are the scapegoats that are used - society, friends, environment, heredity, etc.

One must not blame society for personal wrong and talk about guilt feelings caused by society's restrictions and prohibitions. Rather, the person who wants to be healed (like the thief) must accept personal responsibility for real guilt and confess it to God. If one is to be saved from guilt and its consequences, then one must reject the popularly-held Freudian theory of guilt. "In essence, Freud's theory holds that anxiety comes from evil wishes, from acts which the individual would commit if he dared. The alternative view is that anxiety comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not, but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not. It is, in other words, a 'guilt theory' of anxiety rather than an 'impulse theory'." (Mowrer; pg.26)

David found healing and forgiveness. How? "*I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.*" (Psalms 32:5)  
As in the case of the thief, repentance always leads to salvation.

C. Acknowledgement of Jesus' Sinlessness and Lordship

*But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*  
Luke 41b-42

Jesus is Lord, which means Jesus has supreme authority and power due to His divine nature. Jesus is sinless because Jesus is God, and only the sinless One can save the sinful ones. It would have been futile for the dying thief to have called upon anyone else other than Jesus, for Jesus alone is sinless. The godly died for the ungodly. The blood of Jesus was the blood of God - the only blood that could atone for sins. All other blood is polluted with sin. "The blood of Jesus flowing for his sins cleansed him so effectually that it made him (the thief) at that moment as fit to enter paradise as Christ Himself." (Lee; pg.50) *"The blood, the blood is all my plea, O hallelujah it cleanses me." "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9:12) "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." (Hebrews 10:10)*

The thief declared Jesus as Lord and thus accepted Jesus' deity. *There is no way to heaven or to God except through Jesus (Acts 4:12).* Jesus as Lord and God had authority over the unknown realm of eternity. Jesus could speak naturally and authoritatively about Paradise. Jesus came from Heaven's Paradise and so was soon to return to His heavenly home - taking with him a dying, contrite, repentant believing thief.

D. Faith In Jesus' Person and Power (v. 42). "It was at the very darkest hour this world has ever seen, or ever will see, that this thief's splendid faith flashes up brighter than them the mid-day sun that day." (Whyte).

The thief called Jesus 'Lord'. "Dr Allen tells us that Peter called Jesus 'Lord' after he had witnessed the great miracle of the draught of fishes, that Thomas called him 'Lord' after he had a glorious vision of Him, that this criminal had eyes to see Christ and call him 'Lord' as he saw Him dying on a cross. This man recognized the King though he had no throne but a cross, no crown but thorns, no scepter but nails in His hands, no wardrobe but shameful nakedness." (Lee; pg. 48,49)

*"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:33) "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)*

Come, and he will give you rest,  
Trust him for his Word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest,  
Christ receiveth sinful men.

Christ receiveth sinful men,  
Even me with all my sins,  
Purged from every spot and stain  
Heaven with him I enter in.

Chorus

Sing it o'er and o'er again  
Christ receiveth sinful men,  
Make the message clear and plain;  
Christ receiveth sinful men.

Jesus said, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mark 2:17) Christ came to save us even when we were indifferent and helpless! *"When we were utterly helpless with no way of escape, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners who had no use for him."* (Romans 5:6; Living Bible)

The thief was saved by simple faith in Christ. *"For by grace are ye saved by faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9) No baptism, or Lord's Supper, or church ceremony, or good works, or character - just simple faith and total dependence upon the mercy of the Lord. The thief was without personal expiation or atonement for his sins. The thief was helpless, but he knew where to turn to find help. How wonderful - indeed, how saving - was his faith! "Yes, Christ, the object of priestly hatred, the thief saw as the Helper of the helpless. Would that every orphan, every widow, every defeated man, every friendless woman, every despondent orphan, every widow, every defeated man, every friendless woman, every despondent soul, every homeless prodigal, could, and would see Him through the eyes of the thief - the Helper of the helpless. Would that all men everywhere knew that to Jesus there is never a Hill of Difficulty, never a Valley of Humiliation, never a Sough of Despond, never a Doubting Castle." (Lee; pg. 53)

Not by works of righteousness which the thief did (for he had none), but by simple faith in Christ - resulted in his salvation. Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost and the thief was the first that Jesus took to heaven with him. (The Conditions which the thief met, are the same conditions we must meet).

Don't misunderstand. We are not to belittle good works. Remember, the thief's soul was saved, but his life was lost. How much better it would have been to have taken a fruitful and productive life of many years into heaven to present to the Father. Faith is to issue forth in good works. God has created us for good works. (Ephesians 2:10) Note the believer judgment of evaluation (II Corinthians 5:10).

The thief (1) Feared God, (2) Acknowledged personal guilt, (3) Acknowledged Jesus' sinlessness and Lordship, (4) Declared faith in Jesus' person and power. How did Christ respond to the thief's plea?

II. THE SAVIOUR'S RESPONSE. God's Grant of Salvation *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise."* Luke 23:43

Jesus did more than the thief expected. Jesus not only remembered the thief, but Jesus promised to take him into the very gardens of Paradise to be Jesus' companion for ever! How wonderfully Jesus responds to the penitent heart! The very life of God becomes the possession of the true believer who trusts Christ alone for salvation.

Jesus' words show that the soul of the believer goes into the very presence of God immediately after physical death.

Said Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." (John 8:51) "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:26)

"Paul knew, as all those early believers knew, that death no longer existed; Jesus Christ had abolished it. We may search our New Testaments in vain for any of the gloomy graveyard images, the shadows, the darkness, the pains, the bitterness of death, which still appear in many of our Christian hymns. 'To depart and be with Christ, which is far better', 'to sleep in Christ', to be 'forever with the Lord' - these are the radiant certainties of the New Testament. We need firmly to hold on to the fact that there is no death for the Christian; it has been completely abolished. For the old dark god with his weapons of basic, primitive fear still operates, quite illegitimately, in many Christian hearts. We should allow him no foothold, for he has no right to be there, and he has no real power over us. The glory of Easter is not pious hope that we shall somehow survive after a fear-ridden journey through the 'gloomy portal'. It is a demonstration of undiluted joy. Christ is the one who bore the sin, the darkness, the terror, and the pain. He is the one who 'tasted death for every man.'" (Phillips Good News; pg. 198) Heaven is nearer than we think. Mrs. Joseph Bayley testifies, after

losing 3 children in death, that heaven seems very near to her now. "Only the thinnest of veils separates earth and heaven," she testifies.

Jesus' statement concerning the abolition of death for the believer is altogether New and Significant and filled with Hope and Joy, especially considering the gloomy world of despair and uncertainty of Jesus' day. "Socrates, the most original thinker of his age, after defending himself confidently before the judges who condemned him to death, remarked, 'And now it is time to go, I to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to a better thing is unknown to all but God.'"

"In the century when Christianity was born, the average citizen seemed to have lapsed into despair. Epitaphs on contemporary tombs all too often carry the cynical inscription, 'I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.'"

The story of the thief forever tells us that one can know that heaven is the destiny of the dying saint. A saint, in the Biblical language, is a sinner who has believed in Christ. You can know you are going to heaven (assurance). (John 5:24)

Death means immediate entrance into heaven or hell. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7) For the Christian, to be absent from the body is to present with the Lord. (II Corinthians 5:8) This episode of the thief who went immediately into heaven, forever refutes the theory of 'soul-sleep'.

Further, this story shows that delay in receiving Christ can mean perdition instead of paradise. If the thief would have delayed in repenting and calling upon the Lord, Paradise would NOT have been his destiny.

'Today' is all-important. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3) 'Today' was all-important to that thief. "The morning of that day the malefactor walked the stone floor of his dark dungeon in a tumult of horror - and in the evening of that day he walked the golden street of the City of Light in a tumult of joy." (Dr. Ryle)

We have no guarantee of tomorrow. Our life is subject to change and decay. Death is a respecter of no man. The old must die, and the young may die. To be ready to die, is to be ready to truly live. 'Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.' Do not delay. To delay in accepting Christ could mean perdition rather than Paradise. "Now ...it is high time to awake out of sleep." (Romans 13:11). The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Act upon your

good intentions NOW. Turn, repent, and start following the Christ. "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." Procrastination is Satan's Biggest weapon.

"Now is a word that wisdom proclaims. O backslider, look to the Lord now - and ask for his healing forgiveness. O unenlisted Christian, step into the ranks now - and `endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' O undedicated Christian, having only that `shallow stream of piety', place your all at Jesus' disposal now. O unsaved one, come to Him now! Act as though today were the decision hour of human history for you." (Lee)

The early Methodist preachers were called the `NOW' Preachers. They called for a decision NOW! Notes William Sangster: "...Listen! God's forgiveness is now. Now! Isn't that a wonderful announcement to make? Years of sin - forgiven in a moment! Is it possible? Is that a credible statement? Does that make sense in a moral universe?

"I do not know whether that makes sense in your idea of a moral universe, but I say that it is the gospel. God's forgiveness is NOW. For Jesus Christ's sake He meets penitence with pardon, and He meets it now.

In wonder lost, with trembling joy  
We take the pardon of our God;  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,  
A pardon bought with Jesus' blood:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?"  
(Daily Readings; pg.2)

"Surely this story of the repentant thief tells us above all things that it is never too late to turn to Christ. There are other things of which we must say, `The time for that is past. I am grown too old for that now! But we can never say that of turning to Jesus Christ. So long as a man's heart beats, the invitation of Christ still stands." (Barclay's Luke; pg.300)

**CONCLUSION:** As long as there is time, there is hope! But to `put off' your salvation could be most dangerous!

Declare your personal helplessness - your moral bankruptcy. Look to Christ as your only source of help and salvation.

## FAITH

### PENITENT THIEF - SAVING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Is it possible for a sinner, if he truly repents of his sins, to be 'saved' (converted to God) even very late in his life? What is your personal feeling about a 'death-bed repentant'? What is meant by the statement: "His soul was saved but his life was lost"? (Note I Corinthians 3:11-15) Will one who has repented late in life receive 'heaven' as his eternal reward, the same as the person who has lived a Christ-centered life for many years? (Matthew 20:1-6)
2. As a prerequisite in coming to God for salvation, a person (like as in the case of the dying thief) must 'Fear God'. What does it mean to 'fear God'?
3. Do you believe that the following statements truly reflect a Biblical understanding of God's holy love: "The wrath of God is the reverse side of the mercy of God, and wrath towards unrepentant sinners is one manifestation of holy love and divine justice. He who spurns God's mercy will reap God's judgment"? (Note 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; Hebrews 10:26-31; Hebrews 12:28,29)
4. Why is it necessary for one to accept personal moral responsibility for his wrongs (sins), before he can be forgiven (converted)? (Luke 23:41)

What does C.S. Lewis say is the modern-day attitudes towards sin, and what does he suggest we do to help awaken a sense of sin in the lives of modern-day people?

5. What are some of the 'scapegoats' which people use today, in an attempt to escape personal moral responsibility for their sins.?
6. Describe the popularly-held Freudian 'theory of guilt', and contrast this view of guilt with that which the Bible teaches. What is the Biblical solution to the problem of guilt? (Note Psalms 32:5)

7. Is it possible for one to become a Christian (believer) without acknowledging and without confessing the deity of Jesus (i.e. Jesus is 'God in human form')? What significance do you attach to the fact that the dying thief recognized that Jesus would soon enter 'His Kingdom' when He died, and the he - the thief - wished to go to be with Jesus in His 'Kingdom'? Was not this a great act of faith on the part of the dying thief - to believe that a crucified one was a 'King' with a heavenly 'Kingdom', when everyone else saw Jesus, at worse, as an executed criminal, and at best, as a dying hero? Is it accurate to say that faith sees beyond the 'apparent' to the 'reality' - beyond the dying Jesus on the cross to the reigning 'Christ of Paradise'?
  
8. According to Mark 2:17 and Romans 5:6 and I Corinthians 6:9-11, for whom did Christ die on the cross? Can those who are proud and self-sufficient be 'saved'? (Note John 9:39-41; Revelation 3:17-18)
  
9. In contrast to exercising true repentance and sincere faith in Jesus alone for salvation, what 'substitutes' are some people resorting to as the objects of their faith for their personal salvation? What is meant by the phrase "Jesus is the 'Helper of the Helpless'"?

Is there anyone too sinful for Jesus to 'save'? (Note Romans 5:6-11, 20-21)

  
10. What is the significance of 'good works', as these relate to 'saving faith', in the life of a sincere believer? (Note Ephesians 2:8-10). If one is not saved by good works, is it nevertheless true to say that one is saved for good works, that good works are the resultant affects of salvation and not the cause of salvation?
  
11. What is the difference between the 'Judgment of Damnation' for sinners, and the 'Judgement of Evaluation' for believers? (Note Matthew 25:31-46; II Thessalonians 1:5-12; I Corinthians 3:10-15; II Corinthians 5:6-10; Revelation 20:11-15).
  
12. What does Jesus promise to the person who truly repents of his sins? (Note Luke 23:43)
  
13. What evidence is there from Scripture to assure a believer that, immediately following his physical death, he will enter heaven, rather than go into a long 'soul-sleep'? (Note Luke 23:43; II Corinthians 5:6-9; Philippians 1:220-24).

14. What are some of the gloomy graveyard images which sincere Christians have mistakenly held in their thinking regarding physical death? Give your interpretation of the following statement by J. B. Phillips: "We need firmly to hold on to the fact that there is no death for the Christian; it has been completely abolished." (Note John 8:51; 11:26; I Corinthians 15:53-57)
  15. Contrast the pessimistic attitudes of the pagans regarding physical death with that picture which is given to us in the New Testament. Is it possible for one to have definite assurance that he is going to heaven when he dies? (Note John 5:24; 14:1-4)
  16. Why is the word 'Today' such an important word, as this word relates to the subject of 'eternal salvation'? (Note Hebrews 2:3; 3:7-19) Tell what is meant by the following statement: "Procrastination is the devil's biggest weapon."
  17. Is it possible that, after spending years in a life of sin, one can be immediately forgiven? Why or why not?
  18. Give your comments on the following statements: "Heaven is nearer to us than we think. Only the thinnest of veils separates earth and heaven."
  19. Tell with what conviction you believe the truth of the following statements: "So long as a man's heart beats, the invitation of Christ still stands. As long as there is time, there is hope."
- Has it been your experience that many Christians, in their efforts to win souls to Christ (personal evangelism), have tended to avoid sharing the Gospel with elderly non-believers (with a subconscious assumption that it is 'too late' and that the elderly are 'too old' to respond to the Gospel appeal)?
20. As a result of studying the account of the dying thief's salvation, do you experience a deeper desire to 'win souls to Christ'? Does not the Bible declare, "He that winneth souls is wise"?

**CHAPTER 33**

**FAITH**

**PHILIPPIAN HERETICS - PERVERTED FAITH**

## FAITH

### PHILIPPIAN HERETICS - PERVERTED FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:1-2; 4-6; 18-19

**TEXT:** *"That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."* (Philippians 3:9)

**INTRODUCTION:** To exercise a sound faith means that one must avoid the perversions of faith, namely legalism and antinomianism.

#### I. THE WAY OF LEGALISM ('Living By Rules') (verse 2)

- A. Paul's Derision of Legalism
  - 1. Paul called these Jews 'Dogs'.
  - 2. Paul called these Jews 'Evil Workers'.
  - 3. Paul called these Jews 'Mutilators of the Flesh'.
- B. Paul's Description of Legalism
  - 1. The way of legalism is the way of futility because of its exclusive focus on Externalism.
  - 2. The way of legalism is the way of futility because of its emphasis on Traditionalism.

#### II. THE WAY OF ANTINOMIANISM ('Living Without Rules')

- A. Definition of Antinomianism
- B. Description of Antinomianism
  - 1. Antinomians are Enemies of the Cross of Christ (verse 18).
  - 2. Antinomians are self-indulgent.
  - 3. Antinomians are earthly-minded, instead of heavenly-minded.
  - 4. The future of antinomians is eternal loss.

**CONCLUSION:** The way of legalism and the way of antinomianism are both perversions of true faith. We can't be saved by works, but it is also true to say that a saving faith is a working faith. Faith without works is dead. The faith that saves is the faith that not only imputes a man as righteous, but it is also a faith that imparts the righteousness of Christ to the repentant sinner. We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The way of faith (in contrast to the way of legalism and the way of antinomianism) is the way of love. Wrote Paul, "Pay all your debts except the debt of love for others - never finish paying that! For if you love them, you will be obeying all of God's laws, fulfilling all his requirements." (Romans 13:8, Living Bible)

## FAITH

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**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:1-2; 4-6; 18-19

**TEXT:** *"That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."* (Philippians 3:9)

**INTRODUCTION:** A good shepherd has many good qualities - one of which is guarding his sheep against the wolves. Paul was filled with joy as he thought of his beloved people in the church at Philippi, but, while joy was the predominant emphasis in his love letter to the Philippians believers, there is also a note of concern and caution that can be felt when one carefully reads the Book of Philippians. Paul was a man of love whose joy and delight in the Philippians is perhaps unmatched. But Paul was also a man whose mind could be troubled and whose emotions could be disturbed with great anger when dangerous wolves were attempting to destroy his sheep - his friends and parishioners! In contrast to the tender mood of love and affection which is felt in chapter one and two, Paul, in the first part of chapter three, blazes out in righteous anger against false teachers who apparently had crept into the warm fellowship of the Philippian church, seeking to lead the believers astray by their perverted teachings on the subject of faith.

Paul warns, *"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh."* (Philippians 3:2) This is a warning against the false teaching of legalism. Later in the chapter he writes, *"For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."* (Philippians 3:18-19) This is a warning against the false teaching of antinomianism. Legalism is living by rules, and believing that by doing so, one is gaining a right standing with God. Antinomianism is living without rules, and is based on the belief that one's practice of sinning makes no difference to the all-forgiving grace of God. Legalists debase grace by mixing works with it; antinomians pervert grace by divorcing it from behavior. Both legalism and antinomianism are perversions of true faith and lead to spiritual death!

It is important to understand the delightful participation in faith (verses 7-11), the diligent performance of faith (verses 12-17), and the definite and ultimate perfection through faith

(verses 20-21), but before we look at these various dimensions of a Biblical faith, we must first take note of the destructive perversions of faith (verses 1-2; 4-6; 18-19).

**PROPOSITION:** To exercise a sound faith means that one must avoid the perversions of faith, namely legalism and antinomianism.

## I. THE WAY OF LEGALISM ('Living By Rules') (verse 2)

### A. PAUL'S DERISION OF LEGALISM

Philippians 3:2 describes, as well as derides, the way of legalism. Those whom Paul severely derides in Philippians 3:2 are those who believed that, in order for one to be accepted by God, he must first become a Jew and accept the mark of the Jewish identity which was circumcision.

Notes Barclay, "It was the teaching of these Jews that, if a man wished to be saved he must earn credit in the sight of God by countless deeds of the law, that he must build up a credit balance in the sight of God, that he must put God in his debt by continuously carrying out these deeds of the law. Further, it was the teaching of these Jews that salvation belongs to the Jews and to no one else, and that, before God has any use for a man, the man must be circumcised and must, as it were, become a Jew." (Barclay's Philippians; page 66)

#### 1. Paul called these Jews 'dogs'

"Paul says to them, 'In your proud self-righteousness, you call other men dogs; in your nationalistic pride in being a Jew, you call other nations dogs; it is you yourselves who are dogs, because you shamelessly pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ.'" (Ibid; page 67)

#### 2. Paul called these Jews 'evil workers'

They were workers of evil instead of workers of good, for the acceptance by men of their ideas led to spiritual bondage, not to spiritual freedom and life. They taught that only by keeping the Old Testament laws of God could one be accepted by God. "The effect of their teaching was to take man further away from God instead of to bring men nearer to God." (Barclay; page 68)

The way of law is the way of uncertainty. In attempting to achieve God's favor through mere human effort and attainments, there is always uncertainty as to how much more one needs to do to be accepted by God. One tends to think, "Perhaps a little more effort and work will gain God's favor and put me in good standing with God". Such

attitudes of the mind and labors of the hand, lead to stress, strain, anxiety, and misery. Simply recall Martin Luther's agony of soul when he tried to earn God's favor by religious labors and performance. However, in contrast to the 'Way of Law', the 'Way of Faith' is simply the acceptance of God's free forgiveness and loving favor (grace), and is not based upon human performance and achievement. It has nothing to do with seeking to appease an angry God or seeking to out balance one's bad works with good works. The way of faith leads to quiet confidence and rest in God.

The way of law is the way of fear. The way of law is the way of works. The more one focuses upon works, the more one focuses upon law. The law then becomes the focus of attention and the standard for harsh judgment. Fear becomes the motivation for behavior. Performance of good works to avoid God's judgment becomes the goal of life. However, the way of faith is the way of grace. The more one focuses upon faith, the more one focuses upon grace. God's love then becomes the focus of attention and the standard for merciful evaluation. Love becomes the motivation for behavior, not fear. Performance of good deeds to express love to God and love for man becomes the goal of life.

The way of law is the way of condemnation. What the law forbids, the sinful heart desires, resulting in condemnation. "It is human nature that when a thing is forbidden it has a tendency to become desirable. 'Stolen fruits are sweetest.' Law, therefore, can actually move a man to desire the very thing which it forbids. The essential complement of law is judgment, and so long as a man lives in a religion whose dominant thought is law, he cannot see himself as anything other than a condemned criminal at the bar of God's justice." (Barclay's Romans; page 69)

### 3. Paul called these Jews 'Mutilators of the Flesh.'

These Jews who were perverting the way of Faith were legalists. They were more concerned in the symbols of religion than in the reality of a personal relationship with God. "They regarded circumcision in itself as being enough to set them apart specially for God. They regarded this merely physical badge as making them belong to God, and making everything else unnecessary...So what Paul says is, 'If you have nothing to show but circumcision of the flesh, if all you have is a physical

mark, then you are not really circumcised - you are only mutilated. For real circumcision is devotion of heart and mind and thought and life to God.'" (Barclay's Philippians; page 69)

#### B. PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF LEGALISM (verses 4-7)

It is interesting how Paul describes the characteristics of the legalistic life-style. He points out the features of the legalistic life-style, and shows at the same time the futility of such a life-style - by declaring his own utter failure as a rigid and legalistic Jew, before he became a Christian. "Yet if anyone ever had reason to hope that he could save himself, it would be I. If others could be saved by what they are, certainly I could! For I went through the Jewish initiation ceremony when I was eight years old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish home that was a branch of the old original Benjamin family. So I was a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees who demand the strictest obedience to every Jewish law and custom. And sincere? Yes, so much so that I greatly persecuted the church; and I tried to obey every Jewish rule and regulation right down to the very last point." (Philippians 3:4-7, Living Bible)

Humanly speaking, Paul, as a devout Jew, had a long list of outstanding credentials - hereditary and religious and moral credentials - but he declares that none of his legalistic attempts to gain a right standing with God were successful. He had to count all of his human attainments as utter loss, in order that he might gain Christ!

Take a closer look at Paul's life in legalism, before he found Christ through faith alone.

##### 1. The way of legalism is the way of futility because of its exclusive focus on Externalism.

Outward religious performance becomes the standard for righteousness rather than inward relationship with God. In the case of these Jews, the fact that one had received the physical mark of circumcision in the flesh proved that one was acceptable to God. There are still those today who depend on religious performance to bring them acceptance by God. There are still those who believe that outward performance of religious activities and duties will bring them favor from God. Reading so many chapters in the Bible daily, or saying so many prayers, or doing so many good deeds, or knocking on so many doors (Jehovah's Witnesses), or being baptized, etc. - these activities are looked at as the MEANS of one's acceptance by God rather than as RESULTS of one's love response to

God for His salvation. Legalism focuses on one's outward performance rather than upon the internal condition of one's heart.

2. The way of legalism is the way of futility because of its emphasis on Traditionalism.

Tradition, in and of itself, is not necessarily bad. The past is to be cherished, and lessons from the past can be beneficially applied to the present day situations. But Paul, as a legalist before he became a Christian, trusted in his past heredity and heritage exclusively as the means by which he gained a right standing with God.

Advantages In His Heredity:

a. "Circumcised on the eighth day" (verse 5) - "Here he stresses the fact that he had been born into the Jewish faith, and had known its privileges and had observed its ceremonies since his birth." (Barclay; page 72)

b. "Of the people of Israel" (verse 5) - "By calling himself an Israelite, Paul stressed the absolute purity of his race and his descent." (Barclay; page 72)

c. "Of the tribe of Benjamin" (verse 5) - "Paul stated that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, it was a claim that he was not simply an Israelite, but he also belonged to the highest aristocracy of Israel." (Barclay; page 73)

Advantages In His Heritage and Personal Attainments:

d. "A Hebrew of Hebrews" (verse 5) - "Paul claims, not only to be a pure-blooded Jew, but to be a Jew who still spoke the Hebrew tongue." (page 74)

e. "In regard to the law, a Pharisee" (verse 5) - "It is Paul's claim that not only was he a Jew who had retained his ancestral religion, but he had also devoted his whole life to the most rigorous and unbending observance of it. No man knew better from personal experience (as a Pharisee) what Jewish religion was at its highest and most demanding peak." (page 74)

f. "As for zeal, persecuting the church" (verse 6) "It is Paul's claim that he knew Judaism at its most intense and even fanatical heat." (page 75)

g. "As for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (verse 6) "Paul claims that there was no demand of the Law which he did not fulfill. As far as the Law went, he was beyond criticism." (page 75)

There are still those today who, in a limited degree at least, are like Paul before he became a Christian. Some depend on their birth into a Christian home as their 'passport' to heaven. Some unconsciously, if not consciously, believe that the fact that they are an American gives them a special and favorite place in God's evaluation. Because they believe in democracy and freedom and justice and equality - American ideals - they think that they are 'Christian' automatically. Some, like Paul, stress the absolute purity of their race or of their special and unique descent, or of their elite aristocratic ancestry, believing that such an heredity brings them special treatment from God.

There are others who depend upon their own achievements as worthy credentials to present to God in order to earn His acceptance. Religious achievements, or moral and social achievements, or educational and cultural and professional achievements. There are those yet who mistakenly think that certain things will save them, such as morality, religion, baptism, church membership, culture, natural birth, charitable deeds, or mere sincerity.

But after Paul lists all of the credentials which he took pride in while he was striving to please God through his legalistic life-style, he declares: *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him."* (Philippians 3:7-8)

The way of legalism - i.e., the way of externalism and traditionalism and human achievement - is the way to ultimate and total loss!

## II. THE WAY OF ANTINOMIANISM (LIVING WITHOUT RULES')

### A. Definition of Antinomianism

If the way of legalism is a perversion of true faith, the way of Antinomianism is also a perversion of true faith. If

legalism is "living by rules", Antinomianism is "living without rules". These ways are two opposite and extreme ways to live - both of which lead to eternal death!

What is the way of Antinomianism? Philippians 3:18-19 describes this futile way of life. *"For I have told you often before, and I say it again now with tears in my eyes, there are many who walk along the Christian road who are really enemies of the cross of Christ. Their future is eternal loss, for their god is their appetite: they are proud of what they should be ashamed of; and all they think about is this life here on earth."* (Living Bible)

Here is the same scripture in Phillips' translation: *"For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, whose lives make them enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction - their god is their own appetite, they glory in their shame, and this world is the limit of their horizon."* (Phillips)

Legalists "debase grace by mixing works with it; the (antinomians) pervert grace by divorcing it from behavior." (Paul Rees)

Legalists are those who fall into the folly and futility of salvation by works, and the antinomians are those who, on the opposite end of the continuum, fall into the folly and futility of professing a salvation which makes light of works, resulting in them ending up in a state of lawlessness and anarchy.

Antinomians are those who want liberty without restraint, privileges without responsibilities, and grace without law. "The antinomians were those who denied that there was any law at all in the Christian Life. They declared that they were within the grace of God, and that, therefore, it did not matter what they did; God would forgive; they were quite safe; no further discipline and no further effort were necessary...There were those who distorted the principle of Christian liberty. They said that in Christianity all law was gone, that the Christian had perfect liberty to do what he likes. In other words, they turned Christian liberty into unchristian license, and gloried in giving their lusts and passions full play. There were those who distorted the Christian doctrine of grace. they said that grace was wide enough to cover every sin and stain; that the love of God was great enough to forgive any sin; therefore, let a man sin as he liked and not worry; it would make no difference to the all-forgiving grace of God." (Barclay's Philippians; pages 83, 85)

## B. Description of Antinomianism

### 1. Antinomians are Enemies of the Cross of Christ (verse 18)

Antinomians don't realize the seriousness of sin and the high cost to God to forgive sins through the bloody death of Christ on the cross. Anyone who 'trades' on the mercy of God treats the cross lightly - and therefore is an enemy of the Cross of Christ!

### 2. Antinomians are self-indulgent.

They live to gratify the desires of their flesh, with no desire to sacrifice for others or for Christ. They are very self-centered, food and pleasure are their gods! Of such people, Jude wrote, "When these men join you at the love feasts of the church, they are evil smears among you, laughing and carrying on, gorging and stuffing themselves without a thought for others." (Jude 12a)

### 3. Antinomians are earthly-minded, instead of heavenly minded.

They have a wrong set of values. They value the material instead of the spiritual. They live only for the world of time instead of the world of eternity. They are spiritually short-sighted, and pleasure-obsessed! The accumulation of things preoccupies their sole attention!

### 4. The future of antinomians is eternal loss.

Why? Because antinomians make light of sin and practice sinning against God. They thoughtlessly break God's laws. The Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23) Wrote Jude, "*Some godless teachers have wormed their way in among you, saying that after we become Christians we can do just as we like without fear of God's punishment. The fate of such people was written long ago, for they have turned against our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ...They are not only dead, but doubly dead, for they have been pulled out roots and all, to be burned...Ahead of them is the everlasting gloom and darkness that God has prepared for them.*" (Jude 4,12b,13b)

Paul encountered the problem of antinomianism in Romans 6:1. Said Paul to the antinomians: "*Well then, shall we keep on sinning so that God can keep on showing us more and more kindness and forgiveness?*" (Romans 6:1, Living Bible)

Some antinomians might be heard to say this: "If I sin, so what! I am a Christian! I am saved by grace and grace alone. The degree of my sinning in no way affects my relationship with Christ. If I once was saved, I am always saved, regardless of my sinning. Grace covers all my sins. Did not Paul write, *'Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds!'*?"

Such reasoning - the reasoning of an antinomian - is the reasoning of a person who wished to sin and at the same time be guaranteed safety from sin's consequences. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that the reign of grace and the reign of sin are totally incompatible. To be saved by grace is to be saved from sinning! It is utterly absurd to reason as follows: "In light of God's great power to forgive, it is therefore safe - and even virtuous - to sin, for my sinning gives God a chance to exercise His great grace in forgiveness!"

Paul refutes such reasoning: *"Anyone who lightly regards sin, also lightly regards the meaning of union with Christ, and lightly regards the call to holy and righteous living!"* In other words, willful, habitual sinning is a perversion of God's grace! It is a tragedy to presume upon the mercy of God and to pervert the grace of God!

Paul would warn us against a trivial attitude toward sinning - the kind of attitude the antinomians have regarding sinning. Paul would urge us never to take God's grace and mercy for granted! Realize the seriousness of sin, confess it quickly, and turn from it decisively. To engage in willful, habitual sinning is a total perversion of God's grace. To practice sinning is to deny the operation of God's grace in one's life. Paul would agree with John who states that he who is presently practicing sinning is he who is not in a present state of knowing Christ. (I John 3:8)

There are antinomians who are very perfected in their thinking: "The more we sin, the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter, for God will forgive anyway. In fact, we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because it gives the grace of God a chance to operate." The conclusion of such an argument is that sin produces the greatest thing in the world.

To us this type of antinomian reasoning is about like saying (to use a very simple illustration) that it is a good thing for basements of houses to be filled with rain water, for this give a chance for the pumps to show their power in pumping water out of basements!

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to have an accident, for the accident gives the insurance company a chance to prove itself!"

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to have a serious illness, for the illness gives the doctor a chance to prove his medical skills!"

Or it is like saying, "It is a good thing to break a parent's heart, for it gives the parent opportunity to exercise his love and grace in forgiveness!"

### CONCLUSION:

So, the way of legalism and the way of antinomianism are both perversions of true faith. We can't be saved by works, but it is also true to say that a saving faith is a working faith. Faith without works is dead. The faith that saves is the faith that not only imputes a man as righteous, but it is also a faith that imparts the righteousness of Christ to the repentant sinner. We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). Notes Bastian, "Rules do not save us nor keep us saved, but they do offer us guidance in working out our salvation in fear and trembling. However, rules must be put in their rightful place. Mature Christians know you cannot live without rules any more than a truck driver can drive a truck or a manager can operate a store without special regulations. Mature Christians also know that it is folly to try to live by rules. To do so is to court legalism. For the mature Christians it is neither a matter of living without rules nor by rules. The object is to live beyond rules. Here's what this means. Rules help in laying a good foundation for the new life. But rules set down principles which are clear applications of Christian doctrine, and these we readily internalize. They become principles by which we regulate the new life in Christ." (Belonging; page 142; Bastian)

The way of faith (in contrast to the way of legalism and the way of antinomianism) is the way of love. Wrote Paul, "*Pay all your debts except the debt of love for others - never finish paying that! For if you love them, you will be obeying all of God's laws, fulfilling all his requirements.*" (Romans 13:8, Living Bible)

## FAITH

### PHILIPPIAN HERETICS - PERVERTED FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What accounts for the sudden change in Paul's mood as seen in chapter three, as contrasted with Paul's mood in chapters one and two of the book of Philippians?
2. By way of contrast, define and describe the meaning of 'legalism' and 'antinomianism'.
3. In seeking to understand the various dimensions of Biblical faith, list (with the Scripture references) the four aspects of 'faith' as each is described in the third chapter of Philippians.
4. Of whom is Paul speaking when he warns the Philippian believers to "look out for the dogs" (Philippians 2:2)? Describe the beliefs of these heretical teachers which made them and their influence so dangerous in the early Church.

Why do you think Paul was so bold as to choose to call these teachers 'dogs'? What is there about their teachings which justifies Paul calling them 'evil workers'?

5. Why is the way of 'law' the way of uncertainty and total frustration? Why, in contrast to the way of 'law', is the way of 'faith' the way of peace and joy?
6. Why is it true that fear becomes the motivation for behavior in the life of the person who is seeking to gain God's favor through the keeping of laws?
7. Is the performance of good works the means of gaining God's favor, or is the performance of good works the natural expression of one's love for God and for one's fellowmen?
8. Why is condemnation the inevitable consequence which comes to a person who is seeking to gain God's favor through law-keeping?
9. What was, for the legalists, the essence of religion and the mark of their spiritual distinction? Why was Paul justified to angrily call these teachers "Mutilators of the Flesh"? (Philippians 3:2)

10. What are the characteristics in the lives of those whom Paul called "the true circumcision"? (Philippians 3:3)
11. Give modern-day illustrations which demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "Legalism focuses on one's outward performance rather than upon the internal condition of one's heart."
12. List and describe Paul's 'credentials' which, from a legalistic viewpoint, made Paul perhaps the most outstanding Jew of his day.
13. What are some of the 'credentials' which people today point to which they believe make them acceptable to God and worthy of God's special attention and rewards?
14. After Paul became enlightened regarding the way of faith, in contrast to the way of Law, what value did Paul place on his noteworthy accomplishments (Philippians 3:7-8)?
15. Describe in some detail the antinomian's attitude toward God's grace and towards man's sins. Discuss with other students your understanding of the following statement: "Antinomians are those who want liberty without restraint, privileges without responsibilities, freedom without discipline, action without accountability, and grace without law." Can you give modern day examples of those (persons or philosophies) who, as the antinomians in Paul's day, turn Christian liberty into unchristian license?
16. What did Paul mean when he described antinomians as "enemies of the cross of Christ"?
17. Describe what is meant when it is said that antinomians are 'self-indulgent' and 'earthly-minded'.
18. Why is the future of antinomians eternal loss?
19. Is it realistic to say that most (if not all) antinomians wish to sin and at the same time be guaranteed safety from sin's consequences, based upon their perverted understanding of God's grace? (Note Romans 6:1) Is it not a contradiction in terms (and an indication of an antinomian tendency) to talk about "sinning Christians"? What does I John 3:4-10 say about the person who both professes to be a believer and who continues to practice sinning?

20. How would you answer a person who uses the following argument to justify his practice of sinning? - "In light of God's great power to forgive, it is therefore safe - and even virtuous - to sin, for my sinning gives God a chance to exercise His great grace in forgiveness!" (Note Romans 6)
21. What should be the attitude of a sincere believer when he recognizes that he has either deliberately or carelessly committed an act or has entertained an attitude which is definitely wrong and which has incurred guilt?
22. With the use of Scriptures, and by use of common logic and illustrations, how would you refute the arguments of those persons who claim that sinning is 'an excellent thing' because gives the grace of God a chance to operate?
23. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "The faith that saves is the faith that not only imputes a man as righteous, but it is also a faith that imparts the righteousness of Christ to the repentant sinner."
24. According to Ephesians 2:8-10, what is the relationship between 'grace', 'faith', and 'good works'?
25. If legalism (living by rules) and antinomianism (living without rules) neither reflect the proper attitude that one should have regarding rules, what attitude should a mature Christian have regarding rules? What does it mean to "live beyond rules"?
26. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The way of faith is the way of love." Why is the way of love the answer to living a successful Christian life? (Note Romans 13:8)

**CHAPTER 34**

**FAITH**

**THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS - PRACTICAL FAITH**

## FAITH

### THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS - PRACTICAL FAITH

#### O U T L I N E:

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12

INTRODUCTION: *"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."* (I Thessalonians 4:1-2)

In I Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:12, Paul states what the principle of holiness is, declares what the power of holiness does, and describes what the practice of holiness means.

PROPOSITION: The life of holiness is a life of love, a life which results in a victorious standing before God in the present and in a fearless acceptance by God in the future. It is a love-filled life which is practically expressed in one's daily life in his home, in the Church, and on his job.

- I. The PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS - Overflowing Love (3:12)
  - A. A Life of Holiness is a life of love.
  - B. Growth in Holiness is a growth in love.
  
- II. The POWER OF HOLINESS (3:13)
  - A. Blameless Standing Before God At The Present.
  - B. Specific Ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)
    - (1) In the Home - Moral Purity (4:3-8)
    - (2) In the Christian Fellowship (Church) - Growing Love (4:9-10)
    - (3) On the Job - Diligent Labor (4:11-12)

CONCLUSION: Are you pursuing holiness of heart and life? Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal? Faith in God is practical - very practical!

## FAITH

### THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS - PRACTICAL FAITH

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12

INTRODUCTION: *"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."* (I Thessalonians 4:1-2)

'Holiness' is a word that unfortunately scares many people! What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'holiness'? Is it a picture of legalism - a life of 'do's and don'ts'? Is it a picture of a lonely saint in a monastery, closed away from all other humans, nurturing his personal spiritual life? Is it a picture of a person who is joyless, straining to do right and duty-bound in his attempt to make himself worthy before God? What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'holiness'? Is it a picture of a withdrawn and introverted and critical person who feels he is too good to rub shoulders with common sinners - something like the Pharisees who were the 'holier-than-thou' type, who 'look down their nose' on others?

If 'holiness' brings any of these pictures to your mind, then you have a wrong concept of holiness!

In I Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:12, Paul states what the principle of holiness is, declares what the power of holiness does, and describes what the practice of holiness means.

PROPOSITION: The life of holiness is a life of love, a life which results in a victorious standing before God in the present and in a fearless acceptance by God in the future. It is a love-filled life which is practically expressed in one's daily life in his home, in the Church, and on his job.

#### I. The PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS - Overflowing Love (3:12)

Writes Paul, *"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."* (3:12).

##### A. A Life of Holiness is a life of love.

Notes Sangster, "The heart of holiness is supernatural love - and love is a gift. Love is the key to holiness." (Daily Readings; page 53)

Jesus said, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love for another."* This love which is

the very principle and essence of holiness originates in God Himself. Romans 5:5 says that God's type of love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is God's gift to the humble soul; it is not man's proud accomplishment!

The proof that one is a true Christian is seen when the believer is truly loving his fellowmen. A Christian is called to love his fellow believers first. Wrote John, *"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."* (I John 4:19 - 21, NIV)

It is not only fellow Christians that believers are called to love, however. It is also non-believers - and even one's enemies - that Christians are commanded to love. Said Jesus, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:43-45A)

Notes John Wesley, "There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way and putting them upon a false scent." Another time Wesley noted, "Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God." (quoted in A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology; Vol. 1; page 534)

#### B. Growth in Holiness is growth in love.

It is not only the presence of love that is important in the believer's life, but it is growth in love that is all-important! This love, of which we have been speaking, "is God's own gift to totally committed children of His, who, renouncing self-pleasing and men-pleasing, are imbued with a passionate eagerness to please Him (God) in all things." (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 61; Paul Rees)

The love of God which is initially shed abroad in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit is the same love which can abound more and more in the heart of the believer. Notes J.A. Wood, "Perfection in quality does not exclude increase in quantity. Beyond entire sanctification there is no increase in purity, as that which is pure cannot be more than pure; but there may be unlimited increase in expansion and quantity. After love is made perfect, it may abound more and yet more.

Holiness in the entirely sanctified soul is exclusive, and is perfect in kind or in quality, but is limited in degree or quantity. The capacities of the soul are expansive and progressive, and holiness in measure can increase corresponding to increasing capacity. Faith, love, humility, and patience, may be perfect in kind, and yet increase in volume and power, or in measure harmonizing with increasing capacity. A tree may be perfectly sound, healthy, and vigorous in its branches, leaves, and fruit, and yet year by year increase perpetually its capacity and fruitfulness." (Perfect Love, page 29)

## II. The POWER OF HOLINESS (3:13)

Paul continues, "*May he give you inner strength that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*" (3:13)

The essence of holiness is love. Love is a gift which God gives to the sincere soul who surrenders all to Christ. This imparted love grows steadily as the believer walks in faith and obedience, and as he learns to exercise this love within his human relationships - with both believers and with non-believers.

### A. Blameless Standing Before God At The Present

This God-imparted love is powerful, for this love enables a believer presently to stand before God without guilt and without condemnation, and this love also enables a believer to face the future without fear when "*Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*" (3:13)

The man who is made perfect in love has no alloy in his love for God. He is 'blameless' before God, i.e., he is without blemish or pollution or taint. His love is unmixed and pure. His love is fixed on God alone. There is no room in his heart for any less affection than affection for God alone. His whole heart is the home for God. God occupies every room. There is a constant preference for God, even in times when God's leadership is difficult to discern or to follow. What does it mean to be 'blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father' (verse 13)? It means that one loves God with all of his heart, his soul, his strength, and his mind. To love God in this way is to love Him, despite the cost in personal sacrifice or loss. The 'blameless and holy one' has a supreme preference for God at all times. He is not double-minded, trying to serve the interests of both God and sin at the same time. Love that is perfect is love that prefers God at all times - in times of loss or gain, sorrow or joy, success or failure, sickness or health.

The one who loves God wholeheartedly is the one who gains inner strength to successfully live the Christian life, moment by moment. A love-filled man is in a right standing with God, and he has confidence that he is truly born again. Wrote John, "*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*" (I John 4:7-8, NIV)

#### B. Fearless Acceptance By God At Christ's Coming.

The believer who practices love is the believer who has no fear of facing God in the end! The one whose love is increasing and overflowing for his fellowmen is the one who has no reason to be terrorized when Christ comes back to earth with his holy angels to judge the world of evil men!

He who loves God deeply and who believes that God loves him unconditionally and sacrificially, is the one who is guaranteed a safe entry into heaven following physical death! The one who is deeply in love with God has no reason for terrorizing fear in the future. Wrote John, "*We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us. So you see, our love for him comes as a result of his loving us first.*" (I John 4:18,19; Living Bible)

### III. The PRACTICE OF HOLINESS (4:1-12)

We have seen what the principle of holiness is. It is overflowing love to each other. We have noted what the power of holiness accomplishes - a blameless standing before God at the present, and a fearless acceptance by God in the future "*when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*" (3:13)

Now we must look at Paul's description of a holy life - the practice of holiness. (4:1-12)

#### A. General Exhortations To Holy Living (4:1-2)

Before Paul turns specifically to a description of the ethics of a holy lifestyle (4:3-12), Paul gives a general exhortation to the young Thessalonians believers to live a holy life. "*Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*" (4:1-2)

There is a lifestyle that is pleasing to God, and there is a lifestyle that is displeasing to God. Make no mistake about this: There is a right way and there is a wrong way to live, there is a high road that leads to heaven and there is a low road that leads to hell, there is a Christ-centered lifestyle and there is a self-centered lifestyle, there is the way of the flesh and there is the way of the spirit, there is a God-pleasing way of life and there is a Satan-dominated way of life.

It was Paul's responsibility - and it is the responsibility of every spiritual leader today - to instruct those who wish to become Christians and those who have just become Christians "*how to live in order to please God.*" (verse 1) Are you, as a leader, in the process of helping to initiate others in the ways of holy living? Are you teaching others - by example and by precept - what it means to follow Christ, what it means to shun evil, what is involved in doing the works of righteousness and mercy and love?

Paul was a good instructor in the ways of holy living, for his new converts at Thessalonica had received his instructions and they were (at the time he wrote to them) practicing holy living. Not perfectly and not for a long period of time, but nevertheless authentically they were living for Christ! These young believers recognized that Paul's instructions to them were given with no less authority than the very authority of the Lord Jesus. "*You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*" (verse 2)

When we are instructing young believers, we must be most careful not to give them merely our own ideas or opinions or notions or personal convictions, based on our own human experience and views. We must point young converts to God's revealed truth. We must carefully interpret and apply God's eternal truths to the personal lives of the believers whom we are instructing and nurturing and guiding. Our instructions for holy living must have the backing of nothing less and nothing other than the authority of Jesus Christ Himself.

It is important not to impose our personal convictions upon the lives of young believers. We must always make a distinction in our teaching ministry between our personal opinions and interpretations and convictions and experience on one hand, and the simple, direct teachings of God's eternal Word on the other hand.

The non-negotiable truths of God's Word are to be presented by the disciple-maker to the new Christian, with the authority that God Himself grants. However, the personally-interpreted

convictions of the disciple-maker must be tolerantly offered to the new believer for his careful consideration without the pressure of dogmatism or coercion.

Unfortunately, there have been some sincere Christian teachers who have, in the 'name of holiness', instructed some new believers to do certain things and not to do some other things - to dress in a certain way, to adopt a certain lifestyle or to develop a certain manner of speaking or of acting - all of which were more the ways of the disciple-maker than necessarily the ways of God. There is a place for flexibility and tolerance, and, as teachers and spiritual leaders, we must always distinguish between 'Thus saith the Lord' and 'This is my personal interpretation and personal standards and convictions'. We must not tamper with God's eternal Word, but, on the other hand, we must not dogmatically impose our own personal opinions upon others. We must leave room for differences of convictions among sincere Christians.

Notes Barclay, "The church is an empire in which all kinds of opinions and all kinds of theologies can find a place. We have a tendency to brand as a heretic anyone who does not think as we do. John Wesley was the greatest example of tolerance in the world. 'We think', he said, 'and we let think.' 'I have no more right,' he said, 'to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair.' Wesley had one greeting, 'Is thy heart as my heart? Then give me thy hand!' It is good for a man to have the assurance that he is right, but that is no reason why he should have the conviction that everyone else is wrong." (Barclay's Mark; page 110,111)

Getting back to Paul (in I Thessalonians 4:1-2), Paul's clearly-presented and gladly-accepted instructions resulted in the Thessalonian believers living a holy lifestyle. Paul now exhorts them to continue to grow in their love for God and for others - to live this holy life 'more and more'. "Their love for one another and for all men, and their obedience to God, should become even more dedicated, more detailed, deeper. More spiritual victories must be won. They must become ever more sensitive to the demands of the divine will." (Ronald Ward; page 94)

Before one looks specifically at the areas which are involved in the practice of the life of holiness (4:3-12), he must first have the right attitude regarding the holy lifestyle. It is a life of God-pleasing, a life that is lived by God-given instructions, a life that has unlimited possibilities for growth in love for God and for one's fellowmen.

When one understands the unlimited possibilities of growth in holiness, and after one makes a general commitment to 'Christianize' his lifestyle in his pursuit of holiness, then it is relatively easy to make specific applications of God's general instructions for holy living.

B. Specific ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)

1. In The Home - Moral Purity (4:3-8)

Holy living encompasses all of life, but perhaps the best place to begin in a consideration of the practical lifestyle of holiness is the home, and specifically in the area of moral purity.

In an age where immorality was rampant and where women were treated as things to own and as objects to enjoy sexually, Paul focused on the standards of moral purity as an essential characteristic of a holy lifestyle. "Immorality was a way of life in Thessalonica. Women were held in low esteem and the family had little permanence." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 74)

A life of holiness is always a life of moral purity. "Echoing his Master, Paul elevated women, admonished sexual purity, taught the sacredness of marriage, and encouraged new reverence for the family. The Christians were to be distinctly different, Christ-guided, holy people." (Ogilvie; Ibid; page 74,75)

(a) A life of moral purity means that one is to avoid sexual immorality. (Note 1 Thessalonians 4:3). This means that sex is to be reserved for marriage, and for marriage only. There is to be no heterosexual sex before marriage or outside of marriage. There is, of course, to be no homosexual relationships at any time.

"Holiness affects the body as well as the mind or soul. This derives from the Christian doctrine of personality. Man is not a soul living in a body - so that what happens to the body is of no consequence; man is an animated body. Body and soul form a unity." (Ronald Ward; Commentary; page 95)

Says Millard Sall, Christian psychologist, "The modern 'free love' philosophy that states that 'any act is all right as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else' is false. Immoral acts always hurt someone else besides hurting the person who commits them, although he might not recognize it at the time. A perfect example is that of Sally and Mike:

'We love each other; we want to express that love sexually; nobody else is being hurt, so why shouldn't we go ahead?' said a young man of nineteen to his girl friend. A few months later Sally came to my office broken and confused. She said that Mike and she had engaged in sex relations and at the time she could not see how anybody could be hurt. She had thought that the idea had just been a carry over from her Puritan past. 'Now' she said, 'I am beginning to see it differently. As soon as Mike got what he wanted, he no longer seemed to be interested in marrying me. I also began to become confused as to my feeling about him. Did I really love him for himself or were we just using each other? Another thing that bothers me now is whether I could trust Mike to be faithful to me after we were married. I never thought I would be guilty about this, but now that I have done it I can see I really am. I'm terribly upset.'

The effect of these acts may not show up immediately, but the disintegration of the person's self-image and character occur eventually." (Faith, Psychology and Christian Maturity; page 43)

God created sex to be enjoyed within the sacred confines of marriage, not to be abused outside of marriage. Sex is a mighty dynamo - either to create endlessly or to destroy totally. We must allow the Creator of our urges to control and to cleanse those drives.

(b) A life of moral purity means that a husband controls his own body and that he honors the body of his wife - not as an object of lust but as an expression of her God-given self which is to be cherished, not exploited. I Thessalonians 4:4,5 is translated differently by different translators. Here is the NIV translation: *"that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."* This means (according to this translation) that the husband is not to allow his sexual drives to gain control of his reason - even within the context of marriage - and that he is to be a love-filled man instead of a lust-filled man when he is involved in the sexual act with his wife. There is however, a strong prohibition against allowing legitimate sexual drives to obscure reason. It is possible for the desires of the body to overcome the reason of the mind - and when this happens, the wife can become an object to be selfishly used rather than a subject to be enjoyed and loved and cherished.

"Scholars have been divided as to whether it here means the husband's 'body' or his 'wife'." (Ronald Ward; page 96) Perhaps the better translation is as follows: *"Each of you men should know how to take a wife in a holy and honorable way, not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God."* (Today's English Version) The heathen of Paul's day considered women as objects of pleasure to be used and abused at will. "Demonthenes expressed the belief of many: 'We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our home.'" (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 74)

Within the context of marriage, the Christian husband is not to abuse his wife sexually. "Paul was suggesting that in marital cohabitation the husband must constantly woo his wife and in a manner which honors her and does not treat her as the object of mere lust." (Ronald Ward; page 96) The husband must think as much - if not more - about his wife's sexual needs as he does of his own needs. He must never forget that, just as he is to control his own body, so he is also, at the same time, to honor his wife by treating her tenderly and by recognizing that her body is a 'vessel' which belongs first to God and only secondarily to him as the husband.

It is true, according to I Corinthians 7:3-5, that the Christian husband and wife each has mutual rights - sexually - but these rights must always be exercised with mutual respect for each other and with proper restraints. These 'rights' must be exercised with the restraint which love at times requires, rather than with the uncontrolled compulsion which lust always demands!

(c) A life of moral purity means that an individual maintains purity of mind and purity of relationships in regards to persons of the opposite sex. Adulterous relationships are strictly prohibited! Note I Thessalonians 4:6 (Living Bible) *"And this also is God's will: that you never cheat in this matter by taking another man's wife, because the Lord will punish you terribly for this, as we have solemnly told you before."*

In an age that declares that the Ten Commandments are irrelevant and outdated, we need to hear again the message of God's Word" *"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"* Paul wrote in I Corinthians 6:18-20, *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?"*

*You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*" (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

How does the Lord punish the adulterer? In many ways! Sin pays its own wages, as evidenced, among other ways, by the devastating physical affects which a promiscuous lifestyle has on the human body. Notice the various ways in which the adulterer is punished, according to Proverbs 5.

(d) *A life of moral purity means obedience to God's rules for holy living which brings honor to the Holy Spirit who lives within you.* (verses 7-8).

The God who has given the Holy Spirit to live within the hearts of all true believers is the God who has called us to live holy lives! The Holy Spirit has come to produce a holy people. What is the motivation to live a holy and a pure life? A desire to please God and a longing to honor the Holy Spirit. Every word we speak, every thought we think, every attitude we express, every desire we feel, every decision we make - all of these things must bring honor to the Holy Spirit! Wrote Paul to the Ephesians, *"Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better. Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature."* (Ephesians 4:23-24; Living Bible) We must not cause the Holy Spirit embarrassment by the way we live!

To reject this call to a holy life is not to reject the call of men, but it is to reject the very call of God! A holy life is not an option for a Christian! It is a divine requirement! The rules for holy living are God-established rules, not man-originated rules. The God who made man is the God who prescribes rules for man's moral and spiritual health and welfare. To obey God's rules is to enjoy health and wholeness and sanity and happiness! None of God's rules is to enjoy health and wholeness and sanity and happiness! None of God's rules for holy living are unreasonable. To obey God's rules is to fulfill one's own best interests - for man is made by God and for God. The way of obedience is the way of freedom and fulfillment! The way of disobedience - doing that which is right in your own eyes, with no regard for God's established moral order - is the way of moral disaster and spiritual destruction. Let no one take lightly the rules for holy living, for to reject these rules is to reject God Himself.

In summarizing the ethics of holy living as these apply in the home, we can say that moral purity means (1) avoidance of all sexual immorality (verse 3), (2) choosing a wife in holiness, not in lust (verses 4-5), (3) never taking another man's wife (adultery), for God will terribly punish the one who disobeys this God-given rule (verse 6), (4) obeying God's rules for holy living, and thus honoring the Holy Spirit who lives within you (verses 7,8).

## 2. In The Christian Fellowship (Church) - Growing Love (4:9-10)

Paul continues to make specific applications of the ethics of holy living, next within the context of the Christian fellowship (or the Church). *"But concerning the pure brotherly love that there should be among God's people. I don't need to say very much, I'm sure! For God himself is teaching you to love one another. Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christian brothers throughout your whole nation. Even so, dear friends, we beg you to love them more and more."* (verses 9-10; Living Bible)

Growth in holiness means growth in upward adoration towards God, growth in inward humility towards yourself, and growth in outward love for your fellowmen.

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that they might grow more and more in their capacity of love. *"And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love."* (Ephesians 3:17; Living Bible) There is opportunity for unlimited growth in love toward our fellowmen, as reflected in the following exhortation by William Law: *"Let every day be a day of humility; condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind."*

You can experience heart purity immediately at the time you surrender your all to Christ, in faith, but you can only experience life maturity to the extent that you grow daily in your capacity to love. Remember, there is no greater joy known to mankind than the 'joy of becoming' - the joy of becoming more loving and loveable, and thus becoming more Christlike!

### 3. On The Job - Diligent Labor (4:11,12)

The life of holiness is a life of abounding love, lived out in the practical areas of the home, in the church, and on the job. I Thessalonians 4:11-12 talks about the practical manifestations of holiness in one's daily life.

(a) Practical holiness means leading a quiet life (verse 11). Leading a quiet life does not mean withdrawing passively from life's activities and duties or from association with people. Christians are to be aggressive in striving to reach God-honoring goals and Christians are to be totally involved in their ministry to hurting people. Jesus actively went about doing good while he ministered on earth. Leading a quiet life means leading a life which is free from needless distractions which keep a believer from fulfilling his God-given goals or mission in life. Believers are to be free from needless busy work and from the clutter of meaningless activities, activities which drain them from productive service in God's vineyard. Also, leading a quiet life means freedom from a bad conscience, caused by deliberate wrong doing. To have a clear conscience, as a result of living carefully and prayerfully and obediently, is to have a conscience that allows a believer to live a restful and quiet life.

Freedom from clutter, freedom from a bad conscience. Third, living a quiet life means minding your own business. The man who lives a quiet life is a man who does not 'butt into other people's business' with a desire to control others or with a desire to gossip about others. A man who lives a quiet life is a man who minds his own business and who preoccupies his time and thoughts in the performance of his own God-given tasks. He is not a busybody or an idler who meddles in other people's affairs. There were some lazy, gossiping-type people - professing Christians - at Thessalonica. Note what Paul says in II Thessalonians 3:11-12. *"We hear that some of you are living in laziness, refusing to work, and wasting your time in gossiping. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we appeal to such people - we command them - to quiet down, get to work, and earn their own living."* (Living Bible)

(b) Practical holiness means living an exemplary lifestyle before all believers - a life of diligent labor. What is one of the best advertisements for Christianity? A host of godly people who work diligently on their jobs, working as to the Lord and not simply to please their employers. Wrote Paul to the day-laborers in the Ephesian Church (most of whom were slaves serving

a master): *"Slaves, obey your masters; be eager to give them your very best. Serve them as you would Christ. Don't work hard only when your master is watching and then shirk when he isn't looking; work hard and with gladness all the time, as though working for Christ, doing the will of God with all your hearts."* (Ephesians 6:6,7; Living Bible)

In our modern-day age when people are wanting higher pay, shorter work weeks, increased benefits, and easier demands - it is imperative that Christians take seriously God's call to diligent labor on a daily basis on the job. Notes William Barclay, "Work must be done in the memory that God's eye is on them and it must be done to please God. The conviction of the Christian workman is that every single piece of work he produces must be good enough to show to God. The problem that the world has always faced, and that the world is facing acutely today, is not basically an economic problem at all; it is a religious problem. We will never make men good workmen by increasing pay, or bettering conditions, or heightening rewards. It is quite true that it is a Christian duty to see to these things; but they in themselves will never produce good work. Still less will we produce good work by intensifying threats and increasing oversight and multiplying punishments and penalties. The only secret of good workmanship is that is done for God. It is only when a man is taking all his work and showing it to God that work can be good." (Barclay's Ephesians, pages 214,215)

The Christian workman should be the best workman of all. To give your employer a good day's work and to do your work well is to give God an opportunity to witness to the non-Christian employers and fellow employees. A life of holiness means a life of diligent labor, living an exemplary lifestyle before non-believers. "Whereas the readers had been earlier urged to walk in a manner worthy of God, they were now reminded of the impression that the same walk would make on non-Christians." (Ronald Ward; page 102) Wrote Paul to the Romans, *"Be decent and true in everything you do so that all can approve your behavior."* (Romans 13:13; Living Bible)

*"Now here is a command, dear brothers, given in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by his authority: Stay away from any Christian who spends his days in laziness and does not follow the ideal of hard work we set up for you. For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing; we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we*

would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you, firsthand, how you should work for your living. Even while we were still there with you we gave you this rule: 'He who does not work shall not eat.'" (II Thessalonians 3:6-10; Living Bible)

(c) Practical holiness means finding and maintaining a sturdy financial independence. A life of holiness is a life that commands the respect of nonbelievers. It is a life that avoids laziness and which is involved in diligent labors of the hands and of the mind. Due to diligent labors, a life of holiness many times leads eventually to a life of financial prosperity. Don't misunderstand what is being said. We are not saying that living a holy life will always make one a rich person monetarily. There are many holy, yet financially poor, persons in the world - especially in what are called 'Third World' countries. However, diligent labor is meant to produce financial freedom - freedom from the bondage of indebtedness and from the bondage of luxury alike. Financial independence means that you do "not need to depend on others for enough money to pay your bills." (I Thessalonians 4:12b; Living Bible)

A life of holiness is a life that is committed to diligent work, to a simple lifestyle, to generous giving, to the genuinely needy and poor people in the world, and to a life of personal financial freedom from indebtedness. A holy lifestyle is characterized by neither a self-imposed poverty nor a life of selfish luxury. It is neither a life of giving all away nor is it a life of keeping all for one's own selfish indulgence. It means adequately providing for one's own family's needs, living simply, and giving generously.

**CONCLUSION:** We have looked at the life of holiness, as described in I Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:12. Let us quickly summarize what we have studied in this portion of Scripture.

- I. The Principle of Holiness - Overflowing love for each other (3:12)
- II. The Power of Holiness (3:13)
  - (a) Blameless standing before God at the present
  - (b) Fearless acceptance by God at Christ's coming
- III. The Practice of Holiness
  - (a) General Exhortations to Holy Living (4:1-2)
  - (b) Specific Ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)

- (1) In The Home (4:3-8) - Moral Purity
  - a. Avoid Sexual Immorality (verse 3)
  - b. Choose a Wife In Holiness, not in lust (verses 4-5)
  - c. Never take another man's wife, for God will terribly punish the one who disobeys this God-given rule (verse 6)
  - d. Obey God's rules for holy living, and honor the Holy Spirit who lives within you (verses 7-8)
- (2) In The Church (Christian Fellowship) - Growing Love (verses 9-10)
  - a. Established Principle (verse 9)
  - b. Established Practice (verse 10)
  - c. Unlimited Potential (verse 10)
- (3) On The Job - Diligent Labor (verses 11-12)
  - a. Lead a quiet life (verse 11)
  - b. Mind your own business (verse 11)
  - c. Exemplary lifestyle before unbelievers (verse 12)
  - d. Dependence on nobody (verse 12)

Are you pursuing holiness of heart and life? Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal? Faith in God is practical - very practical!

## FAITH

### THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS - PRACTICAL FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'holiness'?
2. What evidence from the Bible can you cite to demonstrate that the essence (or principle) of holiness is 'Love'?
3. What is your response to the following quotation from John Wesley: "Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God"? From whence does this love come, and how can this special love best be described and defined? As they relate to love, describe the difference between heart purity and growing maturity?
4. In terms of moral excellence and spiritual maturity, what does it mean for a believer to be 'blameless' before God?
5. To what extent do you identify with the following statement: "The one who loves God wholeheartedly is the one who gains inner strength to successfully live the Christian life, moment by moment"? (Note John 15:1-17)
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "He who loves God deeply and believes that God loves him unconditionally and sacrificially, is the one who is guaranteed a safe entry into heaven following physical death". Is it possible to have a genuine faith in God without a corresponding practical love for one's fellowman? Why or why not? (Note I John 4:19-21; James 2:14-19)
7. In terms of the life of faith - the life of love in human relationships - how specifically do you believe a believer will practically express such faith? How would you describe the lifestyle that is pleasing to God? What does it mean, practically, to 'shun evil', to be involved in doing the works of righteousness and mercy and love?
8. Does a Christian leader, who is attempting to instruct and to train young believers, have a right to be so bold as to claim "the authority of the Lord Jesus" (I Thessalonians 4:2) in what he says and in what he does in his disciple-making endeavors? Why or why not? What is meant by the statement: "Beware of 'authoritarianism' in Christian leaders"?

9. Is there a danger in Christian leaders imposing their own personal convictions upon the lives of young believers, with a failure to make a distinction in their teaching ministry between mere personal opinions and interpretations and experience on one hand, and the simple and direct teachings of God's eternal Word on the other hand? Can you give an illustration of a sincere Christian imposing his personal convictions upon a young believer, with the result of needlessly (and unbiblically) threatening the personal spiritual liberty and freedom of that young believer? Can you give illustrations of non-negotiable truths of God's Word which must be strongly presented to new believers, in contrast to personally-interpreted and debateable convictions which the disciple-maker must be careful not to impose upon others?
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by William Barclay: "We have a tendency to brand as a heretic anyone who does not think as we do." When is 'tolerance' a virtue and when is it a fault, in defending ideas and in dealing with others who disagree with you?
11. What specifically can believers, who take the advice of I Thessalonians 4:1, do to become more sensitive to the demands of the divine will?
12. Give your response to the following description of a 'holy lifestyle': "A holy lifestyle is a life of God-pleasing, a life that is lived by God-given instructions, a life that has unlimited possibilities for growth in love for God and for one's fellowmen."
13. According to I Thessalonians 4:3-8, what should be the attitude of the person of faith regarding sex and sexual expressions?
14. What are two different ways of interpreting I Thessalonians 4:4,5? What does I Corinthians 7:3-5 teach regarding the sexual life of a Christian couple?
15. According to I Thessalonians 4:6 and I Corinthians 6:18-20, how serious is physical adultery? What did Jesus teach in the 'Sermon On The Mount' regarding adultery (Note Matthew 5:27,28)? How does the Lord punish the adulterer (Read Proverbs 5 in the Living Bible)?
16. According to I Thessalonians 4:7-8, what is the motivation to live a holy and pure life?

17. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements: "The God who made man is the God who prescribes rules for man's moral and spiritual health and welfare. To obey God's rules is to enjoy health and wholeness and sanity and happiness". Can there be any true 'freedom' without moral restraints and without obedience to God's laws?
18. According to I Thessalonians 4:9-10, how is faith practically expressed within the context of the Christian Fellowship (Church)?
19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "You can experience heart purity immediately at the time you surrender your all to Christ, in faith, but you can only experience life maturity to the extent that you grow daily in your capacity to love."
20. Does living a 'quiet life', according to I Thessalonians 4:11, mean withdrawing passively from life's activities and duties and associations with people, and becoming a person of solitude who meditates 'day and night' upon 'spiritual matters'? Why or why not? What, to you, does it mean 'to lead a quiet life' (I Thessalonians 4:11)?
21. Do you believe, according to I Thessalonians 4:11b, that one of the best 'advertisements' for Christianity is a host of godly people who work diligently on their daily jobs, working as to the Lord and not simply to please their employers? (Note Ephesians 6:7,8; II Thessalonians 3:6-15) Is the daily 'work place' probably the best place to demonstrate before a critical world that the Christian Faith is both genuine and practical? Do you believe that the Christian workman should be the best workman of all? Why?
22. Why is it important for a person of faith to find and to maintain a sturdy financial independence (Note I Thessalonians 4:12)? Is it 'praiseworthy' for a person, in the name of 'faith', to 'go out on a limb' to take financial risks to demonstrate to the world that God is a 'miracle-working' God? When is it right for a believer personally or for a Church corporately to go into financial debt 'to advance the cause of the Kingdom of God'? Is waiting for God to supply the finances before one launches into a new 'faith ministry', an indication of a 'lack of faith', or is it an indication of a 'wise and patient restraint'?

23. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A life of holiness is a life that is committed to diligent work, to a simple lifestyle, to generous giving to the genuinely need and poor people in the world, and to a life of personal financial freedom from indebtedness."
24. Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal? What specifically are you doing to help make the fulfillment of this goal a daily reality in your life?



**CHAPTER 35**

**FAITH**

**THESSALONIANS BELIEVERS - SANCTIFYING FAITH**

## FAITH

### THESSALONIANS BELIEVERS - SANCTIFYING FAITH

#### O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

INTRODUCTION: Gifts are something which everyone enjoys receiving. A gift is something you can't earn or purchase, and it is something you don't necessarily deserve. Rather, a gift is an expression of love given to someone who is cherished and valued as a friend.

God is a God of grace, i.e., a God who enjoys giving gifts to His world. God has given an undeserving world the gift of His Son, Jesus. Jesus is God's gift to mankind - the greatest gift possible! Jesus lived a sacrificial life, died a substitutionary death, and arose victoriously from the grave. All of these acts of Jesus were acts performed in behalf of mankind, expressions of God's unmerited favor and love towards a fallen race of people. When Jesus went back to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to continue the compassionate work of Jesus which Jesus could no longer do in bodily form after His ascension. The Holy Spirit is in the gift of God to mankind. The Holy Spirit is in the world today as the perfect expression of God's love for a loveless world. The Spirit's ministry is a multiple ministry. Among His many works, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the unregenerate of his sin, to convert the repentant sinner, and to cleanse and to mature the responsive believer.

These are the very works which the Holy Spirit was involved in when He was dealing so effectively with the lives of the Thessalonians. The Holy Spirit convicted the pagan Thessalonians, the result of which was their deep repentance of sin. They turned away from their idols to serve the living and true God (1:9). They "*welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*" (1:6) Not only did they initially welcome the life-transforming message, but they nurtured their lives in that faith and even spread the good news to others. Wrote Paul concerning the vitality of their new-found faith: "*The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere.*" (1:8)

Paul rejoiced in the love which these new believers were experiencing for each other, and Paul encouraged them to abound more and more in love. "*Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to*

do so more and more." (4:9-10) Paul urged these young believers to live lives which were pleasing to God. *"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."* (4:1) Paul urged them to live pure and holy lives in the midst of a very sensate and corrupt society: *"It is God's will that you should be holy: that you should avoid sexual immorality."* (I Thessalonians 4:3)

These Thessalonian believers were saved from a practice of sinning. They were also growing in love and learning to live holy and pure lives in the midst of a corrupt society. Yet, as great as was their conversion and as wonderful as was their growth, Paul recognized that these new believers had some lacks in their lives and in their faith. Wrote Paul concerning his deep desire to be reunited with these new believers: *"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."* (I Thessalonians 3:10)

What was lacking in the faith of these new believers? I believe the answer is found in I Thessalonians 5:23-24 - the portion of Scripture we are presently looking at. *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."*

What was lacking in the lives of these new believers? The experience and reality of what might be called whole or entire or complete or full sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit by which a believer is made holy through and through. Being sanctified completely or wholly is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Being sanctified or filled with the Holy Spirit is a gift of God given to fully surrendered believers. Remember Jesus' words: *"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11:13)

**PROPOSITION:** Every believer - like as in the case of the Thessalonian believers - needs to be sanctified through and through. The God of peace, through the work of His Holy Spirit, is the Sanctifier. Inward cleansing and integration of the human personality is the purpose and plan of the Holy Spirit. The experience of entire sanctification is the will of God for every believer.

To better understand the importance and the meaning of entire sanctification, let us look at (1) The Source of Sanctification, (2) The Substance of Sanctification, and (3) The Surety of Sanctification.

#### I. SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION - "The God of Peace".

How would you describe the word 'sanctification'? Sanctification means basically two things: 'separation' and 'cleansing'. Sanctification is a work of God in the heart and life of a person who yields to God. Another word for 'sanctification' is holiness. It is God's will that humans be holy, i.e., separated from sin outwardly and cleansed from sin inwardly. "*Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.*" In the fourth chapter of I Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "*It is God's will that you should be holy.*" (4:3)

Holiness is the work of God - a divine enablement, not a human attainment. Christ died in order that the world could be forgiven of sins and delivered from the bondage of self-centered living. It says in Ephesians 5:25b-27 that "*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"

God is the source of sanctification. It is God, through the ministry of His blessed Holy Spirit, who applies the blood of Jesus to accomplish the work of justification and the work of sanctification in the lives of responsive people. Christ's blood was shed on the cross, not only to forgive us for what we have done but to deliver us from what we are. We need forgiveness for the sins we have deliberately committed, and we also need deliverance from the bondage of inner self-centeredness which gives expression to outward transgression.

God has provided a double cure for a double problem. Man's problem is twofold - outward practice of willful sins, inward attitude of self-centeredness and pride and rebellion. Man's need is twofold - forgiveness for what he has done, and deliverance from what he is. God's provision is twofold - reconciliation of the sinner to the Savior, and empowerment of the believer for victorious living.

Where sin abounds, both in its outward practices and in its inner attitudes, the grace of God superabounds. There is no guilt so great but what God's forgiving grace is greater. There is no willfulness and self-centeredness so strong, but what God's cleansing power is stronger. God is able to 'save to the uttermost'. This salvation includes forgiveness of all volitional sins and also cleansing from all inherited sin.

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit", saith the Lord. Justification and sanctification are not the work of man; they are the work of God. It is God alone who can forgive the guilty sinner and who can deliver the self-centered believer.

## II. SUBSTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION

We must better understand the meaning of 'sanctification' in its various dimensions.

### A. Initial Sanctification

If 'sanctification' means 'separation', then the sinner who experiences the new birth is 'sanctified' in at least an initial way. A sinner separates himself from an outward practice of willful transgressions against the known laws of God. When the Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the living God (1:9), they were separating themselves from a life of sin, and thus they were sanctified in the 'initial' sense of the term. The Bible says, regarding separation from a practice of sin: *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* (II Corinthians 6:17-18: NIV). A new convert is one who has made a 'moral U-turn'. He has repented of his sins and chosen to follow Jesus Christ. He no longer practices sin. He is new in Christ Jesus. The old has passed away. He has separated himself from a life of sinning, and is thus 'sanctified' in one sense of the term.

### B. Entire Sanctification

I Thessalonians 5:23 expresses a prayer and a desire that all of the Thessalonian believers may experience sanctification at an even deeper level. *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you (believers) through and through."* (NIV) *"May the God of peace himself make you entirely pure and devoted to God."* (Living Bible) *"May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy in every part."* (NEB) *"May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly."* (RSV)

Initial sanctification, we have noted, is that beginning separation from a life of sinning, sometimes called conversion. What is full or entire sanctification? Following is a definition of entire sanctification, as one Church understands it: "We believe entire sanctification to be that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believer, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, is cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification

enables the believer to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and his neighbor as himself, and it prepares him for greater growth in grace." (Doctrinal statement of The First Free Methodist Church)

Initial sanctification means separation from an outward practice of sinning, resulting in conversion, reconciliation, and regeneration. Entire or full sanctification means inward cleansing from a spirit of self-sufficiency and self-centeredness, resulting in Jesus becoming the Lord of one's mind, affection, and will.

Bishop Donald Bastian describes sanctification remarkably well. Note what he says, "*Holiness of heart suggests that, at the center of one's being, Jesus Christ rules in the power of the Holy Spirit.*" Holiness of life suggests that, as a consequence, one's daily walk increasingly reflects Christ's kind of concerns and conduct at the personal, family, and social levels. The New Testament calls believers to this quality of life (Romans 6:13; 12:1,2). In doing so, it indicates that one does not automatically begin there. It further reflects that a believer can suffer from arrested development and settle for being a carnal Christian (I Corinthians 3:1). But the norm is full sanctification (I Thessalonians 4:23,24). The life of full sanctification is a life of constant dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the sanctifier. It is a life lived in the fellowship of the church. It is never marked by a constancy of emotions (emotions are changeable and subject to many external influences), but it is characterized by a constancy of will. In its ethical aspect, it is manifested by love for God and man. It is personal in the sense that it is lived devotionally. It is social in that it is marked by a growing concern to meet the needs of one's fellowman." (Adventures In Church Membership; Bastian; pg. 84)

"When we come to God for forgiveness, our concern is with the guilty conscience, the sense of estrangement from God and from others, and we are asking, 'How can I enjoy the benefits of Christ's atonement in the forgiveness of sin?' In the later development of the Christian life, the focus is not on what I may receive from Christ, but what Christ may receive from me. The question becomes, 'Will Christ enjoy the benefits of my life, surrendered to do His will?'" (Christianizing the Christian; address by Stanley Walters)

"You can find plenty of people whose heart is like a tavern, where Christ finds no welcome, where evil plies its trade busily and brazenly. You can find others whose heart is like a hotel with rooms parcelled out, and a rather nice one assigned to the Lord Jesus. You can find yet others whose heart is like a home, where Christ the Lord has been given not

only the right of entry but the right of mastery. There's not a room He cannot occupy, not a corner He cannot inspect, not a piece of furniture he cannot either enjoy or remove!" (Prayer and Life's Highest, p. 23; Paul Rees)

"Before the believer makes the great commitment to God in entire consecration, it is necessary for him to sense his need of God for a further or deeper deliverance. He must sense something of the clash with the carnal mind and long for a better way. It is more of a conviction of want, need, or lack, than it is of actual wrongdoing or guilt. The conflict is within and the sighs and tears expressed rise eloquently before God who knows how to read our need better than we can express it." (Entire Sanctification: Studies in Christian Holiness, p. 51)

It is important to distinguish between consecration and sanctification. Notes J. Paul Taylor, "Consecration is the work of man; entire sanctification is the work of God. Consecration is man's giving to God what he owes; entire sanctification is God's giving to man what He has promised. Consecration is placing oneself on the altar without reserve; entire sanctification is the descent of purging fire upon the offering. Consecration is laying oneself on the surgeon's table; entire sanctification is the removal of the cancer of sin. Consecration is human exposure to the cleansing action; entire sanctification is the expulsion of sin by the cleansing action of God". (Holiness, The Finished Foundation, p.52)

Consecration to God involves all that we are and all that we have. A surrender of time, talents, money, relationships! A surrender of all! "Just as the canvas surrenders itself to the painter, the violin to the musician, the wire to the electricity, so you put yourself at the disposal of the Divine. You surrender for better or for worse, for riches or for poverty, in sickness and in health, in life and in death--you will keep yourself only unto Him. He has you. Are you thereby lost, or thereby found? You are lost just as the musician is, when he takes his violin, surrenders himself to the music, lets go, becomes a part of the music and is thereby lost. He is lost only to find himself a part of the universal harmony. You lose your petty, isolated defeated self in the universal Self of God and are harmonized with the heart of reality. As Rufus Moseley says: 'I died and I died ungraciously, but I died to nothing but that which caused me to die'. You die, just as an engine dies to the thought and purpose of wandering free anywhere and surrenders itself to the rails--only to find its freedom there." (Abundant Living, p. 157; E. Stanley Jones)

John Wesley's prayer which he used at his covenant services should be the prayer with which each earnest believer should identify: "I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee; I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen".

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1; NIV)*

While it is true that consecration is a condition for full sanctification, it might be better stated that consecration is the outward manifestation of inner faith. Strictly speaking, faith is the only condition for receiving the Holy Spirit in His fullness. Notes Dr. A.F. Harper: "There is a sense in which faith is the only condition for receiving the Holy Spirit. Desire and consecration are necessary, but they are foundations for our faith". (Entire Sanctification: Studies in Christian Holiness, p. 59)

Note J. Paul Taylor, "Every step in the direction of the fullness is a step of faith. It might be put in this form. There is a faith of conviction - the fullness is for me. There is a faith of courage - I must have it. There is a faith of clasping - I have it." (Holiness, The Finished Foundations; pg. 47)

### C. Progressive Sanctification

Initial sanctification and entire sanctification are usually decisive, dated, and dramatic experiences of commitment to Christ, whereas progressive sanctification is an ongoing and gradual experience of daily commitments to Christ, resulting in the believer's character progressively being perfected. The Holy Spirit daily and continually cleanses the believer from anything which is a hindrance to spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit constantly works in the lives of believers to bring them into full harmony with the will of God. "Progressive sanctification is the progressive establishment of one's Christian character, in strengthening in divine grace, and the fashioning of the total personality into ever increasing Christlikeness." (Preaching Holiness Today; Richard Taylor; pg. 55,56)

A picture of the ongoing cleansing and perfecting work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is seen in the picture

of the Vine and the branches. Said Jesus, "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He lops off every branch that doesn't produce. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops. He has already tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and usefulness by means of the commands I gave you. Take care to live in me, and let me live in you. For a branch can't produce fruit when severed from the vine. Nor can you be fruitful apart from me." (John 15:1-4; Living Bible)

Being 'born of the Spirit' is a description of conversion or initial sanctification. Being 'filled with the Spirit' is a description of progressive sanctification. E. Stanley Jones gives a practical description of what it means to 'walk in the Spirit', especially as this relates to daily surrender of our will to God's will. "You have said 'All' to Him and He has said 'All' to you. But there are a lot of little 'alls' under the big 'All'. They will come up day by day and little by little surrenders will have to be made, made about things and issues you did not realize would be involved. So the surrender is a blanket once-for-all surrender, but also an unfolding surrender. As you have given all you know and all you don't know, the 'don't knows' have to be dealt with as they arise. How? By a continual surrender. You do not fight or suppress the issue, you turn it over to Him and say: 'I am Yours and this thing concerns me, so this is Yours, too. I surrender it. Tell me what to do about it.' That keeps problems and issues from piling up and making you tense and burdened. It is a continual catharsis. You are saved from the tension that comes from suppressing things and driving them into the subconscious sphere where they fester, and also from evading the issues in which case they nag us from the margin of consciousness. You are fulfilling that verse, 'But if we walk in light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son Cleanses us from all sin'. (I John 1,7) By walking in the light, holding nothing back, you have a continuous fellowship with Christ and a continuous cleansing of your problems and sins. It is a working way to live." (Victory Through Surrender; pg. 110)

### III. Surety of Sanctification

Paul writes, "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (I Thessalonians 5: 23-24)

What God has started - namely, the sanctification of His people - He will complete. "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (verse 4) He who saved you from outward sinning will also cleanse you from inward sin. The one who sanctified you initially - i.e., the one who converted you -

will also sanctify you through and through. God is faithful in dealing with His people. It is God's intention not only to enter your life in conversion, but also to sit on the throne of your heart, as a result of your full consecration. He wants to make you, not only a citizen of the kingdom, but He wants to make you also a soldier of the cross. He not only wants to create within you a desire to serve Him, but He wants to impart power to you to enable you to serve Him. He who imparted His love to you at the time of your new birth wants also to perfect His love in you at the time of your full sanctification. He not only wants to save you from the wrath to come, but He also wants to bring you into full harmony with the nature of God. It is God's will not only to take the repentant sinner out of the 'world' of evil practices, but it is also God's will to take the 'world' of carnal pleasures out of the heart of surrendered believers. Justification admits you into the family of God on earth; entire sanctification fits you for the society of God in heaven. The Holy Spirit wishes to become not only resident in your heart at the time of your conversion, but the Holy Spirit wishes to become president of your heart at the time of your inner cleansing. It is God's intention not only to save you from the guilt of sin, but also to cleanse you from the pollution of sin. God not only wants to cleanse your conscious mind, but he wants also to cleanse your subconscious mind.

There is a need for the subconscious mind to be cleansed, and for the believer to be integrated in his personality. Too many Christians are fragmented - divided in their loyalties and doubleminded in their thoughts. Too many Christians are like 'walking civil wars'. Paul's description is very vivid: *"It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin. So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh what a terrible predicament I'm in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free."* (Romans 7:21-25: Living Bible)

Writes E. Stanley Jones, "The soul gets on by a series of crises. I've found it so. In conversion there is the sudden or gradual rise to a new level of life, a life as different from the ordinary man as the ordinary man is different from the animal. Then after the rise, life is on a permanently higher level. But on that new level there usually ensues an experience of ups and downs, of alternate encouragement and

discouragement, of victory and defeat. It was so with me. For a year I lived under cloudless skies. The sun of my happiness seemed to have risen in the heavens to stay there forever. But after a year of unalloyed joy I found something alien began to rise from the cellar of my life. I felt there was something down there not in alignment with this new life I had found - ugly tempers, moodiness, deep-down conflicts. The general tenor of life was victory, but there were disturbing intrusions from the depths. I was becoming a house divided against itself. I was puzzled, confused, hurt with a tinge of disappointment. Was this the best that Christianity could do - to leave me wrestling with myself, or with something alien to myself? What was this dark something within?" (Song of Ascents; page 51)

We must repeat the message of Paul to the Thessalonians: "*The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*" (I Thessalonians 5:24) Do what? Sanctify you entirely - through and through!

The Holy Spirit wants to cleanse your subconscious mind. He wants to take away your double-mindedness (James 1:8) and make you single-minded. He wants to take away your double will (Romans 7:22-23), and enable you to be fully consecrated to the Lordship of Christ alone. He wants to take away your divided affections (Matthew 10:37) and enable you to have an undivided loyalty for God and a supreme love for Christ.

The Holy Spirit - the Sanctifier - is the one whom God has sent, not only to convert us from sin, but also to heal us of our inner fragmentation, and to integrate our personalities to become like Christ. Not only in the decisive work of entire sanctification, but also in the daily work of progressive sanctification, the Holy Spirit wishes to perfect our lives - making our human spirits increasingly more sensitive to God, making our emotions more tender to feel God's compassion for the lost and hurting people around us, making our wills strong to accomplish God's tasks and assignments, making our bodies more healthy as we learn to keep them surrendered to the Lord.

Notes Lloyd Ogilvie, "What Paul seems to be praying is that the Thessalonians' entire spirits, souls, and bodies be freely open, committed, receptive and utilized for the purpose of each part's calling and that they all work in unity to accomplish the purpose of the total life of the Christian." (Life As It was Meant To Be; pg. 114)

Spirit, Soul, and Body are the three components of human nature. The spirit of man is the God-created point of contact with the Holy Spirit. When one's spirit is surrendered totally to the control of the Holy Spirit, then wholeness and integration begin to become a reality. The soul of man

includes his intellectual and emotional and volitional capacities. When the human spirit, surrendered to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, exercises control over the soul, then the Holy Spirit - working through the channel of the cleansed human spirit - has access to the mind, the emotions, and the will. The Holy Spirit then begins the process of what can be called 'the Christianization' of the mind, the emotions, and the will. The Holy Spirit progressively works to bring every thought into submission to the thoughts of Christ, to bring every emotion into alignment with the feelings and compassion of Christ, and to bring the will into conformity to the revealed purposes of God. "Christ makes a beachhead in our spirits and then penetrates in our souls, capturing our understanding, healing and liberating our emotions and reorienting our wills to do His will." (Life As It Was Meant To Be: Ogilvie; pg. 116)

Not only does the Holy Spirit seek to permeate the human spirit and, through the human spirit, to begin the process of Christianization of the mind, emotions, and will of the believer, but the Holy Spirit also seeks to sanctify the body of the believer. As a believer, have you set aside and consecrated your body entirely to God, to be a cleansed vessel for the use of the Holy Spirit? Entire sanctification is concerned not only with the spirit and soul of the believer, but entire sanctification also includes the body of the believer. Wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "*Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that he lives within you? Your own body does not belong to you. For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because he owns it.*" (I Corinthians 6:19-20; Living Bible)

The Holy Spirit seeks to bring our human spirit into submission and communion with Christ. "Wholeness is begun when we yield our spirits to be filled with His Spirit." (Ogilvie; pg.116) The Holy Spirit seeks to correct our thinking in order that we might be able to think clearly and Scripturally. The Holy Spirit seeks to cleanse our affections and emotions from any perverted desires, and to enable us to feel God's compassionate feelings with Him, The Holy Spirit seeks to strengthen our wills in order that we might have courage to do the things which are helpful to others. The Holy Spirit seeks to make us aware that our bodies are His temples, and that we must not engage in any activity which abuses our bodies. All hurtful habits which result in quick or gradual destruction of our bodies must be abandoned, and those activities which enhance the health of our bodies must be practiced, such as proper diet and exercise and rest and recreation.

When the God of peace, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, brings peace and integration to our spirit, soul, and body, then we, as sanctified believers, are ready to witness effectively and winsomely in the world of hurting people. A world that is 'out of joint' spiritually needs to hear a healing message from people who are 'in step' with God spiritually. A disintegrated world needs to hear the good news of God's love from the lips of people whose lives demonstrate peace and wholeness and integration. Thus, wholeness involves not only personal healing, but relational healing as well. We are personally healed so that we, in turn, can be God's instruments to help heal others. "The total, integrated expression of our spirits, souls, and bodies is in our relationships. A vital part of wholeness is what happens to us in our contact and communication with people. We are not whole as we were meant to be until we are free to develop deep, satisfying relationships with loved ones and friends. Wholeness is not a solo flight. We were made for community." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; Ogilvie; pg. 120)

What is wholeness? "Wholeness, then, is the maximum development of our lives spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, volitionally, physically and relationally. It encompasses our relationships with God, self, others and our life in the world." (Ibid; pg.121)

**CONCLUSION:** It is God's will that you be sanctified or made holy through and through! How can you be sanctified in this deeper way? By making a complete and unconditional surrender of your spirit, and soul, and body to the lordship of Christ. It is your responsibility to do the consecrating. It is God's part to do the sanctifying. As you surrender, surrender all! Let Christ have your all! Then, simply open your inner life to the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

E. Stanley Jones expresses the attitude of faith in this way: "Having given yourself, you now have a right to take Himself. Then repeat to yourself: 'He comes - He comes' I let Him come. I welcome with open heart His coming. I am grateful for His coming. It is done. We belong to each other, forever.' Close the eternal bargain." (Abundant Living; pg.158)

Pray this prayer: "Father, fill me decisively today with your Holy Spirit. I surrender the controls of my heart to your total control. Cleanse me from all inward sin and shed abroad your love in my heart by your Holy Spirit. Enable me to live a consistently victorious life as I daily learn to affirm your lordship in all of my actions, attitudes, and relationships. Thank you. In Jesus' name."

## FAITH

### THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS - SANCTIFYING FAITH

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What can you say concerning the person and the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. How would you describe the character and the lifestyle of the Thessalonians, at the time Paul wrote his first letter to them? (Note I Thessalonians 1:6-9; 4:1,9-10)
3. What do you believe, according to I Thessalonians 3:10, was lacking in the faith of the new Thessalonian believers? (Note I Thessalonians 5:23-24)
4. Is 'entire sanctification' a gift from God or is it a human attainment? (Note Luke 11:13)
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following: "*The experience of entire sanctification is the will of God for every believer.*" (Note I Thessalonians 4:3)
6. What are the two basic meanings of the word 'Sanctification'?
7. What act of God and of Christ and the Holy Spirit makes possible the sanctification (cleansing) of believers?
8. Tell what is meant by the following statement: "God has provided a double cure for a double problem?"
9. What is your response and interpretation of the following statement: "Salvation includes forgiveness of all volitional sins and also cleansing from all inherited sin?"
10. In what sense can it be said that the sinner who repents of his sin, is 'sanctified'? (Note II Corinthians 6:17-18)
11. How would you describe and define 'Entire Sanctification'? What is the difference between 'initial sanctification' and 'entire sanctification'?
12. Is a 'life of holiness' marked by a 'constancy of emotions' or by a 'constancy of will', or by both? Why or why not?
13. Ethically, personally, and socially, how does a Spirit-filled life manifest itself?

14. According to Stanley Walters, what is the main concern of the person who has passed the initial (beginning) stage of his Christian life?
15. Describe people whose hearts are like a 'tavern', a 'hotel', and a 'home'.
16. How would you distinguish between 'consecration' and 'sanctification'?
17. In making a 'full consecration' to God, does a believer 'find himself' or does he 'lose himself'? Why? Give your interpretation of the following statement by Rufus Moseley: "I died and I died ungraciously, but I died to nothing but that which caused me to die."
18. What is the relationship between 'faith' and 'consecration', as these terms apply to the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification in the life of a believer?
19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Every step in the direction of the fullness is a step of faith."
20. How would you describe and define 'progressive sanctification'? How does the picture of the Vine and the Branches in John 15, help one to understand 'progressive sanctification' in the life of a believer?
21. What is the difference between the following three experiences: 'born of the Spirit', 'filled with the Spirit'. and 'walking in the Spirit'?
22. How can surrender to God be both a 'blanket once-for-all-surrender' and also a 'daily unfolding surrender'? Why is there a need for a 'continual catharsis' in the life of a believer?
23. How can the experience of 'full sanctification' be described in contrast to the experience of 'initial conversion'? Give a list of contrasts.
24. Is it possible for a believer to be like a 'walking civil war'? (Note Romans 7:21-25)
25. How would you interpret the following statement by E. Stanley Jones: "The soul gets on by a series of crises"?
26. What, according to I Thessalonians 5:24, does God promise to do for a believer? What conditions must a believer meet in order for God to fulfill His promise which is given in I Thessalonians 5:24?

27. In His progressive work of sanctification, what specifically does the Holy Spirit intend to do for the believer in his spirit, mind, emotions, will, and physical being?
28. What attitude, according to I Corinthians 6:19-20, should a believer have regarding his body?
29. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Wholeness involves not only personal healing, but relational healing as well."
30. How would you describe that attitude of faith which claims God's power to sanctify you wholly?