

# FAITH IN DARK TIMES

A Study on Nike-Faith that Overcomes the World



*1 John 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh (nika) the world: and this is the victory (nike) that overcometh (nika) the world, even our faith.*

**B r o o k y   R   S t o c k t o n**

# Faith in Dark Times

Version 1.0



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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Preface .....	6
<b>Part I</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1. Out of the Darkness White Lilies Grow .....	9
Psalm 50:15 .....	9
2. Do You Have Hope? .....	12
Lamentations 3:21-25 .....	12
3. If God be for us . . . ..	16
Romans 8:31 .....	16
4. The Call to Faith .....	22
John 20:31 .....	22
5. The Just Shall Live by Faith .....	26
Habakkuk 2:4 .....	26
6. Something More Precious than Gold .....	29
1 Peter 1:6-7 .....	29
7. Jesus Marveled .....	31
Mark 6:6; Matthew 8:10 .....	31
8. The Unbelief of the Nazarenes .....	31
Luke 4:18-19 .....	32
9. The Centurion’s Legacy of Faith .....	36
Matthew 8:5-13 .....	36
10. Faith’s Public Confession .....	38
Luke 8:48 .....	38
11. Faith Rests in His Promises .....	40
Isaiah 30:15 .....	40
12. Fighting for Faith .....	43
1 John 5:4 .....	43
13. Whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin .....	45
Roman 14:23 .....	45
14. When Afraid I will Trust in Thee .....	49
Psalm 56 .....	49

15. Eyes of Faith that See the Unseen .....	56
2 Kings 6 .....	56
16. A Great Woman with Nike-Faith .....	61
2 Kings 4 .....	62
17. Great Faith in a Great Famine .....	72
2 Kings 6:25-7:1-25 .....	72
18. The Progress of Faith .....	78
Mark 9:13-29 .....	78
19. Jeremiah's Crisis of Faith .....	86
Jeremiah 15 .....	86
20. Where is God When I Need Him?.....	98
Genesis 16.....	98
Lessons of Waiting on God from the Life of Abraham.....	100
Lessons of Waiting on God from the Life of Hagar .....	103
Lessons for Christians Today .....	106
21. Faith in the Fight.....	107
Psalm 11.....	107
22. Minding our Minds When our Faith is Tested .....	114
1 Peter 1:13.....	114
23. Faith in Faith or Faith in Fact? .....	117
1 Corinthians 15:5 .....	117
24. Fact, Faith, and Your Feelings .....	119
Hebrews 13:5.....	119
25. Faith that Moves Mountains .....	120
Mark 11:22 .....	120
Wrong Applications of this Text.....	121
Correct Applications of this Text .....	125
26. Faith that Flourishes in Old Age .....	129
Psalm 92:11-15 .....	129
27. Faith that Accepts Suffering .....	133
Hebrews 11:32ff.....	133
28. Spurgeon's Devotional on Psalm 101:1 .....	138
<b>Part II .....</b>	<b>140</b>
29. Contending for the Faith .....	141

Jude .....	141
A Commentary on Jude 3-5, 24-35.....	142
30. Beware of Selective Faith .....	149
Hebrews 10:39 .....	149
31. Justification and the Faith of Abraham .....	151
Genesis 15.....	151
Definition of Justification .....	152
The Justification of Abraham.....	153
32. Justification and the Charismatic Movement .....	155
1 Corinthians 15:1-4 .....	155
33. What is the “Faith of Christ”? .....	162
Romans 3:22 .....	162
34. Walking in the Light.....	170
1 John 1:7-2:2 .....	170
35. The Perfected Conscience .....	179
Hebrews 10.....	179
36. Peace, the Means to Perfection .....	186
Hebrews 13: 20-21 .....	186
37. Faith that Works .....	190
James 2 .....	191
38. Stages of Maturity in the Faith .....	198
Matthew 5:1-12 .....	198
<b>Publications .....</b>	<b>216</b>

# Preface

Men of God are in vigorous pursuit of faith for “faith is the victory (nike) that overcomes (nika) the world” – I John 5:4

Nike-faith is a gift of God. Therefore, the Christian man prays for the light of faith in his midnight-walk through this world. Confusion abounds. It is not only dark; there are many voices in the world which claim to have faith. The pursuer of Christ has to discern the truth while listening to the echoes of faith claims that speak in many tongues. Clarity in the bookshelf of the mind comes at a cost.

This work is a result of my studies on nike-faith -- an effort to discern the truth and to separate it from the assertions of religious hucksters claiming power once you plant your “seed money” in their orchard.

To get the most out of this work, your mind must contain convictions that all Scripture is borne by the breath of the Almighty (2 Timothy 3:16), and that integrity requires truth assertions to be backed by evidence with strict proof of claim.

Necessity is the wind that pushes people to grow. Read sections as you have a heart-felt need for true faith.

This work is a resource for you that come from my Bible studies, devotions, and sermons on “Faith in Dark Times.” Carefully consider the various texts on nike-faith in this e-book and your insights will produce music in the soul.

Brooky Stockton, ret. pastor / professor of theology.





# Part I

Faith that resists the doubt and lights a candle to shatter the darkness of their era.

# 1. Out of the Darkness White Lilies Grow

## Psalm 50:15

### In the Day of Trouble

◆ Darkness, doubt, death, and doom grow around us like mold in the damp dirt around Japanese maples. In these times we need niki-faith.

Facing darkness in your life? Out of the darkness, white lilies glow.

Psalm 50 is a summons by the Judge for His people to come out of darkness and into His Court to plead their case.

If you are a believer in covenant with God, you have standing in this court to show cause why the Judge should grant your plea. Though it takes faith, you can prevail!

(Note: the whole context of Psalm 50 is a summons to Court. Salvation in this chapter is the Court's verdict in your favor.)

**Psalm 50:15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.**

**50:23 "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.**

Dark times require lighthouses, lanterns, and candles. Faith in God's Word is the torch in the cave; the flame that dances in the wind and refuses to die; a single candle under a starless sky — small, yet defiant against the vastness of doubt's darkness.

You can have the deliverance, but God must have the glory. You can have your health, but God must have the honor. You can have your win, but God must receive the worship. You can have your pardon, but God must have the praise.

If you are a thief of God's glory, how can He honor His promise to deliver?

The only uncertainty about this promise is the "When?" While we wait for God to work, we wait in darkness where the white lilies grow.

### **Does God delay?**

- He did with Mary's prayer for her sick brother (John 11). But, maybe a resurrected Lazarus could bring Him more glory than a recovered Lazarus?
- Did God wait 14 years to answer the prayer of aging Abraham? Maybe, a child from an old man and an old woman could bring Him more glory than the gift of a child to a young bride.
- Did Jacob's plea for protection and prosperity happen in the first year of his departure from Canaan? Maybe, an impoverished patriarch with no commodities, two wives, and eleven children could bring Him more glory than a wealthy bachelor.
- Did God reveal to Job the reason for his suffering? Maybe, a sick man living in faith could bring Him more glory than a healthy, young athlete trying to win a race in the Summer Olympics.
- After defeating Goliath, God could have made David king of Israel? But, He did not! Maybe, an innocent but vilified fugitive seasoned by years of "running from the law" (Saul) would make a better king than a naïve boyhood-king.

Out of the Darkness

Out of the dark forbidding soil

The pure white lilies grow.

Out of the black and murky clouds,

Descends the stainless snow.

Out of the crawling earth-bound worm

A butterfly is born.

Out of the somber shrouded night,

Behold! A golden morn!

Out of the pain and stress of life,

The peace of God pours down.

Out of the nails -- the spear -- the cross,  
Redemption -- and a crown! (Source Unknown).

Matthew Henry on Job 28:1-11 . . .

“The caverns of the earth may be discovered, but not the counsels of Heaven. Go to the miners, thou sluggard in religion, consider their ways, and be wise. Let their courage and diligence in seeking the wealth that perishes, shame us out of slothfulness and faint-heartedness in labouring for the true riches.

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! How much easier, and safer! Yet gold is sought for, but grace neglected. Will the hopes of precious things out of the earth, so men call them, though really they are paltry and perishing, be such a spur to industry, and shall not the certain prospect of truly precious things in heaven be much more so?”

Got troubles? You may be walking on the path where the greatest saints have trodden; where grass refuses to grow -- dark, uphill, and rocky; a bridge stretched across a canyon – narrow, fragile, requiring balance born of faith.

Truth is a symphony waiting to be heard – a nugget waiting to be found.

On this path there are many voices shouting to go this way or go that way. Therefore, we have to separate truth from these echoes bouncing off canyon walls.

Men dig deep in the earth under darkness to find gold, but men can't seem to find the vault of God's Word that contains eternal gems.

Work in the darkness like coal miners digging for treasure in the Scriptures and watch the white lilies grow; a path worn by the feet of triumphant saints.

## 2. Do You Have Hope?

### Lamentations 3:21-25

◆ **Lamentations 3:21-25** This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

There is trouble in the world: depleted bank accounts, unemployment, unending debt, and reports about international terrorism tornado their way through the flat fields of our hearts and minds.

There is enough insanity in American politics to discourage a stadium full of optimists: fornicating, adulterous women are responsible for over a million baby-murders a year; the Supreme Court changed six-thousand years of history by redefining marriage and sanctioning same-sex perversions; the Naughty United Nations dropped hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Mexicans on our shores who want Americans to accommodate them, who can't assimilate, and who demand we submit to their gods and their laws. These are the people who have been shouting "Death to America" for decades.

See <http://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/topic/is-there-hope-for-godly-causes/>

We have / had a British-born, Indonesian-educated, revolutionary Chicago Politician President who is Islam's best friend (2015). He doubled the national debt and imported hundreds of thousands of Mohammedans into this country to divide, split, and plunder our nation's resources—and then, there are illegal immigrants sloshing across the Rio Grande. It hurts to see our country unravel. One searches for hope in the evening news, and it is as elusive as Bigfoot and the Lock Ness Monster.

Jeremiah saw the slaughter of his countrymen, the destruction of the temple, the ruin of his beloved city Jerusalem, and thousands of aliens plundering his nation, Lamentations reads like the journal of a lynch mob survivor. In the middle of his list of woes, he proclaims his hope.

Hope is not a wish or pie in the sky, but an anchor connected to God's revelation about Himself in Scripture.

Even in the midst of the destruction of his country and the deportation of the survivors of the Jerusalem siege (585 BC), the prophet found an anchor of hope. Let's call it nuke-hope. Even though he was depressed (3:20), and saw the carnage and downfall of Judah's capital city personally (3:1-19), he could still say, "I have hope."

We would do well to tap into this reservoir of his quiet confidence.

**Lamentations 3:21-25 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.**

**First**, Jeremiah had hope in the LORD's endless mercies (3:22-23). He hammers out his message on the anvil truth: "the LORD's mercies never cease; His compassions never fail."

The Hebrew term for "cease" (*halah*) means "to come to an end, to be spent, or to be exhausted." It is preceded by a negation, "never;" that is, the tearful prophet informs us that God's reservoir of mercy never runs dry; His sun never ceases to shine; His sky is never depleted of stars; and the rivers to His oceans never cease to flow.

**Second**, the root word for "compassion" (*racham*) is a reference to the womb, the source of new life. By slightly changing the vowel structure, the word "womb" is translated "compassions" (plural).

In the New Testament (NT) we read about “bowels of compassion” in 1 John 3:17; that is, the Greeks saw the inner core of man from pelvic bone to collar bone as the source of empathy and sympathy.

Jeremiah is telling us that the womb of God’s compassions will never miscarry or be shy of mercy and love.

Furthermore, having denied the negative, Jeremiah states the positive: “Great is your faithfulness!”

The word “great” refers to the inexhaustible supply of a thing.

Unlike the reservoirs of California that sometimes dry up like powdered chalk, God’s aquifer of tender love is never depleted. It is like an artesian well that springs up “new every morning.” Therefore, there is always hope!

**Second**, he had hope because the self-existent LORD was his inheritance: “The LORD is my portion,” declared the prophet; that is, the broken seer expected a tidal wave of goodness to swamp his shores.

The word “portion” refers to an “allotment of land, or plot, or division of assets;” that is, Jeremiah staked a claim and saw God as his real estate, his treasure, and his property.

Jeremiah was not “other worldly” or so “heavenly minded” he was of no earthly use. He did not deny the importance of the material . . . but, bottom line, He saw the LORD as his Source of wealth that could never be taken away from him! His was a galaxy of silver stars.

It is marvelous when a man can say the he is God’s and God is his. It is one thing to possess golden eggs, it is quite another to own the golden goose. Jeremiah’s eggs were stolen, but he owned the goose. Jesus put it this way,

“I know them . . . and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”  
(John 10:27, 28).

Therefore, the afflicted Christian has hope because of his relationship to his Savior and risen Lord.

**Third**, he had hope in the LORD because of God's character—a pearl of great price; a symphony without discord; a stary nighty without clouds; a diamond with eternal light that glows in the dark.

**“The LORD is good to those who wait for Him” (3:25).**

The Christian faith teaches us that God is good; always good; and only good; that He is good when things are going right and that He is good when things are going wrong in our lives. At the same time we have faith in His goodness, we are also humble confessing we don't understand why bad things happen to good people. His ways are higher than our ways.

In fact, Jeremiah informs us in verse 37 that God is the Source of both good and evil in providence; that is, everything that happens to us has to pass his approval.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.

The verse is about God's sovereign power over all things, both good and bad, rather than claiming that God creates moral evil.

The Holy Scripture teaches that there is no evil in the Creator and that He does not tempt men with evil. But, He does permit, even ordain, bad things to happen to good people for reasons known to Himself.

**Fourth**, the Scripture also teaches that good can come out of evil because God is at work in the midst of our suffering producing good (Romans 8:28). Goodness is an attribute of God and the condition precedent to experience that goodness is “to wait;” that is, waiting embodies all the assets of trust and obedience.

**In summary**, where is a man supposed to go to find hope when his bank account is in the red and he sees the threads in his dreams unraveling before his eyes?

Jeremiah is called the “Weeping Prophet.” His nation was demolished; Jerusalem ransacked; the temple destroyed; and its survivors deported to Babylon. He moaned that God made him walk in darkness (3:2); that God’s hand was against him (3:3); that God broke all his bones (3:4).

Yet, he found hope in the One Who afflicted him. Because God is sovereign, *everything was going wrong just right*. He knew that God’s well of mercy never ran dry; that the LORD was his inheritance; and that God is good and will do good to those that continue to seek Him even in the midst of great affliction (3:25).

### **Out of Hope?**

Hope comes by believing!

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Learn His promises. Believe them, Rest, and wait for Him to do His magic in our lives.

## **3. If God be for us . . .**

### **Romans 8:31**

◆ **Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?**

The giants of the Christian-faith are eagles borne on the breath of the Almighty and the wind under their wings whistled, “If God be for us, who can be against us.

This is arguably one of the greatest verses in the Bible because it expresses the finish line of nike faith. It was John Calvin’s life verse.

Furthermore, it was Melanchthon's favorite verse.

Two great men stood side by side in the early Reformation movement. One was Martin Luther, the thrashing activist, and the other was Philip Melanchthon, the refined scholar. Luther once said of their relationship:

I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether warlike, fighting against innumerable monsters and devils. I am born for the removing of stumps and stones, cutting away thistles and thorns, and clearing the wild forests; but master Philippus comes along softly and gently, sowing and watering with joy, according to the gifts which God has abundantly bestowed upon him.

Where did Melanchthon get his strength? What made this gentle, retiring man stand with Luther against the crushing powers of the papacy? The heart of the text, Romans 8:31, gives the answer:

### **If God be for us, who can be against us?**

In his lectures and correspondence, that verse is quoted more than any other Scripture. It still hangs on his study wall in Wittenberg where visitors can see it. As the record has it, when Melanchthon sensed he was dying he asked to be placed on a portable bed in his study because that is where he was happiest. When the pastor read Romans 8:31, Melanchthon exclaimed,

"Read those words again!"

The pastor by his side read,

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Melanchthon murmured in a kind of ecstasy,

"That's it! That's it!"

This text had always been the greatest comfort to him. In the darkest hours of his life when death's cold stare threatened, he comforted himself again by reciting, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

### **What Others Say**

**Mounce:**

“Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise.”

**Jamieson & Fausset:**

“This whole passage strikes all thoughtful interpreters and readers, as transcending almost everything in language”

**William Newell** explains our difficulty in appreciating our text:

Our weak hearts, prone to legalism and unbelief, receive these words with great difficulty: God is for us . . . They have failed Him; but He is for them. They are ignorant; but He is for them. They have not yet brought forth much fruit; but He is for them. (Romans 8: Expository Notes Verse by Verse)

You may assume that those of us who are always before the public speaking of the blessed promises of God are never downcast or heartbroken. You are mistaken. We have been there, and perhaps we know how to say a word in season to any who are now going through similar experiences. With many enterprises on my hands, far too great for my own unaided strength, I am often driven to fall flat on this promise of my God, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (see note Hebrews 13:5). [Unknown. Preceptaustin.org].

Newell is correct! We are legalists by nature driven by a performance-based theology. We feel like God is for us when we are dutiful to our Christian responsibilities, and we feel God is against us when we sin and fail Him. We feel God’s favor shines upon us when prosperity knocks at our door, and that God is against us when adversity storms our gate. With knowledge of His law our own weaknesses and failures fuel the furnace of doubt as to whether God is for us.

The marvelous truth in this text is that God is greater than our weaknesses, greater than our sins, greater than our failures, greater than our disappointments, and greater than our adversaries.

It is no test of faith to believe God is with us when we succeed and have money in the bank, but it is a test of faith to believe God is with us when we fail and our purse is empty! Thus, the great response of faith in Romans is to consent to be loved though unworthy; i.e., at all times, good and bad, to take sufficient comfort from the truth, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

### Observations About the Text

Literally, Romans 8:31 can be translated, "If God for us, who against us?"

This is the beginning of Paul's conclusion regarding his great treatise on the gospel of the Son of God (Romans 1-8).

"If God be for us" is a first class conditional in Greek and must be rendered, "Since God is for us . . ." The clause, "If God is for us" is not a question. The major premise is **not** in doubt. The question raised is rather an enemy can be equal to the power of Almighty God . . . and, the answer, of course, is a trumpet blast, "**NO ONE!**"

The "us" here does not refer to all men howbeit religious, or all Americans. It refers to Christians; that is, to His elect—to those who believe and are justified in His sight (See 8:28-30).

The word "who" can also be translated "what?" Since God is for us, "What can be against us?"—that is, there is no one and no circumstance that can be against us.

The word "for" (*hyper*) is a preposition meaning "above" or "around." If God surrounds us, who or what can break through His impregnable fortress to bury us? Nothing!

Note the word "things." It references our physical "weakness" (8:26) and "sufferings" in this present evil age (8:18). All pain, agony, and terror connected with sickness and disease and poverty are simply summed up under the term "these things." All our Herculean concerns about life and death are shriveled into two words: "these things"—"things" which are degraded as having little weight in the big scheme of God's redemptive plan.

**Denney** adds:

The idea underlying all that precedes is that of the suffering to be endured by those who would share Christ's glory (Ro 8:17-note). The apostle has disparaged the suffering in comparison with the glory (Ro 8:18-note); he has interpreted it (Ro 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27) as in a manner prophetic of the glory; he has in these last verses asserted the presence through all the Christian's life of an eternal victorious purpose of love: all this is included in 'these things.' (Nicoll, W Robertson, Editor: Expositors Greek Testament: 5 Volumes. Out of print. Search Google)

This promise applies to legal matters. All the apostles faced false accusations by pagan accusers in man's lawless courts. When Chrysostom was brought before the Roman Emperor, the Emperor threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied,

"Thou canst not banish me for this world is my father's house."

"But I will slay thee," said the Emperor.

"Nay, thou canst not," said the noble champion of the faith, "for my life is hid with Christ in God."

"I will take away thy treasures."

"Nay, but thou canst not for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there."

"But I will drive thee away from man and thou shalt have no friend left."

"Nay, thou canst not, for I have a friend in heaven from whom thou canst not separate me. I defy thee; for there is nothing that thou canst do to hurt me."

On this text, **Ray Stedman** illustrates as follows:

"Now, that is a wonderful statement, and, in times of doubt, I suggest that you try to answer these questions...Now, what is

the effect of this realization? It is clear from this passage that it is the removal of fear. If God is for us, who can be against us? All fear of successful opposition is removed. It is not that there is no opposition. The Law is still there, the Sin nature is still there, the flesh nature is still there — there is still going to be opposition (1Pe 2:11–note Gal 5:16–note; Gal 5:17–note; Gal 5:18–note). But Paul is saying, “If God is for us, what difference does it make?” A few weeks ago at our elders’ meeting, Barney Brogan was telling us about his grandson. His daughter has moved to Missouri with the boys. As some of you know, their father is Chicano, and the children look like their dad. Their 13-year-old ran into a tremendous nest of White Supremacy at school. Because of the prejudice against blacks and Chicanos, that little innocent lad began to suffer very unjust torment and persecution. He didn’t understand it; he came home weeping, beaten up because of his looks. His mother didn’t know what to do, and so she wrote and asked us to pray for this situation, and we did. A week or so later a letter came back and described how one night the biggest kid in school appeared at their door and said that he was a Christian, that he knew they were Christians, and that he had come to tell them that he had gone to every kid in school who had beat up on the boy and told them that if they ever did anything like that again, they would answer to him. I don’t know what that boy’s name was, but let’s call him Mike. I can imagine this little boy going back to school, walking in the shadow of Mike, with all his tormentors looking at him. He probably would be saying to himself, “If Mike is for me, who can be against me?” That is what God is saying here.” (If God be For Us)

The opposite of this thought is also true: *If God be against you, who can be for you?* If you are God’s enemy, your blessings are temporary and your troubles are permanent. Your pleasures are like the dew which quickly disappear and your pains are like boulders on your chest that cannot be

removed. Whether you have adversity or prosperity, so long as God is against you, you face eternal perils.

If God be against me, what then? What will become of me when eternity knocks at my door? What will happen to me when I die? How can I stand in the Day of Judgment? Just as there is certainty for the child of God that God is for him, there is certainty for the Christ-neglector that God is against him. Nothing he owns will shadow him from the fires of judgment.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” Though earth, hell, and all their armies come against you, if the Lord of Hosts surrounds your camp, you shall scatter them like toy soldiers. When Hezekiah went to bed in Jerusalem with the Assyrian army around his throat, he woke up to vultures feeding on the dead bodies of Sennacherib’s army. Likewise, you shall know the favor of the Lord for all eternity.

The clouds in the sky are about 6,500 feet high. Eagles borne on the breath of the Almighty can soar as high as 15,000 feet – above the lightening, thunder, and cloudbursts of roaring rain.

Let us be eagles borne on the breath of the Almighty soaring higher and higher by the power of this truth, “If God be for us, who can be against us.” Let the force of this gentle text lift us to new heights out of reach of the thunder clouds of doubt and fear that threaten our peace.

## 4. The Call to Faith

### John 20:31

◆ **John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**

The most spoken condition to obtain salvation is that of faith – a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Trust seizes Christ. Trust is the positive side of faith; repentance is the negative side of faith – a rejection of personal autonomy<sup>1</sup>. Nike faith embraces the truth of the gospel with a hug and a kiss while simultaneously releasing its grip on sin (repentance).

### Linguistic Data

The word “believe” is the Greek word *pisteuo* (πιστεύω). Strong’s list the word as being translated in the following ways:

- believe (239)
- commit unto (4)
- commit to (one's) trust (1)
- be committed unto (1)
- be put in trust with (1)
- be commit to one's trust (1)
- believer (1) (248)

### Faith in Hebrews 11:1

**What is the meaning of faith?**

**Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**

Faith is called “the substance” of things hoped for.

The word “substance” is the Greek word *hupostasis*. The word *hupostasis* has been a difficult word to translate because the term was lost in history. It is usually translated “foundation.” It wasn’t until Sir William Ramsay, the archaeologist, discovered an account in Egypt that contained the Greek word *hupostasis* that light exposed its meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Autonomy comes from two words “auto” and “nomos” meaning self-law or self-ruled.

Apparently, a certain woman named Dionysia lost a law suit in a lower court in the days of the Ptolemaic reign and decided to appeal her case to a higher court. She put her records in a stone encasement and sent them to the higher court by way of her servant. The slave stopped for the night in a common lodge and was later assaulted by a band of raiders. The slave lost his life and the stone encasement was buried in the sands of time-- until Ramsay unearthed it. The papyri in the stone encasement read:

“In order that My Lord the Praefect may know that my claim to this property is just, I enclose my *hupostasis*.”

Thus, a *hupostasis* consisted of title deeds to property.

Now we can properly translate Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the title deed to things hoped for.” If a person has faith, they have the title deed to Heaven’s property.

The word “evidence” is the Greek word *elegchos*. It is translated “reproof” (once) and “evidence” (once). It means: (a) a proof, that by which a thing is proved, tested, and verified; or (b) a conviction. In this section, faith appears as *a title deed or evidence* that one holds title to the land. *It is the quiet confidence that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is a fact of history and that the Christ event provides for one’s salvation.*

The Irish have a word for *believe*. It is called “*lippen*.” It means to “hold weight.”

An Irishman once asked a traveler crossing a catwalk over a large stream, “Will the bridge *lippen* your weight?” The question pondered the integrity of the bridge. Could one exercise full confidence in the bridge; did it have integrity?

Biblical faith puts one’s full weight on Christ as the bridge to God. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” – the only bridge to the Father (John 14:6).

Believe (*pisteuo*) is a Greek present tense informing us of the fact that true faith is durative. Biblical faith is a resident conviction, not a one-time prayer or a spurious moment of decision. It is an error to think that faith

for a moment brings life for eternity. Biblical faith is a studied position — the assurance that arises when a juror investigates the facts of a case.

### **Faith and the Old Testament**

In commenting on the Hebrew words for “believe,” **Berkoff** has this to say (p. 493):

The Hebrew word for believe is *he'emin* (!m;a', 'aman). It means “to believe.” In *qal*, it means “to nurse” or “to nourish.” In the *niphal* it means “to be firm” or “established or be steadfast.” In the *hiphal* it means “to consider established” or “to regard as true.”

The word “believe” (*aman*) is translated “they will not support me . . .” in Exodus 4:1. This is akin to the Irish meaning of “*lippen*.”

The Hebrew word for “trust” is *batach* which means “to confide” or “to lean on” or “to trust” (2 Kings 18:22):

“Now, behold, thou trustest (*batach*) upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean (*batach*), it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust (*xj;B'*, *batach*) on him.”

Another Hebrew word translated as trust is *chasah* which means “to hide one’s self” or “to flee for refuge” in 2 Samuel 22:31:

“As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge (*chacah*) in Him.” Thus, we can conclude the OT meaning of the word “trust” means “to lean on,” or “to rely on” or “to take refuge in” the work of Christ (Berkoff, 1993).

### **Faith is used in different ways throughout the Bible.**

“By faith, we mean **the sum total of Christian doctrine**” (Thiessen, 1979, (p. 271).

In this sense, it is not an action; it is a noun which refers to the content of **the Christian faith**.

But, faith is also **an action**,

**Thiessen** says, "Faith is the turning of the soul to God, as repentance is the turning of the soul from sin." (Thiessen, 1979, p. 270).

**Albert Gray**, former president of Pacific Bible College, says faith is intellectually necessary, that it is emotional (Romans 10:10), that it is volitional (Romans 10:16) (Gray, 2005, 272).

**Hodge** makes a distinction between dead faith, temporary faith, and saving faith (Hodge, 1992, 442).

Faith is "an intellectual conviction, resting on the testimony of another," (Berkoff, 1993, 494).

**Faith is also a decision.** Like a juror who looks at the evidence presented in court and comes to a verdict, so faith is a decision of trust after a preponderance of the evidence concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

## 5. The Just Shall Live by Faith

### Habakkuk 2:4

#### Background

◆ Habakkuk was disturbed by the "violence" in his day (1:1-11), and he wondered why the LORD did not intervene.

God answered the prophet by informing him that He would send the Chaldean marines to humble the nation for its indulgence of evil.

This answered stunned Habakkuk . . . but, it raised a second question: "Why would God use an evil empire to chastise God's dirty sheep" (1:12-2:20)?

The LORD comforted the grieving prophet by giving him instruction on how to live by faith, and with the assurance the Babylonians would receive the God's just punishment.

### In Wicked Times the Just by faith shall live

**2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.**

The Spirit contrasts the soul of the wicked with the soul of righteous.

### The Soul of the Wicked

In saying, "his soul is not right with in him" is God's way of explaining the twisted, spiritual condition of the treacherous Chaldeans – poisonous snakes slithering through green grass.

Because the Babylonians did not seek the LORD nor align themselves with the law of God, they became the grim reapers of the Levant.

The first word the Spirit uses to describe the wickeness of the Babylonians is the Hebrew term "not upright" (Heb: *yasar*). It means **not** level, straight, or smooth in an ethical sense. *Caveat emptore*: Don't expect a "square deal" from these fraudsters. They were actors with borrowed virtue; serpents in imperial robes.

The **second** word used to describe the crookedness of the Babylonians is the term "lifted up."

The Hebrew verb for "lifted up" (*aphal*) is an Pual verb -- an intense passive form of the Piel verb stem. It can be translated, "has been puffed up!" The word *autonomous* comes to mind. Because the Chaldeans exercised little restraint over their desires, conceit grew in their hearts until their vessels were capsized by their large cargo of pride.

The word *autonomous* comes from the Greek words *auto* which means "self;" and *nomous* which means "law:" i.e., in a negative sense these Chaldeans were a law unto themselves – a democratic powerhouse drunk with multi-culturalism and exceptionalism. They recognized no authority over their own souls but their own will, wants, and wishes!

In contrast to the autonomous Babylonian, we have the righteous who live by faith believing the LORD God is the Supreme Ruler of the Universe and that His law is absolute; that all men are accountable to Him as "Judge of All the Earth" (Genesis 18:25).

*There is no greater heresy among men than the notion that Christians are at liberty to choose the law they will serve.*

### **The Soul of the Righteous**

In Hebrew the text reads, "By faith . . . the righteous shall live."

The Hebrew word for "faith" is *emuwnah* which means "firmness," "steadfastness," "faithfulness," and "reliable." It is translated "steady" in Exodus 17:12, "truth" in Deuteronomy 32:4; "faithfulness" in 1 Samuel 26:3; "faithfully" in 2 Kings 12:15; and "ordain in their set office" in 1 Chronicles 9:22.

- By faith the Spirit does **not** mean faith in faith nor faith as a matter of philosophical truth, but faith that yields acts of faithfulness.
- By faith the Spirit does **not** suggest belief in any religion will result in righteousness or that all faiths are equal; aka *omnism*. That faith in any religion or all religions lead to heaven is hereby **denied**. Few seem to recognize there are many roads to hell.
- By faith, the Spirit does **not** refer to the power of positive thinking.
- By faith, the Spirit does **not** imply there are other ways to be righteous without faith. Only those with faith in Christ are righteous.
- By faith, the Spirit does **not** suggest faith in one's own righteousness will justify the sinner.
- By faith, the Spirit is **not** referencing one's "profession," but one's holy disposition.
- By faith, the Spirit is **not** directing the reader to "faith in the heart," but a faith that looks away from self to Another.
- By faith, the Spirit is **not** suggesting faith relies up some ritual like praying the rosary to obtain favor with God. True "faith worketh by

love;" that is, true faith produces love and goodness toward others (Galatians 5:6)

- By faith, the Spirit instructs Habakkuk on the core mark of righteous men. Righteous men believe in the LORD God . . . in the Holy Scriptures . . . in His law . . . in the basics of OT gospel proclamation that "the Lord reigns." Further, righteous men display faith-conduct (faithfulness) consistent with their holy profession.

The apostle Paul uses the principle, "The just shall live by faith", as the cornerstone of his treatise on the gospel (Romans 1:16-17).

Before us is a faith that believes unto justification (4:5); a faith that sanctifies (12:1ff); a faith that believes God and works righteousness (Habakkuk 2:4; James 2); a "faith unto faith" where faith leads to faithfulness (Romans 1:14-16); a faith that grows in time while drawing a man closer to Christ; and, a faith that receives Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) revelation regarding Christ the Savior and the progress of redemption.

The righteousness that justifies a man is entirely of faith, from faith, and by faith. This statement leads Christians to conclude that salvation is wrapped up in Reformation theology: Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Sola Christos, and Sola Scriptura.

## 6. Something More Precious than Gold

### 1 Peter 1:6-7

◆ Q: Do you value gold? Most of us do.

Q: Do you value trials? Most of us don't. But, the Apostle Peter did.

**1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:**

**1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:**

The text does **not** say your faith is more precious than gold, but that the "trial of your faith" is *much, more* precious than gold.

The word "trial" (*dokimion*) refers to those pressures and stresses you experience as a result of your faith in Christ.

These trials are seasonal (*oligos*); that is, they appear for a short time in our lives and then go away.

These "trials" are "manifold" (*poililos*). They are numerous and of different kinds. These trials may be financial, political, or medical. The pain of these trials comes from a change of circumstances in life, from poverty to affluence, and from affluence to poverty.

These trials are "heavy" (*lupeo*) which means "grievous," "painful," "sad," or "tiresome." We get the medical term "*lupus*" from this word which is a painful inflammation of bodily tissues.

"Wherever change occurs in the external circumstances of life, there a man's religion is put to the test, and there he should feel that God is trying the reality of his faith" (Barnes).

These trials are not only called "precious" (*timios*) but "much" "more" precious. The term "precious" is preceded by a prefix (*polu*) which increases the value and richness of the term -- "very valuable and costly." The word *timios* means "honorable," "esteemed," and "valuable" -- much, more valuable than any of us understand -- a pearl in the belly of the ocean.

The main verb is "might be found" (*heurisko*) -- an aorist passive subjunctive -- a possibility or wish of the apostle that would hopefully turn into reality at a future time.

These tests drive men to Christ and to His Word; that is, these trials not only prove a man's faith, but improve the man and his faith. God provides these trials so a man may know if his faith is genuine or false. They are

provided to perfect his faith, and to make it pure -- that his faith, "might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

If trials make better Christians, then the struggling believer has cause for rejoicing: "Wherein, ye greatly rejoice" for you are becoming like gold forged in the fire.

## 7. Jesus Marveled

**Mark 6:6; Matthew 8:10**

◆ **Mark 6:6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.**

**Matthew 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.**

The Greek word "marveled" (*thaumazo*) means "to stand in awe, or amazement."

Twice in the New Testament, the Spirit says that Jesus marveled: once at the unbelief of the people in Nazareth; and once at the faith of the Roman Centurion.

Two things capture the attention of Jesus: faith and unbelief.

The obvious question is, "What does Jesus' marvel at in our lives – our unbelief or our faith"?

## 8. The Unbelief of the Nazarenes

## Luke 4:18-19

### The Gospel that Drove the Jews Insane

◆ Consider the gospel of our Lord as proclaimed at Nazareth in 30 AD. It is a message that drove the People of Nazareth insane – like people who swim with their boots on; or play the violin under water; or trying to lasso a lightning bolt. Moreover, it is a sad, but powerful illustration of doubt and unbelief – the ground out which insanity grows.

After Jesus said these words, the crazed Jews in Nazareth sought to throw him over a cliff. This fact shows us how little we understand the words Jesus spoke.

The one who does understand these words and uses them to expose the doctrines of Cain may suffer the same fate as our Lord. (The doctrines of Cain are humanism, self-esteem, psychology, psychotherapy, self-improvement, Hinduism, and Judaism).

Modern men speak of human problems in terms of poverty, lack of self-esteem, mental illness, and addiction. No one in the mainstream media speaks of man's troubles in terms of sin and rebellion against God's law order. Likewise, the world's solutions are found in "good counseling," drug therapy, and total compliance of the total man to total government.

But, Jesus did not come to be the Great Therapist. He came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He did not come to improve people's self-esteem, but to save those who understood the truth about themselves; that they poor in spirit, slaves to sin, and broken by it.

Likewise, if your problems can be solved with drugs, money, or therapy, Jesus is not for you. But, if you are broken over your spiritual poverty, enslavement to sin, and lack of righteousness, this gospel is for you.

The troubles under which humanity suffers are addressed by the terms poverty, broken heartedness, bondage, blindness, and brokenness. Our Lord introduces Himself as the remedy to all man's spiritual and physical maladies -- the one christened to be man's Savior.

**Luke 4:18-19 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.**

This passage is almost an exact replication of the LXX version of Isaiah 61:1-2. The context is the Year of Jubilee, "the acceptable year of the Lord" when mortgaged lands were scheduled to return to its owners, debts were forgiven, and Israelite slaves released (Leviticus 25:9-10). It is here applied to the kingdom of God, the age come; that is, the blessings of age to come at the end of history broke forth in the middle of history in and through the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Spirit of the Lord" is upon me. No Jew at the time of Jesus would dare say this . . . but it was true of our Lord. He was not anointed with ambition, economic prowess, or Caesar-inspired leadership as men covet today, but by the Spirit of the Lord.

Set up a seminar on how to become a millionaire, and the auditoriums will be full; but, schedule a seminar on how to be set free from sin, and the place will be empty.

"he hath anointed me" -- There is a slight play upon words here. The word, "anointed" (*chrío*) forms the root meaning of Jesus' title, "the Christ" (*christos*) or "anointed one."

"All the gifts and graces of the Spirit were upon him and on him, without measure" - Matthew Henry

"to preach the gospel to the poor" -- In using the word "poor" most people in Jesus' day would have thought of those suffering from economic deprivation, a condition that humbles men. But, Jesus had a broader perspective. The poor refers to those who know they are sinners, without God, lacking in spiritual wealth, and who know they are not right with God. Christ came to save the poor, not those that feel they are righteous and in need of nothing.

"he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted (*suntribo*)" -- The verb "sent" changes from the aorist tense to the perfect tense indicating that Jesus was in the process of fulfilling this ministry. The phrase "heal the broken hearted" is not in the best manuscripts. Since these texts were used in church liturgies, and liturgists tended to modify the verse for harmonic liturgical services, the "revised" melonic version found its way in to Latin texts.

Nevertheless, the textual phrase is true by virtue of the word "bruised" (*thrauo*) in the last phrase of the sentence -- a word that means "broken hearted."

"to preach deliverance to the captives" -- "and recovering of sight to the blind" -- The blindness is that of those who have been imprisoned in the darkness -- a double inference to those few who are physically blind and to the majority who are spiritually blind; i.e., unable to see the truth about God, man, and salvation.

"to preach deliverance to the captives" -- The term "deliverance" comes from the Greek word "*aphesis*" which means "to set free," "to deliver," or "to forgive." It is used twice in this passage. The expression "captives" (*aichmalotos*) comes from two words "*aich*" meaning "the tip of the spear" and "*haliskomai*" which means "captive" or "prisoner" -- a reference to those who were forced into slavery by those prodding them with the tip of the spear -- an ideal word to shed light on man's enslavement to sin.

"to set at liberty them that are bruised" -- The term "liberty" is a translation of the Greek word "*aphesis*." The word "bruised" (*thrauo*) means "broken," "shattered," "crushed," and "pierced through with a sword." The word describes the pre-salvation state of God's people. Before men are saved, they grieve over the sin in their lives; that is, they mourn and agonize over their sinful state; so much so, they look for a Savior to save them from the penalty, power, and presence of sin.

"To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" -- The year spoken of is the Hebrew *year of jubilee*, the day that all debts were forgiven and all property returned to its original owners -- an economic reset to balance the books and to give men new hope. The connection between the "year of

jubilee" and Jesus heralding the kingdom of God are indivisibly linked together (Luke 4:43). Receive Jesus as Lord and surrender to His reign, and you will experience a jubilee in your life called "salvation."

The application is rather simple: If you are poor in spirit, a slave to sinful habits, and grieved over your broken condition, Jesus is for you. But, if you are full of self-esteem, happy with your habits, and "think positive" about your condition, then move on. The Lord has nothing for you.

4:24 No prophet is accepted in his own country \*\*\*\*\* Elijah . . .

**28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,**

**29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.**

That Jesus proclaimed *the year of jubilee*, the arrival of the kingdom, that He was the prophet spoken by Isaiah and Malaci, and that the people would reject Him in unbelief like the people did in the days of Elijah caused the people of Nazareth to erupt like volcano.

The gospel that drove the Jews insane was not a preaching that men need to be better and superior, but his preaching that sin made men vulgar and inferior; they his audience were sinners in need of salvation.

Our Lord's message exposed the doctrines of Cain, and the Jews wanted to kill him for it.

Likewise, the gospel message is not for those with high self-esteem but for sinners; not for Armenians who have the power to choose the right way, but for those who cannot help but to go the wrong way; not for shakers and movers, but for wrong doers; not for those seeking to be worthy, but for those who know they are unworthy; not for those offering beans, beets, and broccoli for salvation, but those who trust in the blood of Jesus for salvation.

### **The Unbelief of the Nazarenes**

**First**, the Nazarenes did not believe the Holy Scriptures read by Jesus.

**Second**, they could not believe the words of Isaiah were being fulfilled by Jesus in their day . . . or that they would ever be fulfilled.

**Third**, they defaced Jesus by humanizing Him. Instead of recognizing Him as the unique Son of God, they blemished His image by asking, "Is not this Joseph's son? Matthew uses the metonym, "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55).

The word "carpenter" refers to a construction worker – one that works with wood, stone, and tile.

Likewise, modern men deface Jesus by calling Him "a misled rabbi," a "religious teacher," a "deceived prophet," or "a way to God" (omnism).

Americans love sons of bankers, doctors, lawyers, and stock brokers . . . but "blue collar workers?" No way! People love Hollywood stars, but plumbers, carpenters, and rednecks? Impossible!

Nike-faith believes every word in the Holy Scriptures; that Jesus is the Word made flesh; fully man, fully divine; that He is the Savior of the world – the door carved into eternity; the light on the front porch that marks the way home; the sunrise that breaks through the darkness and the fear of death.

## 9. The Centurion's Legacy of Faith

### Matthew 8:5-13

◆ **Matthew 8:10** When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

**His position:** The centurion was a Roman commander of about 100 men (century) who sought Jesus's help for his beloved, suffering servant. (Centurion is from the Latin "centum" meaning "hundred").

**His faith:** The marvelous "faith of the centurion" refers to a Roman soldier who, despite his Roman, Gentile, military background, had extraordinary insight into Jesus's power to heal his sick servant.

Unlike most, he believed Jesus did not need to be physically present to heal his servant, but that our Lord could heal him from a distance with a single command. This soldier believed that a word from Jesus would be sufficient to release divine power needed to heal his servant.

**His understanding and reasoning:** The Centurion demonstrated a profound understanding of Jesus' authority and power which greatly amazed our Lord. The commander seemed to have an eagle's eye that could spot a meal from thousands of feet in the sky; a mind with windows made of crystal – perception so clear, it could see fish from the clouds in muddy waters as if it was gazing at a clear, mountain spring.

**First**, he reasoned that since he was a man under authority of Rome with power to command men that Jesus was also a man of power because He was under the authority of the Father. He understood that if he could command his soldiers to do things, the Son of God could simply command sickness to leave, and it would be done.

**Second**, Jesus marveled at the Centurion's humility – a humility borne out insight into Jesus' heavenly authority. He reasoned that he being a man under the authority of a mere man (Caesar) was not worthy to have Jesus, the Son of God come into his home. He was so humble he petition Jewish elders to intercede on his behalf to their nation's messiah. As they were on the way, the Centurion felt ashamed of his request asking the Son of God to come to his home. Consequently, he sent a second courier to petition our Lord not to bother to come to his house but to merely issue His command. And, He did!

His humility was a candle in Jewish darkness that shed light on the greatness of Jesus.

**Jesus's reaction:** Jesus was amazed stating that he had not found such great faith in all of Israel . . . and, in so doing elevated the Centurion giving him a supreme place in the Holy Scriptures.

**The result:** The servant was healed by a silent word, even though Jesus was not there – evidence the Centurion's faith-reasoning was correct.

The lesson God wants us to recognize our Lord's status as the Son of God; His transcendent authority; and, to humble ourselves and live expectantly that He is able and willing to grant our reasonable requests from His highly, exalted position at the right hand of the Father.

## 10. Faith's Public Confession

### Luke 8:48

◆ **Luke 8:48 And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.**

**Background:** This woman suffered an affliction called "an issue of blood:" that is, for 12 years she experienced a constant menstrual flow. Whether the problem was hormonal, or an infection, or something more serious like a tumor, we do not know.

Further, our Lord was on his way to help Jairus, the leader of a local synagogue, with his deathly sick daughter who was 12 years old when He was interrupted by the faith-touch of a woman who had suffered 12 years with an issue of blood.

This was a serious interruption because during the digression Jairus' daughter died.

### Lessons on faith

Thus, our **first** lesson is about Jesus' priorities. He ministered to this mature older woman first before ministering to the youth. Jairus had experienced 12 years of joy with his daughter, but this older woman had experienced 12 years of misery due to her sickness; that is, her need had priority over Jairus' need. Age correctly took priority over youth; misery and despair has priority over meteoric suffering and stress.

**Second**, we learn this woman had spent her entire savings on physicians . . . on counterfeits and charlatans who "bled her financially dry" with barbarous remedies for menstrual bleeding such as herbal compacts, utilizing mystical sheep urine, and applying other poultices.

Spurgeon expressed it this way: after she had spent all her savings on pretenders . . . at the bottom of her purse she found Jesus.

Enough of charlatans! This woman needed Jesus, the Source of salvation.

Enough of psychologists, religious gurus, and woke remedies! Only Jesus has the power to save, to heal, and to forgive. Men do not need more self-esteem. They need more Christ-esteem. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" – the only road to the Father -- the only way "to heaven" (John 14:6).

**Third**, having heard of the miracle-working powers of Christ, the woman's faith drove her to secretly touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Only attachment to Him can save the soul.

**47 And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.**

**Fourth**, the woman was healed, but **not** until she was forced to make an open confession of faith; to come out of the shadows and into the light; to embrace Christ publicly in front of all the crowd; that is, in coming to Christ she had to overcome her fear of men. She, like modern people, prefer to follow Jesus privately without embracing the cross, without a commitment to discipleship, without public confession or baptism – like a moon that reflects the sun in silence; like a dove in the rafters – present peaceful, and quiet without disturbing the air.

Jesus felt power go out of him when the woman touched him, but she did **not** receive the power of healing **until after** she confessed her faith openly.

The lesson is clear, men can experience His salvic powers, but not until they separate themselves from charlatans and embrace Christ overtly.

Romans 10:10-11 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Comfort came to this woman's soul, but only after she came out of the shadows and confessed her faith in front of the crowd.

**Five**, we see that felt-needs draws men to Christ. Without a sense of need; a sense of sin, and heart-felt guilt do men come to Christ; that is, need is the black chariot that carries us to the cross (Zachariah 6:2).

**Six**, the word "virtue" (*dunamis*) means power. We learn that only the touch of faith releases the power of God to solve men's problems. Many people touched Jesus as he was moving through the crowd – "as he went the people thronged him", but only the touch of faith untethered his power to save. She heard of Him, believed in Him, searched for Him, touched Him, confessed Him . . . and then she was healed.

## 11. Faith Rests in His Promises

### Isaiah 30:15

◆ **Isaiah 30:15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In (your) returning and rest shall ye be saved; in (your) quietness (rest) and in (your) confidence (trust) shall be your strength: and ye would not.**

There is something about us that as soon as we experience a storm of troubles, the wheels in our little minds begin to turn to all the human solutions that we can think of to find relief our pressures. Agitated, we fret like a hamster on a wheel of worry.

But, this text informs us on how to experience safety and greater power while running on the treadmill of American life.

**The background** of this text is the dark cloud of the Assyrian invasion (730+ BC) and the forbidden alliance of Judah with Egypt.

The "woe" in verse one is an expression of grievance because Judah's ambassadors brought gifts to the princes of Zoan as consideration in their proposed contract alliance (30:2, 4). This trust in the shadow of Egypt for comfort and protection resulted in shame and confusion like a maze with shifting walls (30:3).

This alliance added to their sin of rejecting the law of the Lord and His counsels (30:9). Thus, God promised to break Israel as a Potter breaks a vessel into shards.

**Isaiah 30:15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In (your) returning and rest shall ye be saved; in (your) quietness (rest) and in (your) confidence (trust) shall be your strength: and ye would not.**

"Thus saith the Lord" is the Scripture's enacting clause -- the Source of authority behind the promise (contract); that is, God puts the full weight of His resources behind those resting under the shadow of His wings (Isaiah 37-39; Psalm 46, 76).

The contract offer is from the Lord God (the Grantor), the Holy One of Israel to Judah (the trustee) who was unsettled by the politics of the time -- like a compass spinning in circles.

The proposed contract offer contained duties, requirements, or conditions before benefits could be received.

The LORD called for repentance - "returning" (noun) is the Hebrew word *shubawh* which means "to retire or withdraw from plans of desperation" --

from a trust in man to a trust in God; from an alliance with Egypt to reliance on the Lord. The great lesson here is to trust the Lord and not government – to trust like a tree leaning towards the Sun.

The noun, "rest" (*nachath*) means "quietness" or "rest" -- a cessation of the nervous, desperate attraction to false hopes. Rather, Isaiah encouraged his people to take comfort in the love and power of God to protect them. The sheep in His pasture can rest and be at peace because they are under the care of the Great Shepherd with staff in hand and an eye on the enemy.

The verbal infinitive "quietness" (*shaqat*) is an action that requires silence, rest, and abandonment of all human effort to finagle circumstances to their advantage; that is, be like a hammock strung between two promises.

The noun "confidence" (*bitchah*) means trust -- a movement to a place of rest – to a quiet harbor for weary, battered ships.

**Ellicott:** "The words describe a process of conversion, but the nature of that conversion is determined by the context. In this case it was the turning from the trust in man, with all its restless excitement, to a trust in God, full of calmness and of peace."

**Maclaren:** "They had gone away from Him in their fears. They must come back by their faith. To them the great lesson was trust in God. Through them to us the same lesson is read. The principle is far wider than this one case. It is the one rule of life for us all . . ."

"Returning and rest" correspond to "quietness and confidence," so as that "rest" answers to "quietness" and "returning to confidence." In the former clause we have the action towards God and then its consequence. In the latter we have the consequence and then the action.

The saddest part of this text is "ye would not." Like modern man, ancient Hebrew statesmen struggled with trusting a God they could not see – they were like a wolf howling in a cathedral or like a chess piece leaping off the checker board.

"ISRAEL always felt the difficulty of sustaining itself on the height of dependence on the unseen, spiritual power of God, and was ever oscillating between alliances with the Northern and Southern powers, linking itself with Assyria against Egypt, or with Egypt against Assyria" (Maclaren).

Matthew 23: 37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

The only requirement for protection is returning and trust.

Stop fretting. Rest, soul, rest! Believe, believe.

## 12. Fighting for Faith

### 1 John 5:4

◆ **1 John 5:4 "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."**

The word "overcometh" (*nika*) is a verb. The word "victory" (*nike*) is a noun. Thus, the word "nike" refers to victory – a victory that lights a candle in the dark; victory that crosses the finish line with the sun at your back; the roar of thunder after the storm has passed.

Doubt is the mother of all sins and the cause of all backsliding. The surf and foam on a sea of conflict in this dark world pushes us to doubt God and seek safety on the shores of sensuality where the crashing waves swoosh away every footprint of faith.

"Relying on God has to start all over everyday, as if nothing has yet been done." – C.S. Lewis

**The Holy Scriptures are the anchor of faith** because nike-faith comes by hearing and believing the Word of God (Roman 10:17). God is most glorified when we believe Him while enduring storms at sea.

*Just the presence of faith in a sea of doubt is the victory (nike) that overcomes the world. It is **not** our deeds that commend us to God, but the presence of active faith burning in the hearth of our hearts that pleases Him.*

**Therefore, we fight the fight of faith by faith and for faith.**

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

**Augustine** said,

"Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand." Yes, this needs to be done.

Holy men are not fideists that believe in faith for faith's sake. Nike-faith is based on the facts of historical Christianity. We believe because the evidence supports the claim that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself!

**Nike-faith stands on evidence.** We don't just blindly believe. True faith is grounded on proof of claim that Jesus died for our sins and literally, physically rose from the grave. Because we have historical, legal, eye-witness evidence of how God moved in history, we have courage to trust him for our future . . . for what we cannot see. Faith never knows where God is leading, but it knows and trusts the goodness and wisdom of the One who leads. Because one has knowledge of the floor plan in one's house, he can walk through rooms in the dark.

1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

"If you believe in a God who controls the big things, you have to believe in a God who controls the little things. It is we, of course, to whom things look 'little' or 'big'." – Elisabeth Elliot

**Nike-faith produces encouragement.** We know that our brothers and sisters are tempted to fall into fits of doubt as we have. During these times, we help lift one another up and remind each other of God's good promises.

Stop inspiring fear in those around you by listening to the roar of the sea. Rather inspire courage by standing on the deck clinging to the rail of God's Word by faith. God is good and He will continue to manifest His goodness even in these dark times. Let us approach these days expecting to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living – building bridges on His promises across rivers of doubt.

## 13. Whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin

### Roman 14:23

◆ **Romans 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**

The Greek word for "doubteth" (*diakrino*) refers to a moral decision (judgment) derived from ignorance or fear. It is translated "dispute," "doubt," "hesitate," or "debate;" that is, not acting out of faith, of convictions about right and wrong.

**"he eateth not of faith"**

**The background:** This passage addresses the tension between Jews and Romans; between vegetarians and meat eaters; between cultic Judaism that prioritized OT food restrictions and libertarian Greeks that prioritized liberty.

Jews felt the Levitical law respecting the difference between meats was binding on Christians. Paul did not take this view and neither did the Gentiles. This difference caused tension between the two groups.

As the gospel of liberty made its mark on the Mediterranean world, tension erupted in the early church. Therefore, St. Paul addressed those conflicts in Romans 14.

**The Moral Standard for Right and Wrong:** When it comes to ethical practices, God never intended Christians to be guided by moral relativism.

The Word of God is the standard of right and wrong – the moral compass that always points north; that is, “faith” refers to the content of the gospel; to God’s law-order; His will for believers.

But, the Torah contained temporary, cultic statutes designed to train the ancient nation of Israel in righteousness. These Levitical restrictions ended after the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. Though the first-century Jews struggled with the new principles of liberty, the core of the gospel is about freedom from sin and liberty from the cultic laws of Israel.

Don’t hear what is not being said. While Christians are free from the cultic laws of Israel, no man is free from responsibility to moral law. Likewise in America -- while most men are free from statutory codes passed by legislatures, no man is free from the common law.

**The Doctrinal Position:** While the gospel includes Old Testament moral laws like the Ten Commandments, it does **not** incorporate the cultic, ceremonial statutes of the Old Testament (OT): food laws, Seventh day Sabbath keeping, circumcision, strict tithing, festival regulations, and Levitical practices.

Every believer has a duty to the moral laws in the Word of God, but no Christian has a duty to the cultic, ceremonial statutes given to Israel to isolate them and to prevent them from mixing with Gentiles. The cultic statutes ended with the coming of Christ. However, not every man has this perspective . . . specifically Hebrew Christians in the first century – thus the tensions during the era of gospel proclamation.

**Definition of sin:**

Christians are motivated by a healthy fear of sin; that is, a love and reverence for God, prompting a desire to avoid sin and live a life pleasing to Him. Therefore, defining sin correctly helps one live accurately.

1 John 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law".

Romans 14:23:"...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin".

James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin".

Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"

The Apostle John tells us that sin is a transgression (anomia) of law (1 John 3:4), and Romans 14:23 teaches us that sin is also a transgression of the conscience when dealing with uncertainty. Acting without law is a sin (antinomianism); operating under self-law (personal autonomy) or under the influence of democracy (mob law; peer pressure) is also a sin. It is like a lone wolf howling at its own moon.

### **"for he that doubteth"**

**Definition of the Conscience** is a God-given asset in the human soul that acts like a moral compass helping individuals to discern right from wrong. It is not the ultimate authority of right and wrong, but a conscience trained by God's Word and prayer that leads Christians to make choices that reflect the faith.

Furthermore, what a terrible thing it is to be constrained to do or not do what someone else's conscience dictates. Consider the weakness of "democracy" (mob rule). Such a condition makes men slaves to others. Christians are not to be blackmailed by either legalists or libertarians. Each must walk with God and be guided by His Word – not by popular vote; not by Congress; not by State legislatures, not by bullies, not by religious tyrants.

### **"whatsoever is not of faith is sin"**

**Matters of the Conscience:** Because it took time for Jews to come out of the shadows of OT food restrictions (eating shrimp, crab, and pork) impacted their conscience. Thus, walking in the light so as not to offend one's conscience became a pillar of the gospel. The Word of God is the objective standard of right and wrong; and, the conscience is the subjective thermometer of morality.

Likewise, the error of flaunting liberty to entice others to adopt one's own values became a sin to avoid.

The goal is a "pure conscience" – one that works properly. Consequently, one has to train his conscience with knowledge from Scripture lest it become a "defiled conscience,"[2] or a "weak conscience." [3] The Apostle John tells us that sin is a transgression (anomia) of law<sup>2</sup> (1 John 3:4), and this text teaches us that sin is also a transgression of the conscience when dealing with uncertainty. Acting without law is a sin (antinomianism); acting under self-law (personal autonomy) is also a sin. Operating under the influence of democracy (mob law; peer pressure) is also a sin.

**Romans 14:22 Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.**

The issue is not a violation of clear written law, but a violation of one's knowledge of what is right and wrong regarding unclear matters; that is, acting contrary to one's knowledge on doubtful things or concerns not directly address by law violated the conscience. Thus, a transgression against the conscience was labeled a sin.

Consequentially, a Christian must instruct his conscience by the Word of God and be careful not to infringe upon the conscience in regards to matters not addressed by the Word of God. He dare not act contrary to his knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> The word "transgression" comes from the Greek word *anomia* which means without law; that is, antinomianism is sin; being autonomous (self-lawed) is sin.

Ellicott: "Where the conscience is in doubt, faith alone can make it right to choose the side against which conscience inclines."

**The lesson** here is that all our thoughts and actions must spring from nike-faith; that is, knowledge of the Word and what God would have us to do. One must educate his conscience. Whatever is not agreeable to the Word and doctrine of faith, ought not to be done. It is sinful. If a man crosses the line of doubt, he sins against God; that is, he spins a web of poison and silk.

Anything done without faith cannot be pleasing to God.

**Romans 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat . . .**

Use of the term "dammed" is usually associated with future punishment but not here. It simply means that one who violates his conscience will set the fire alarm off; that the violation of his conscience is a sin; that repentance, forsaking sin, and confession must be employed to cleanse the conscience.

## 14. When Afraid I will Trust in Thee

### Psalm 56

◆ Before us is a chisel in the hands of time – a lesson taught in the darkness and not the light: to walk by nike-faith and not by sight during the stormy seasons of life.

**Psalm 56:1 To the chief Musician upon Jonathelemrechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.**

In the title "upon Jonath-elem-rechokim," the first word - "*Jonath*" - means a "dove," a favorite emblem of suffering innocence (Ellicott).

In fleeing from the wrath and jealousy of King Saul, David found himself at the gates of the Philistines (Gath) acting like a madman (1 Samuel 21:10-22:1). Ashamed of his behavior, David sought the Lord. During this low point in his life, the Lord chiseled a lesson of trust into David's golden heart.

Somewhere in this act of desperation, David came to his senses and shifted his trust from man to God. Later, he penned this prayer that we might learn the lessons of dependence on God.

**Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me**

Instead of mentioning Saul or the Philistines, David refers to man individually or to fallen man collectively. The Hebrew word for "man" is *enosh* - a reference to the egg-shell frailty of mortal man.

In this fight, David depended upon God's mercy, not upon his own merit; upon the mercy of God, not upon the fickle mercy of man (*enosh*). *The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* (Proverbs 12:10); but, the endless mercies of God are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). The man who receives the mercy of God digs as if he is mining stars from the night's sky.

Merit gives a man what he deserves (judgment); mercy does not give a man what he deserves. Mercy gives a man what he needs (relief).

The Hebrew word "oppresseth" (*lachsats*) means to press or squeeze.

The reason for this shift in trust is that David suddenly realized that not only does Saul want to kill him, but the heartless, Philistines feeding on their own bitterness would swallow him up like starving wolves; that is, these callous brutes (*enosh*) would find pleasure in seeing him suffer.

**2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.**

So anxious is young David about his predicament at the Gates of Gath, he mentions their intent a second time: "mine enemies would daily swallow me up" like shadows with teeth.

The word "swallow" can also mean "to pant after," "trample on," or "bruise" as dogs panting after a rabbit in a chase eager to make a meal of the helpless animal. This event is not just a chase, but a passion driven hunt for David's life.

David impresses us with his plight by using the term "many" (*rab*) which means "abounding." His friends were few; his enemies were many. Alone, he felt chased after by a pack of panting, salivating wolves eager to crush his bones.

The term "O most high" is one Hebrew word (*mar'om*) and not a phrase. It means "elevated" referring either to the elevated attitude of his enemies or to God Who is in heaven. There are many gods in this world, but Melchizedek, Abraham, and David raised their hand to the LORD Most High God.

Some expositors note that the word *mar'om* translated "O thou most high" (elevation) is not in the vocative, and therefore, does not refer to God. Rather, they believe the "most high" refers to the attitude of his pursuers. His enemies were not only passionate, but proud and arrogant acting as if they were archers shooting arrows at him from a high tower. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown recognize the possibility of this meaning.

Other expositors such as Barnes believe "O thou most High" is an appeal to the God of Heaven to look down and see his plight. Likewise, Gill adopts this view. The term "High" (*mar'om*) is used of God in Psalm 92:8. Whether this is how we should interpret this word, the next verse definitely shows David looking upward and not around at his enemies.

### **3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.**

**Trust:** As far as we can tell, David was the first to give the word "trust" (*batash*) a religious meaning. The word "trust" is first used in the Bible to refer to the corrupt leadership of Abimelech luring Israel into a death trap: "put your trust in my shadows;" that is trust my government (Judges 9:15).

Boaz observed that David's grandmother (Ruth) trusted in the shadow of His wings (Ruth 2:12); and, it was David, Ruth's grandson, who advanced

the principle of trusting God as a rock, shield, horn, and tower (2 Samuel 22:3).

David did not begin his flight from Saul with raging confidence in God. It was as scar whispered in wisdom, the commitment he made after he foolishly played the madman at Gath -- an essential discipline to learn on the pilgrim path to the Celestial City: "stay on track" -- riding the rails with your eyes on the horizon.

**Fear & Faith:** David announced, "When I am afraid," I will trust. This is no fair-weather trust; that is, I will trust God in the darkness, not just in the light; in difficult times, and not just easy times; in rough seas as well as smooth seas; at midnight and not just at high noon; during cloudy days and not just in the sunshine; during the cold winters of life and not just in the warm summers of this pilgrimage. As a man bundles up under his winter coat during a blizzard, so I will cluster my precious all under His warm wings during the bitters of life.

This is the principle David learned to apply the rest of his life: Faith, not fear, will be my guide. When I am afraid, I will trust God like a child sleeping in the arms of the Almighty!

Some men learn this sooner than others. May the Lord help us all to apply this during periods of darkness; during the black velvet across the sky; when ink spills on our parchment.

Lamentably, this lesson can't be learned in the sunshine. It is learned after midnight . . . after an unwanted trial . . . after a spiritual failure . . . after dark clouds hide the stars. But, better learned in the dark than never learned at all.

**4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.**

This verse contains a textual challenge: The KJV says, "I will praise his word." The LXX says, "I will praise God with my word." "The obvious treatment of the verse is to take the construction as in Psalm 44:8, "I praise God with my word," i.e., in spite of all the chiding by my enemies,

I find words to praise God (Ellicott). But, other scholars believe David trusted God's Word and not the words of his enemies.

Both positions are true: We have respect for His Word, and we praise Him with our words.

"I will not" should be translated: *I fear not what can flesh do*. The text is not so much a promise or commitment as it is a chiseled-in-stone position of reliance on the LORD.

### **5 Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.**

David returns to the tactics of his enemies. The "wrest" (*atsab*) means to twist and to distort his words to the injury of the man. Personal enemies are incapable of speaking the truth in a fair and balanced way. All the reports about David to Saul were designed to incense Saul's anger against David. Likewise, today! The media twists, distorts, and perverts what good men say in order to ruin them politically. Slander is a form of murder and it is the favorite weapon of dirty hands.

### **6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.**

What David experienced from his enemies is true in our time. The enemies of the righteous are like wolves hiding in the bushes looking for the right time to launch their barks and howls against God's attack-lambs. The lesson for us is to be wise and avoid naivety. Beware of wire-pullers and kingmakers. *When government is god in the minds of men you cannot expect them not to betray soldiers for Christ.*

### **7 Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.**

The meaning of this text is obscure. Ellicott says the meaning here is "for iniquity thou wilt requite them;" that is, since there is a God in heaven who marshals the threats of men. How can they escape?

The psalmist asks with earnestness and amazement whether, under the divine administration, people "can" find safety in mere wickedness (Barnes).

### **8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?**

The word "tellest" means to count, recount, or number.

From David's conquest over Goliath to the death of Saul, David lived the life of a fugitive wandering from hide-out to hide-out. Barnes recounts David's wanderings: "My wanderings," to Gath, 1 Samuel 21:10; to the cave of Adullam, 1 Samuel 22:1; to Mizpeh, in Moab, 1 Samuel 22:3; to the forest of Hareth, 1 Samuel 22:5; to Keilah, 1 Samuel 23:5; to the wilderness of Ziph, 1 Samuel 23:14; to the wilderness of Maon, 1 Samuel 23:25; to Engedi, 1 Samuel 24:1-2."

According to the rule of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, the term "wandering" is coextensive with the word "tears." "Wandering" (singular) is a metaphor for "mental anguish;" "tossing to and fro of the mind;" confusion and the feelings of distress caused by the slander of his enemies; like a spinning compass in a magnetic storm.

"tears into thy bottle" is not literal, but a metaphor claiming that God knows all David's pain, anguish, and depression caused by the malicious criticism of his adversaries. What a comfort to learn that God knows and treasures all our sorrows – stones carried in the pocket of the heart: small, hard, and heavy.

### **9 When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.**

Cries occur when people are hurt. "Cry" is a synonym for liquid prayers by those carrying crosses – rivers flowing from the crevices of a broken heart. The first two verbs (Imperfect) indicate that David has confidence that his enemies will be defeated the next time he prays instead of flees.

The wandering shepherd could say, "this I know; for God is for me." David knew God was on his side because he was on God's side.

### **10 In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.**

Because faith banished fear, David praised the LORD for His promises and acts of deliverance. David was not a forgetter but a grateful praiser. The presence of praise means the absence of fear; and, the presence of fear means the absence of faith. Fear is the storm; faith is the anchor; fear builds walls, faith opens doors; fear is being adrift at sea, faith has oars to steer the craft; fear is like a needle in a magnetic storm, faith is like a compass that always points north.

### **11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.**

David repeats the main lesson of the psalm and the hardest lesson to learn for pilgrims awakened by the cries at midnight.

The sentiment in this verse is the same as in verse six except that the word "man" is used here instead of "flesh." Since God was his friend, the young prince adopted a position that he would not fear what mortal man could do to him. Faith in Heaven defeats foes on Earth; faith in the dark is the candle that never disappoints.

### **12 Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.**

Deliverances cause thankful men to go deeper into the Divine will. Vows imply commitment. Freedom from fear and foes ripens resolve and acceptance of responsibilities. Freedom from future failures appears to be grounded on present promises. David determined to trust God and to never again let his fears dictate his destiny.

### **13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?**

The sentiment in this verse is the same as in Psalm 56:6, except that the word "man" is used here instead of "flesh."

"Wilt thou not deliver . . ." is better translated, "Hast Thou not delivered . . . ?"

We have here a *greater to lesser* argument. Since God delivered him from death, David believed he could trust the LORD to deliver him from lesser difficulties. The fact that God rescued him in the past gave him confidence to trust God for the future; salvation from yesterday's difficulties gave David confidence that God would deliver him from today's adversities; his faith became his candle during the darkness of despair.

"that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" shows the purpose of God's salvation in our lives. He delivers us not for our pleasure, but for His Divine plan -- that we might walk with Him every minute of every day.

Having been delivered from darkness, let us walk in the light. If He is in the light let us walk in the light. If Christ took the high road, let us take the high road. Since He is holy, let us be holy. If he delivered us in our weakness, let us walk in His strength by *nike-faith* that we might enjoy freedom from fear and savor the favor of God.

## 15. Eyes of Faith that See the Unseen

**That see behind the Scenes of History**

### 2 Kings 6

#### Seven Miracles of Elisha

◆ Heaven opens for us so we can see behind the scenes of the Syrian War against Israel and the Seven Miracles of Elisha – a prophet who had *nike-faith*.

Because we are too often impacted by negative circumstances and news, we need to be a candle waiting for a spark.

Perhaps, the best approach to this marvelous account is to just read it, and let its simple facts stir our hearts toward faith in the sovereignty of God.

### **Background**

**Joram**, the son of Ahab and Jezebel (the murderers), is the pagan, idolatrous king that rules Israel, the Northern kingdom with its capital in Samaria.

**Ben-Hadad**, serves Rephidm, the Sun god, with border disputes and political interest in parts of Israel. Because his raiding strategies always seem to be foiled by Joram (King of Israel), Ben-Hadad II (Syrian King) feels there must be a traitor in his military cabinet.

Confronting his military staff, he learns that his movements are reported to King Joram by Elisha the Prophet. Enraged, Ben-Hadad orders a small Syrian force to go to Dothan to arrest Elisha and to bring him back to Syria to be interrogated or worse. And, this is where our story begins:

**Miracle One: God reveals to Elisha the military maneuvers of the king of Syria so he could warn the king of Israel.**

**8 Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.  
9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.  
10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.**

Due to esoteric knowledge given to Elisha by a revelation from God Himself, King Joram was able to counter the aggression of the Syrian army. So effective were the counter measures, frustration filled Benhadad's war-room like angry clouds.

**11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?  
12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the**

prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

**13 And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.**

Benhadad knew, like all politicians, the way to victory is to capture and hamstring God's prophets with threats, imprisonment, and even death.

### **The Order to Capture Elisha**

**14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.**

The servant of Elisha trembled with fear seeing the massive Syrian army with its cavalry and chariots surrounding his village. Weakness and fear seized his soul like a hawk catching his prey mid-flight.

**15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?**

### **The faith of Elisha and the truth all Christians must find**

**16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.**

Mark that Elisha did not permit his servant to be governed by fear.

"Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

"There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

"Fear is a shadow that saps strength from the soul" (BRS).

"The one who escapes his prison of fears is truly free."

### **Miracle Two: God answers Elisha's prayer immediately.**

**17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man . . .**

**Miracle Three: God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to see the armies of God behind the scenes of history.**

**. . . and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.**

The miracle here is not that angels were present with the prophet, but his young servant was granted spiritual sight to see the angels of God at work behind the scenes of history.

**Miracle Four: God answers Elisha's prayer to blind the Syrian army.**

**18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.**

**19 And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.**

In the medical field this is known as an amaurotic state. This blindness made the Syrian army helpless wherein Elisha was easily able to lead them to the center of the capital city of Israel while onlookers were mute by the spectacle.

**Miracle Five: God answers Elisha's prayer and opens the eyes of the blind Syrian soldiers who are now smack-dab in the middle of the capital of Samaria, the king's palace and Israel's military headquarters.**

**20 And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.**

Elisha seems to be in total control of army's fate. Oh, that Christian might realize the destiny of many a man . . . nation . . . and war is determined by their prayers. Prayer is the key that unlocks prison doors.

**21 And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?**

**Miracle Six: God moves in the heart of the king to offer grace and mercy towards Israel's enemies by providing home-cooking for the Syrian army.**

**22 And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.**

This is God's capture-and-release program at work. He loves to bestow grace on all men, rich and poor, religious and pagan.

**Miracle Seven: The border disputes stopped and there was peace for a time between Syria and Samaria.**

**23 And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.**

### **Lessons for Us**

**First**, this story ought to stir in our hearts a desire to explore prayer as a means of accessing the power of God.

"Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power." R.A. Torrey

Elisha did **not** pray, "Lord, be with us!" He was already with them.

We learn that angels were the manifestation of God's presence with the man of God. Angels assume a character relevant to the age, in this case, chariots of fire. In our time it could be a manifestation of a modern army.

**Second**, we should contemplate the meaning and power of this Old Testament truth, "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*"

The New Testament equivalent of this truth is found in 1 John 4:4 -

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he (spirit of Christ) who is in you (plural) is greater than he (the spirit of the antichrist) who is in the world;" and in Psalm 91:1, 11 "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. . . . For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

**Third: Somehow, we need to grasp with the eye of faith that the things we see and feel are not what they appear to be, but that there are real, unseen, hidden angelic-forces for good at work behind the scenes of history.**

Consider Joseph's rise to power – from a pit to a palace; David's advancement from holding a staff, to holding a scepter; and Esther's transition -- from being unseen to being a queen.

"If you believe in a God who controls the big things, you have to believe in a God who controls the little things. It is we, of course, to whom things look 'little' or 'big'." –Elisabeth Elliot

"Every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, which will 'turn the necessity to glorious gain.'" — C.S. Lewis

"My trust is in the mercy and wisdom of a kind Providence, who ordereth all things for our good." — Robert E. Lee

**Fourth: We would do well to remember mercy and show love to our personal enemies.**

Possibly, the greatest miracle of all was when the king of Israel fed his enemies -- a peace flag hoisted on the flag pole of power between two proud kings.

## **16. A Great Woman with Nike-Faith**

## 2 Kings 4

◆ 2 Kings 4:8 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

Our subject is about greatness. The trouble with being great at anything is one has to travel the road to greatness – a path worn by calloused feet. The road to greatness is filled tiny stones called trials, troubles, and tribulations. But, people who persevere on this journey seem to have a great destiny.

The holy text describes this woman (*isha*) at Shunem as "great" (*gadola*) an emerald among the red sins of Israel. How many great women do you know?

There is a "great" distress; a "great" prostitute in Revelation 17, but who can find a "great" woman in a good sense. The term "great" is not employed carelessly. An *isha gladola* is like looking for a golden feather in a flock of crows.

The Spirit of God is neither maudlin or miserly in his compliments. The Scripture is efficient and true. Therefore, when the Spirit calls this woman "great", it should be noted and studied because she is as rare as sunshine in a dark cave. She is the **only** woman who was called "great" by the Spirit of God.

No other woman in Scripture is called "great" outside the Shunamite woman – even Mary, the mother of Jesus is not called "great." She had a great child, but the Scripture does not call her great – though, in the opinion of most, she was an exceptional woman.

When the Scripture mentions a "great man" it is in relationship to the man's power, wealth, and status *before men*. Only the Centurion made God's honor roll having "great faith" (Matthew 8:10). Both the Shunamite woman and the Centurion soldier were stars carved from sapphire – the woman as a light on Godly womanhood, and the Centurion as a model of nike-faith.

So, in what way was this woman great, and what lessons does it have for Christians?

**10 Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.**

**11 And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.**

**First, this woman was great in wealth.**

The fact she and her husband were able to build a guest house specifically for Elisha and furnish it with basic comforts informs us that she was a woman of means. But, let us **not** confuse power with greatness. Many people possess great wealth, but are spiritual bankrupt. This woman was no spiritual weakling. She was great in spirituality; great in material wealth; great in virtue; great in excellence; great in love; and great in perspicuity.

She seemed to be endowed by her Creator with skills of observation and sensibility. The further we go into the text the deeper her dignity appears. How many women do you know that the more you study them, the more you appreciate their depth of character? It is such a futile endeavor to search for stars in the daylight.

**Second, this woman was great in hospitality.**

Shunem is located between Samaria, the capital of Israel, and Mt. Carmel, a training center for prophets. Travelers would find Shunem a mid-way place to rest on their journey. However, this woman noticed Elisha traveled frequently. Out of the goodness of her heart, she "constrained him to eat bread." That is, she took the initiative and served him "without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9).

You **don't** get the sense that Elisha expected this of people or that he courted assistance. Further, you don't conclude that Elisha over indulged his business. She did not know that he was a great prophet or that he was destined for greatness. She had no reason to do this outside of the fact she

possessed the gift of golden hospitality. How many women do you know that are eager and ready to open up their home to strangers?

**Third, this woman possessed great discernment.**

After several visits by Elisha, she observed the character and caliber of the man. She was a woman that could describe "a holy man of God" and she perceived Elisha was that kind of man -- that he was head and shoulders above other travelers who passed by. There was a decency, depth, and dignity in this man -- a prophet wrapped in robes woven from the wool of spiritual wisdom."

She did **not** call him a "nice man" or "an interesting man," but a "holy man." She did not call him "educated" or "talented," but a "man of God."

Apparently, she knew the true God and valued holiness and devotion to the Almighty above all other values. As she studied Elisha, she discerned his true character.

How many women do you know can discern a man's spiritual state and appreciate the decorum of a "holy" man?

Moreover, she did not use her feminine assets to seduce him. She was not a gold digger or a honey trap -- but a true woman with honorable intentions as rare as a snowflake in the Sahara Desert.

**Fourth, she was great in thoughtfulness.**

Having discerned Elisha's character, she considered how she might be of assistance to him and make his pilgrimage on this earth a little easier. Thus, she entertained the idea of building a special guest house for the prophet.

There are many women interested in making their own life more comfortable, but this woman lived outside of herself and hosted thoughts on how to enrich the life of God's man -- as rare as a pearl in a pig pen.

The Spirit shines light on her attention to detail and what she provided for Elisha: a room, a roof, walls, a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp. How

many women do you know that are attentive to the detailed needs of others?

**Fifth, this woman was great in owning her husband's authority.**

“Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall;” Notice that she was not self-regulatory (autonomous<sup>3</sup>) nor did she usurp her husband's leadership. She submitted the idea to her husband for his consideration. She knew her place. She understood the role of her husband and prevailed on him for his input and decision. How many women are you acquainted with that know how to arrange themselves under their husband's authority with dignity and integrity?

**Sixth, she was great in contentment.**

This *isha gadola* carried a secret sorrow. Childless, she quietly bore the shame and disappointment among her own people. Who can describe her grief around other woman jabbering gleefully about their children to friends and neighbors?

Moreover, she didn't share her pain with Elisha nor ask him for a miracle of conception in her womb. Accepting the providence of God, she held her head high and quietly bore her own grief.

When Elisha saw how generous she was to him, he wanted to return some kindness to her. He offered to introduce her to the king and thus improve her status among the nobility of the land. But, she said to Elisha, "I dwell among my own people." That is, she did not desire the specious, plastic pageantry of court life or the temporal pleasure of political advancement.

We are all acquainted with women who are social-engineers shuffling relationships to get to the top of political social structures.

Humble and content, this *isha gladola* lacked the "gold digger" attitude possessed by so many. Climbing the social ladder and parading around

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<sup>3</sup> Autonomous from *auto* meaning *self*; and from *nomous* meaning *law* – hence, ruled by self-law.

the court like a peacock in a pen full of chickens was not one of her priorities.

In contrast, how many women do you know that are satisfied with their state in life and are content to live out their lives around normal people?

Everything about this woman informs us that she knew the LORD God and was one of his people. She lived among apostates as a rare as a lily surrounded by weeds.

This woman offered bread to Elisha. In oriental custom, eating bread meant much more than providing a meal to a person. Rather, it signified communion, a bond of friendship and fellowship. In Elisha, she found a true Israelite indeed.

Virtue has its reward. Elisha must have been impressed not only with her generous hospitality but with her contentment. Because she refused his offer to be introduced to King Jehoram, Elisha was pleased to mention her to the King of kings . . . and, in so doing obtained for her the one blessing that had been withheld from her--a child.

Thus, it was God's good pleasure to honor Elisha's prayer and to give this great woman who ministered to His servant the gift of a son. Though not without difficulty, this great woman was destined to experience greater grace and more blessings in years to come.

Seventh, this woman was great in perceiving reality.

**16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, *thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.***

This response was not doubt at work. She understood reality. She knew that conception had evaded her and that a pregnancy was not probable. She was **not** looking for warm fuzzies, or feel-good promises, but truth . . . reality . . . certainty; that is, she wanted a compass that always pointed north.

**Eighth, this woman was great in faith.**

**By faith . . . Women received back their dead by resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35).**

The road to greatness is worn with painful, calloused feet. Great trials can build great character, expose great character . . . or reveal the lack of it. The Shunamite woman was destined for queenly greatness, but not before she faced life's greatest trial--the sudden and tragic death of her son.

**18 And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.**

**19 And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.**

**20 And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.**

After her son had grown into a young boy, he went out into the field where the harvesters were working and unexpectedly came down with a severe headache. He complained to his father, "My head, my head."

Thinking it was only a temporary illness, the father ordered his servant to carry the boy to his mother.

The Shunamite woman took her son and did what devoted mothers do. She held him in her lap where after a couple of hours he died in her arms. How can one put into the words the shock and trauma that rippled through her soul like thunderbolts as she saw her son breathe his last breath? Suddenly, the warm blessing of her motherhood vanished and the cold chill of death ravaged her soul.

God promised her a son through His prophet. Now, He suddenly takes away the joy of her life before he reaches manhood. Oh, the strange hand of Providence! Who can understand it? One minute the boy was full of smiles, skips, and hops, and the next minute he is a motionless corpse. Where is God? Why? Where is Elisha? Why didn't this happen when he was present?

**Notice what she did not do?**

She did **not** despair. She didn't wail uncontrollably or fly into hysterics. She didn't murmur against the providence of God. She didn't succumb to depression or fear or anger. **Neither** was she super human flying in the clouds of optimism. She had the concerns a mother should have after her only child stops breathing. Immediately, her faith went to work. Every movement and word reflects her faith.

In faith, she laid the boy in Elisha's bed . . . for Elisha was the prophet of the promise. Thus, hope springs into action. No funeral preparations are made. She intended to find Elisha . . . miles away.

In faith, she called her husband, informed him of the tragedy, and prevailed upon him to grant her permission to leave the home and go to Mount Carmel in search of Elisha. Again, she did **not** act independent of her husband, but sought his counsel and permission.

There are no secrets between this couple. She does not scheme behind his back or attempt to manipulate him. She is direct and truthful. She wanted to ride to Mt. Carmel and beg Him to come back with her; that is, she was thinking miracle while her husband thought practically:

Though the situation was desperate, she did not act unseemly outside the authority of her husband, but submitted to him. When questioned, she comforted her husband: "It shall be well."

What a jewel of a woman on the black velvet of hard times!

Without a doubt, her husband was in a state of shock and could not totally understand the urgency or practicality of her journey. In fact, he questioned the wisdom of the quest which also tested this woman's faith.

**23 And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.**

Quite possibly, he was working through his own grief. He certainly did not possess the quality of faith of his wife nor did he expect a miracle of resurrection. This is often the case with couples. Each has their own measure of faith. Though filled with grief, she was able to grant a word of

comfort to her husband. She put her hand on his chest and whispered, Shalom, "All is well!"

In faith, she embarked on the arduous journey to Mt. Carmel on the back of an ass at full speed.

Elisha recognized the Shunamite at a distance and courteously sent his servant to inquire of the well-being of her household.

Upon arriving in the presence of the prophet, she threw herself at his feet to plead her case. Gehazi tried to restrain her – another barb-wired test.

Further, Elisha seems totally unprepared for the crisis. This woman of peace and dignity was overcome with grief. The text says she was "vexed," (v. 37); that is, her emotions were like tsunami in a tea cup. The news of her son's death must have overwhelmed this man of God as well. He blurts out, "The Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me."

Thus, the LORD was testing Elisha, and the prophet's unpreparedness must have sent another ripple of uncertainty through the Shunamite's soul.

In faith, she rejected Elisha's offer to send Gehazi with Elisha's staff to cure his son. She did not trust Gehazi or the staff, but only in Elisha, God's holy servant. She prevailed. The two of them headed back to her home at break-neck speed . . . and the corpse of her son.

Gehazi did as his master ordered . . . and when the Shunamite and Elisha arrived, Gehazi, having arrived before them and having placed his staff on the dead boy, informed Elisha that his remedy had failed -- another test of faith like carrying a candle on a windy night.

Elisha went into the guest house alone. There was no fan-fair, no ostentatious ceremony, and no applause. This was holy business that demanded all of the prophet's faith and spiritual resources. Elisha prayed . . . and oh, how he must have prayed! But, God did not answer him with resurrection power immediately.

Remembering Elijah, his spiritual tutor, had a similar battle with death regarding the son of the widow from Zerephath, Elisha then arranged his

body on top of the dead child and breathed. God gave him an encouraging sign. Warmth and heat returned to the corpse . . . but, the boy had not come back to life. Elijah arose.

Possibly perturbed, he paced back and forth. The man was human . . . like us finding it difficult to play a violin in a thunderstorm.

Again, he stretched himself out over the boy with a different result. This was no shallow prayer or phony exercise. Elijah was fully engaged. He applied all his knowledge and resources to solve man's greatest problem. Sneezing seven times, life returned to the child. The lad opened his eyes and was restored to his mother.

The first touch of Elisha revived the body, but the second touch of Elisha revived the soul. This restoration had nothing to do with Elisha's faith but it had everything to do with committing his body, soul, and spirit to the ministry of defying death.

Thus, this woman passed the test of faith and made it into God's hall of fame (Hebrews 11) as one of two women that experienced the resurrection power of Almighty God. See the story of the widow of Zarephath where Elijah brought back a dead boy after lying prostrate over his corpse three times (1 Kings 17:8–24)<sup>4</sup>.

Betrayer

Final victor

Terrifying, chilling, stealing

Man's most unyielding enemy,

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<sup>4</sup> Berean Study Bible: "Then he stretched himself out over the child three times . . ."

This action by Elijah is significant and symbolic. In the ancient Near Eastern context, physical gestures often accompanied prayers and prophetic acts. Stretching out over the child three times may symbolize a complete and earnest appeal to God, as the number three often represents completeness or divine perfection in the Bible. This act can also be seen as a type of Christ, who would later bring life through His own body. Elijah's physical contact with the child signifies a deep intercession, similar to how Jesus would later touch and heal the sick."

Death!

The Lord's power is greater than the power of death as seen in the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and as foreshadowed here in this story. Death is not lord. God reigns. Life prevails. Elisha exonerated! The Shunamite woman comforted and the saints assured that there is a God in Israel that can not only raise the dead, and Who's gifts are without repentance.

Finally, we have to grapple with Providence. Why would God promise this woman a child and then suddenly take him from her? It doesn't make sense!

The answer may be found in the following text:

"That the testing of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

God loves faith! In His sight, faith is more valuable than precious metals.

The Shunamite's faith in Christ brought Him much joy, and it was His pleasure to record this woman's greatness for our own growth and encouragement. Moreover, her faith is a candle in the dark for us. Are you under great pressure? Take heart, God is producing something more precious than a compass in a world without maps.

**Men are not born great, but all great men travel the road of greatness with calloused feet.** The road to greatness is uphill and brimming with fiery trials. The road to Mediocreville is downhill and smooth as butter. It is a rough road that leads to greatness, and a road less traveled. Dream of greatness? Take risks, and bend history imitating the great faith of the Shunamite woman.

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Note: There is more to this story. See chapter 8 and how Providence guided and provided for her. She did not wish for the comforts of court

life, but this *isha gadola* was destined to stand before kings as a witness to the grace and power of the LORD God.

## 17. Great Faith in a Great Famine

### 2 Kings 6:25-7:1-25

◆ Before us is a true story about a great famine where women were driven by hunger to eat their own children in an act of cannibalism.

Who can imagine the terrors of those days?

Famines bring out the worst in men, but they also bring out the best in God's people. We have in this account a great famine, great suffering, great faith, great unbelief, and a great salvation.

#### The Great Famine

**2 Kings 6:25 And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.**

The hyperinflation and unsavory scrapes of food sold in the market is enough to turn any man's stomach.

#### Great Suffering

To enlighten the reader about the horrors of this famine, we are introduced to two thin, frantic women compelled to cannibalize their babies. Who can imagine the desperation of these bony figures?

**26 And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king.**

**27 And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?**

**28 And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow.**

**29 So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.**

**30 And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.**

**31 Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.**

The text introduces us to the perverted thinking of this impotent king who blamed Elisha for the famine -- like man spilling poison on his garden and then blaming the flowers. Under the crisis of deprivation, his remedy was to kill the Christian. To this politician, the solution to starvation was more death and destruction.

Proverbs 8:36 "all they that hate me (God's Wisdom) love death.

### **Great Faith**

**32 But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?**

In contrast to the frenzied king and the two odious cannibals, we have Elisha sitting in his house surrounded by the city council. He too was hungry, but not madly desperate.

God was pleased to give this man of faith a promise to sustain all under his counsel for another 24 hours of suffering.

In a prophetic state, Elisha informs the elders that the murderous king was at the door with plans to cut off his head. Wisely, he ordered the

elders to stand at the door and refuse the messenger entrance. Neither Kings nor their SWAT teams have authority to enter a man's castle – see the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**33 And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?**

The messenger was instructed to question Elijah. Apparently, the king had had enough of this waiting on the LORD. Like many, he was ready to take matters into his own hands even if that meant forsaking the Lord, killing the Christian, and returning his administration over to the Baals.

The king's depleted faith and spiritual resignation stands out like black on white -- the difference between a bullhorn in a cathedral and the whisper of a snowfall.

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## Chapter 7

**1 Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.**

Elisha begins with, "Thus saith the Lord . . ." -- the enacting clause of authority that precedes mandate. It is a promise men can "take to the bank." Here, Elisha placed his own neck on the line. For if the prophesy did not prove to be true, the king had authority to execute him. False prophets must die (Deuteronomy 11, 13).

He did not flippantly say, "Things will get better," or "Don't worry." The detail and specificity about a return to normal market prices informs us this is a word from God.

Imagine eggs selling for 100 dollars a dozen and the next day they are 3 dollars a dozen.

Elisha describes the result but not the means. Perhaps even Elisha did not know how God was going to provide for the people. He too had to exercise faith and the spiritual discipline of "waiting on the Lord."

### **Great Unbelief**

**2 Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.**

The message that squashed all faith and hope came from a mole pretending to have an eagle's eye. This is the voice of the worldly wise man. . . the cynical-pragmatist . . . the snarky-voice of academic doubt.

The phrase "windows of heaven" refer to the floodgates of heaven that water the fields and produce the crops (Genesis 6).

To this underground rodent in the king's cabinet the only remedy was an act of nature, and that would be too late. Like a treacherous sniper, he couldn't resist rifling a cold remark from the casket of his own heart to Elisha.

Thoughts from the unbelieving limit God and drown the candle of faith when it is needed the most.

### **Great Provision**

Now we see the means and how God provided. Oh, the ways of God. He appoints four starving, ragged beggars to be his agents of plenty.

**3 And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?**

**4 If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.**

5 And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

6 For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

Every Syrian soldier heard the roaring sounds of horse-drawn chariots. All fled on foot to be saved from the chariot stampede.

"The wicked flee when no man pursuit" - Proverbs 28:1

7 Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.

8 And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

9 Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

10 So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were.

11 And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within.

12 And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

Since the king had already given his heart over to unbelief, he assumes the worse. This king had demons in his attic; thoughts choked by dandelions of doubt; shadows following him everywhere.

**13 And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see.**

**14 They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.**

This was a useless waste of time considering the king had a promise from God – an effort to collect ambers from a month old fire. Might as well try boiling water in a chocolate teapot.

**15 And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king.**

**16 And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.**

**17 And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.**

The little mole who pretended to have an eagle's eye was trampled in the stampede. Likewise, all satiric, unbelieving skeptics will perish.

**18 And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:**

**19 And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And**

he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

20 And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

**Three great lessons from this section of Holy Writ:**

God calls for famines. They can enrich us or impoverish us; make us better or bitter.

No one has exhausted God's riches in His storehouse of plenty. His sky is full of stars. Let us not limit God by our narrow-thinking pragmatism. Beware of pseudo-intellectuals who pretend to have 20-20 vision on political matters – prognosticators who predict depression, nuclear war, blackouts, and the fall of some political regime seem to abound.

Trials are hard and as we go through them we may be tempted to forsake the Lord and to return to the idols of our youth. Those who persevere in nike-faith shall surely be rewarded with a golden crown to wear after a faith-victory.

## 18. The Progress of Faith

### Mark 9:13-29

◆ Sixteen verses are dedicated to this story in Mark; that is, this may be one of the most important passages on th growing toward nike-faith in the Bible.

**Infancy faith: The man has enough faith to go to Jesus' followers.**

14 And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. 15 And straightway all the

people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.

**16 And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?**

What question ye? - What is the subject of your inquiry or debate with the disciples?" (Barnes)

**Childhood faith: the man responds honestly and truthfully to Jesus' question.**

**17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;**

"dumb spirit" (*alalov*) = unable to speak.

**18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.**

"I spake to thy disciples" - The man and the disciples were focused on a *lack of power*, but Christ focused them on their *lack of faith*. Unbelief locks the door to power; faith in action is the solution – a hands on faith that clings to promises.

**19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.**

The answer from Christ does not come from anger, but from a heart torn with grief over unbelief in within the hearts of men – the disappointment of relying upon a flashlight with dead batteries.

Unbelief has a source - a "faithless (*a-pistos*) generation;" that is, doubt dominates humanity. For this reason John said, "This is the victory (*nike*) that overcomes (*nika*) the world, even our faith." He did not say that faith produces the victory, but **that the existence of faith is the victory!!** (1 John 5:4).

Oh, the chilling environment where there is no faith and no desire to separate from proud, doubt-filled hearts. The problem in America is not just depravity, but the shadow of doubt choking sunshine out of the

hearts of men. The problem is not a lack of money or knowledge or resources, but poverty in nike-faith. Jesus was not seeking to build the man's faith in faith, but faith in Him.

**Adolescent Faith: He accepted the rebuke, Jesus teachings, and continued down the road of honesty.**

"faithless generation" includes the scribes, the disciples, the father, and the general character of the crowd.

This quiet rebuke injected hormones of hope into the afflicted father and the impotent disciples.

**20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.**

This is the final effort of the demonic spirit to destroy the boy.

Only the grace of providence prevents us from experiencing the same abuse by the Devil. What is needed is the ability to hear the whisper of God's promises when surrounded by a stadium filled with shouts of doubt.

**21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.**

Our Lord did not ask this question because he did not know the answer, but so we might understand the entrenched problem.

"He dwells upon all the piteous details with that fondness for repetition which sorrow knows so well." (MacLaren)

**22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.**

"if thou canst do any thing" - Having seen the powerlessness of Jesus' disciples, the father seems to tie his sandals and cinch up his belt so he can keep us with Jesus.

"The words are spoken almost in the accents of despair. Could He, the Master, prevail where the disciples had failed?" (Ellicott).

**Adult Faith – the stage of questioning, discerning, and reasoning to the right conclusion.**

"if thou canst do any thing" -- a first class condition clause. This is not the voice of doubt, but the voice of struggling faith – the first step of a toddler moving towards open arms.

Things progressed from challenging to difficult. Since the most devout men of the day could not help the father, an ordinary man would naturally conclude there was no hope for the boy. But, not this father.

"This man's faith was very weak, and perhaps weaker than when he first came from home with his child. He brought him to the disciples of Christ, and they could not cure him; the evil spirit was as strong, or stronger in him than ever; he now lay in a violent fit, and in a most miserable condition; so that he was almost ready to despair of healing" (Gill).

"help us" indicates this is a family problem. Moreover, this guy was not going to drop out of this class on faith.

**23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.**

"If thou canst believe" – The better MSS. omit the *first* word "believe" (Ellicott).

Jesus steps forward and offers hope in the middle of this perplexing difficulty.

"Very much is promised to our believing. If thou canst believe, it is possible that thy hard heart may be softened, thy spiritual diseases may be cured; and, weak as thou art, thou mayest be able to hold out to the end." (Matthew Henry)

"if thou canst believe; that is the hinge upon which all must turn" (Cambridge).

Use of the personal pronoun "you" may indicate the father was stunned by the inability of Jesus's disciples to heal his son, but the father clung to the hope that Jesus' power was greater than His students.

"Jesus gives him back his doubts. The father said, 'If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' Christ's answer, according to the true reading, is not as it stands in our Authorized Version, 'If thou canst believe'-throwing, as it were, the responsibility on the man-but it is a quotation of the father's own word, 'If Thou canst,'" (MacLaren)

" 'Say not, If Thou canst. That is certain. All things are possible to thee' {not to do, but to get} 'if'-which is the only 'if' in the case-'thou believest.'" (MacLaren)

"That majestic word is like the blow of steel upon flint; it strikes a little spark of faith which lights up the soul and turns the smoky pillar of doubt into clear flame of confidence. 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'" (MacLaren).

Our Lord seems to be saying, "You can have anything you want. What do you want? Ask me for it, and I will give it."

"Do you desire to have your sins forgiven? Has purity any attraction for you? Do you care at all about the calm and pure blessings of communion with God? Would you like to live always in the light of His face? Do you want to be the masters of your own lusts and passions? I do not ask you, Do you want to go to Heaven or to escape Hell, when you die? but I ask, Has that future in any of its aspects any such power over you as that it stirs you to any earnestness and persistency of desire, or is it all shadowy and vain, ineffectual and dim? What we Christian teachers have to fight against is that we are charged to offer to men a blessing that they do not want, and have to create a demand before there can be any acceptance of the supply. 'Give us the leeks and garlics of Egypt,' said the Hebrews in the wilderness; 'our soul loatheth this light bread.' . . . I remember Luther, in his rough way, has a story-I think it

is in his Table-talk-about a herd of swine to whom their keeper offered some rich dainties, and the pigs said, 'Give us grains.'" (MacLaren)

**Mature Nike-Faith: The man believes and makes a commitment to trust Jesus' word even though he was not experienced in exercising nuke-faith.**

**24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.**

"with tears" - "The better MSS. omit "with tears" (Ellicott). The man simply made a direct and unmistakable appeal to our our Lord.

Faith and unbelief like wheat and weeds can be found growing in the same field. Note how the man watered his seed of faith.

"In its infancy, faith may and does coexist with *clouds* of unbelief and doubt. The same state of mind, looked at from its two opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief . . . through life there will always be the presence in us, more or less, of these two elements." (MacLaren).

"There follows from that thought this practical lesson, that the discovery of much unbelief should never make a man doubt the reality or genuineness of his little faith . . . We are all apt to write needlessly bitter things against ourselves when we get a glimpse of the incompleteness of our Christian life and character. . . ."

Every stage of life has its dark night. The remedy begins with the sunrise of faith. Beware of being a grey-headed baby. What is important here is not the maturity of one's faith but the growth and maturity in nuke-faith.

"God rewardeth weak faith where it is attended with a sincere desire of increase." (Poole)

". . . the main thing is not the maturity, but the progressive character, of faith . . . You do not expect the infant to have adult limbs, but you do expect it to grow. True, faith at its

beginning may be like a grain of mustard seed, but if the grain of mustard seed be alive it will grow to a great tree, where all the fowls of the air can lodge in the branches" (MacLaren).

"Lord, I believe" - "I believe - I have faith. I do put confidence in thee, though I know that my faith is not as strong as it should be." (Barnes)

The man did not deny he struggled with doubt. Acknowledging his bout with doubt only strengthened his faith.

"Lord, help thou my unbelief" can mean (1) that the Lord would remove his black cloud of doubt, or (2) that God would strengthen his faith. The idea seems to be the man did **not** want to be identified with the "unbelieving generation." Though he recognized doubt creating a whirlwind in his heart, He asked the Lord to calm the storm, to supply sunshine, and to give him the faith he needed to sail his ship into the harbor of healing.

""Supply thou the defects of my faith. Give me strength and grace to put "entire" confidence in thee . . . Give me strength and grace to put "entire" confidence in thee . . . Everyone who comes to the Saviour for help has need of offering this prayer."  
(Barnes)

### **The Reward of Faith**

The man deposited his faith with the Lord. Now we see the return on his investment.

**25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.**

Matthew calls this foul spirit "the devil." Being sovereign with all authority in heaven and earth given to Him, the Lord commanded this spirit from hell to depart.

**26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.**

The unclean spirit made one last effort to destroy the boy. Things appear to get worse before they got better.

**27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.**

This gentle touch shows us that Jesus is a friend of sinners.

Jesus did not hide from man's ugly problems. He did not seclude Himself in His study, but went into the streets to find sin-tortured men with messed up lives struggling to recover from the wreckage in tornado alley.

**Advanced Faith: Leaving superficial presumptions the Lord takes the disciples deeper into nike-faith.**

**28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? 29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.**

The word "fasting" is not in the text, but was added by an overzealous monk. Maybe, the best way to think of this text is to add the adjective "fervent" prayer.

There is a "kind" of demonic evil that is difficult for even the best of pastors to solve. But, nike-faith lays hold of the peace of God to crush him (Romans 16:20).

Difficult problems call for self-denial, fervency in seeking the Lord's remedy, and rest in our Lord's promises.

"The disciples must not think to do their work always with the same ease; some services call for more than ordinary pains."  
(Matthew Henry)

Our Lord did **not** say that casting out demons was impossible for Christians, but such work required fervent prayer and devotion.

Happily we have a wonderful ending as the boy was released from the iron grip of the underworld.

In conclusion, note this man's progression of struggling faith to a commitment of faith – a crash course on nike-faith that overcomes the world.

## 19. Jeremiah's Crisis of Faith

### Jeremiah 15

◆ This is a message for Christian ministers who are struggling with Providence and are considering leaving the ministry and returning to work in the secular world.

"Quitting is the silence that follows a song unfinished. Resolve is the echo that keeps it alive." (Source unknown)

**Jeremiah 15:1 Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.**

"Then said the LORD unto me" is the Scripture's enacting clause, the source of authority.

God rejected all intercession for this apostate people. Though Moses and Samuel could mediate for their own souls and the souls of the people, there were none in Jeremiah's time who could intercede or mediate for the sins of his generation.

God's mind was made up and there was nothing Jeremiah could do about it. God determined destruction for these rebellious people for this word was an echo trapped in stone.

Jeremiah 7:16 Do not weep or pray for them, and don't beg me to help them, for I will not listen to you.

There comes a time to stop praying for politicians and a nation in decline. Jeremiah prayed vigorously for his people, but God ordered him to stop pleading for them in His court.

"Guilty" declared the Judge. The sentence was decreed: "cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth" (15:1). No prayer could mitigate His just decision.

**2 And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.**

When people came to Jeremiah seeking the will of God, Jeremiah was to announce the LORD's sentence on the nation. Three punishments for the idolatrous nation was declared: death by sword, death by famine, and "captivity" in Babylon -- fruit left to wither in the sun.

The Christian message is the same. Without faith in Christ, men will wither in hell.

**3 And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy.**

Four destroyers are mentioned: swords, dogs, fowls, and beasts. Into our mind pops images of sword-swinging warriors, corpses, vultures, dogs, hyenas, coyotes, and other scavengers lapping blood and devouring flesh.

Matthew 10:28 And 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.

**4 And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.**

"to be removed" speaks of capture, chains, and exile to Babylon.

**Manasseh:** The people are held accountable for the sins of Manasseh, the most wicked and longest living king; that is, they were compliant with Manasseh's lawless decrees. Compliance acts like a virus that replicates evil in conscience.

Blindly following rules and policies of a wicked government that are clearly forbidden promotes crime, chaos, and moral confusion – like a mirror shattered into riddles.

“Because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah” --The name of the pious father intensifies the horror at the wickedness of the son” (Barnes).

Why are we surprised when preacher's sons plunge into wickedness? Holiness, righteousness, and faith are not contagious!

**5 For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest?**

“For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem?” The nation was so iniquitous and vile, it had no friends. No one was concerned about her welfare?

“to ask how thou doest?” literally means “to inquire about your peace.”

At this point in time Israel grew in pride and wickedness and surrounding nations hated these people.

**6 Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.**

“forsaken” (*natash*) is the first word in the sentence.

“me” is the presumed direct object of *et* (Aleph Tav) -- like the Alpha and Omega.

“Backward” could be translated “to the rear.” In view is a people required to follow. “Backward” implies rebellion, laying down the cross, antinomianism, going back “to the world,” and returning to one’s vomit. The term “backsliding” comes to mind.

“destroy” – a reference to the judicial decree.

Jeremiah 3:1 They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 3:20 Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.

“I am weary with repenting” is anthropomorphic language – a reference to exhaustion. Imagine how wicked these people had become to drain the the LORD’s reservoir of patience.

**7 And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways.**

“fan” – a reference to the winnowing fan or a shovel to throw the wheat into the evening breeze to separate the chaff -- which is the first word of the sentence.

“Gates” – a reference to fortified cities in Judah.

The decree: “I will destroy my people.”

“since they return not from their ways” – the reason for judgment: unrepentance, calcification, stubbornness, contumacy, intractability, obstinancy, pigheadedness, and mulishness.

“not” negates the verb “turn” and the direct object is “ways” (*derek*); emphatic, crisp, and tart.

**8 Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city.**

“widows” -- young mothers having soldier-sons -- a hyperbole for the death of soldier-sons on the battlefield.

“spoiler” (shawdad) – Babylonians.

**9 She that hath borne seven languisheth: she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the LORD.**

### The Mater Delorosa

**10 Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.**

This is Jeremiah speaking. Maybe a hyperbole or maybe Jeremiah’s mother was still living.

Usury: charging interest on a loan -- thus, the most despised class of business men in Israel.

Mothers want their sons to grow up, to be happy, and to be popular. But, Jeremiah became the exact opposite of what most mothers desire for their sons. In following the LORD, men hated him. Every time Jeremiah looked in a mirror all he could see was the face of his enemies.

Before us is a description of the *mater delorosa* – a son becoming a “a man of strife” and a “man of contention” at whom the “whole world” possessed enmity – an object of hatred because he spoke the truth to the people; that is, he was a dependable man the Lord used to confront the sins of the nation . . . but this brought him hatred (John 7:7; 15:18ff).

**Q:** How many Christian mothers want their sons to grow up and be cross-carrying Christians?

**Q:** Are Christian mothers raising sons to be great in the world or be great in heaven?

**11 The LORD said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction.**

“Verily” – literally, “Shall it not be?” that is, “Surely it shall be.”

“remnant” refers to God's chosen elect who did not fall into idolatry – a portion of the believing people of whom Jeremiah was a part.

A difficult verse to translate!

“remnant” means “free” and “well” (tov) is the word “good.” That is, it could be translated, “I afflict thee for thy good” or “thy freedom shall work good.”

“I will cause” (*pa'gaw*) – a Hiphael verb inferring God would be a buffer to limit the enemy and cause his work to do good for the prophet.

**12 Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?**

Another difficult verse to interpret!

Ellicott: “that the prayer of the prophet, strong though it may be, cannot change the inflexible purpose of Jehovah to chastise His people’s sins,” but others interpret this verse as referring to the impossibility of resisting the titanic strength of the Chaldeans.

Barnes also sees the iron as a metaphor for the strength of Jeremiah’s prayer.

**13 Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price, and that for all thy sins, even in all thy borders.**

“thy treasurest” could refer to Jeremiah’s treasures or it could refer to the people Jeremiah loved (Ellicott).

“All thy riches and precious things shall be spoiled: there shall be no price taken for the redemption of them.” (Benson).

“without price” – the enemies of Israel would have an easy victory and suffer few casualties.

“for all thy sins, even in all thy borders” – even the sins of the rural people contributed to national guilt.

**14 And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies into a land which thou knowest not: for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you.**

This text could refer to the conquest of the Chaldeans – that the army would stay in the land till the nation was destroyed and the captives were marched to Babylon.

The cause of the destruction is clear: “fire . . . mine anger shall burn” refers to the LORD God.

### **Jeremiah’s Complaint**

**15 O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.**

Seeing the coming of God’s wrath, Jeremiah prays that he might escape the heat of God’s affliction. Particularly grievous to Jeremiah was the rejection, blackballing, denunciation of his people. A social being, he longed for tender human interaction and acceptance, but never received it.

He lists the following reasons why he should not be punished with the people.

But, there is a subtle tinge of discontent / bitterness in this prayer -- something rejected by the LORD.

**16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.**

**First**, His love, respect, and obedience to God’s Word. Jeremiah was a true man guided by the Word of the LORD. For this reason he became God's spokesmen to the people.

**Second**, the people too recognized that he was God’s representative.

Again, there appears to be a tinge of bitterness that he, a righteous man, was going to suffer along with this sinful people.

**17 I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation.**

**Third**, His separation from the sins of the people; that is, he was not compliant with the trendy sins of the age. He sat alone isolated from the people being spurned by them. This loneliness was not caused by a defect in his personality, but because "of thy hand;" that is, he was ostracized because he denounced the sins of the people and exhorted them to follow the law of the LORD God.

**18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?**

Along with his love for the Word and separation from the sins of the people came "loneliness" and heartache ("my wound incurable") – a prophet's pain that could not be "healed" – a bitter sense of failure.

David cried out, "No one cares for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). And, Jeremiah understood the loneliness and lack of love that overwhelms a man of God. He loved the people, but no one loved him!

Jeremiah did **not** see one soul saved or converted in all his preaching. Jeremiah expected much and received little. The more he preached the truth, the smaller his congregation became . . . the more enemies he developed . . . the more men hated him. Ouch!

Jeremiah complained to the LORD while feeling a sense of betrayal – the term "liar" and "waters that fail" express his inner disappointment with God in this crisis. . . . a feeling (bitterness) that the mercies of the LORD had dried up. This was a parched season, a dry summer, a heat wave in Jeremiah's prophetic ministry – not uncommon for men of God. But, feelings of "giving up" must be dealt with lest the minister fall away and follow the people in their sins.

Oh, how rejection must have hurt this tender, personable man. He was not a man of steel, but a man of velvet -- a soul sensitive to criticism -- a man who longed for the comfort of human touch. The desertion and denunciation of the people wounded Jeremiah. So much so, he began to question his calling . . . to doubt God. His feelings shifted from confidence in the LORD to one of uncertainty, perplexity, and skepticism -- "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail? This demurrer robbed Jeremiah of certitude, confidence, and conviction. The power, assurance, and courage was gone in his life. He could not continue as God's prophet until these matters were settled.

By way of application, never forget that your pastor is just a man -- that a little thankfulness goes a long way in sustaining Him in the ministry.

The one thing every Christian knows is that God is sovereign and that He disciplines his children as sons. What minister has not been disappointed with God for unanswered prayers about guidance, or sickness, or for finances? What minister has not been wounded by criticism from the brethren or suffered from being fired or felt the pain of an unsupportive wife or the insecurity of insufficient wages? These trials bring fear, doubt, and confusion. Nevertheless, the man must find a way to renew his faith and commitment or be set aside for service.

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (*adokimos*)."

There are many ways to backslide; in his disciplines, or morality, or in his duties.

One can turn from faith to doubt, from love to fear, from joy to depression, from confidence to uncertainty, from hating the world to loving the world, from sobriety to sensuality; from carefulness, to casualness; from faithfulness to treachery; from loyalty to treason.

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**Pause:** A period of time passes between verse 18 and verse 19 -- the main lesson of this chapter -- a lesson all ministers need to learn . . . or perish.

At this point in the chapter of Jeremiah's life, there is doubt about whether he will be able to continue his ministry. Not only did Jeremiah find little pleasure in preaching, the misery of ministry burdened him to the point of despair . . . to deprivation and impotence as a prophet.

This is Jeremiah's crisis of faith; the fork in the road -- to get out of his miserable ministry and return to the attractive pleasures of the world, or to embrace the pain and return to the path of duty.

### **God's Answer to Jeremiah's Complaint**

**19 Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.**

Jeremiah appears to be in a spiritual, mental, emotional funk. He needed to step out of the darkness of doubt and to return to the light. He needed to stop walking by sight, and to start walking by faith . . . again!

"return" implies a departure from the way of righteousness by Jeremiah; that is, this is a reference to Jeremiah's backsliding. His temper had changed from one of confidence to one of disappointment, doubt, and despair. The need of the hour was repentance, judging doubt, and picking up the cross and following Christ.

"Thus saith the LORD" is the enacting clause, the voice of authority. It also indicates a time break between verses 1-17 and verses 18-21 which presents the major message to Jeremiah that he had to master. It is God's answer to Jeremiah's complaint and backsliding in temper.

Before us is a conditional promise. God promises to be with Jeremiah where Jeremiah could be His mouthpiece . . . The condition . . . if Jeremiahs discerned the difference between the precious and vile and if he did not join the Jewish crowd in rebelling against Him and to remain separated unto God.

At this point in Jeremiah's ministry, he felt the bitters of his ministry (isolation and hostility) and was tempted to join his people in their

unbelief and mutiny; that is, ministers are blessed with a valuable lesson due to the fact that Jeremiah exposed his humanity.

That ministers are always on top of the ladder of faith has a nice rung to it, but it is a few steps down from the truth.

The prophet needed to get control of his thought life, repent for exercising unbelief, complaining, and distrust.

“Upon that condition only can he again “stand before” the Lord in the full sense of that word, and minister to Him as a prophet-priest.” (Ellicott)

He had to distinguish between “the precious and the vile,” between the gold and the dross, between a holy obedience and the gall of bitterness that enveloped as he nurtured feelings of regret. He not only had to call hardened people to repent and follow the LORD, Jeremiah had to repent, return to his mission, and renew his zeal for the King of Israel.

“Above all he must beware of being tempted by his sense of failure, to return to the people in the temper of one who tunes his voice according to the time. Rather must they “return” to him and rise to his level, both “returning” to Jehovah” (Ellicott).

While the people were singing base to the tune of "I did it My Way," Jeremiah had to sing tenor to the tune of "How Great Thou Art."

"let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them' -- the goal of preaching is to convert the people to obey the laws of the LORD God. They could move out of darkness into the light where Jeremiah stood, but Jeremiah was forbidden to huddled together with them like bats in their cave of darkness. Jeremiah was forbidden to follow the maxim: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

**20 And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD.**

The Spirit repeats the first words of God's call to Jeremiah: "And I will make thee unto this people"; that is, this is not a new promise but a refocusing of Jeremiah to his initial call.

"Fenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jeremiah 1:18-19)

The word "prevail" (*yakole*) means "power over" or "ability to conquer" and it is negated by the adverb "not."

God required Jeremiah to repent and to return to his temper and proclivity he had when God first called him into the ministry. The storm would continue, but the floods would not carry Jeremiah downstream.

What a lesson for servants of Christ! There are times when ministers feel like God's promises are shattered glass; like He abandoned them to mediocrity, and where his Word tastes like chalk. It is during these times, the minister must not give in to his feelings; to give in to despair; to interpret adversity as abandonment; to go backward into old habits and sinful pursuits; and, to hold hands with idolatrous men.

Matthew Henry: "Some good people lose much of the pleasantness of religion by the fretfulness and uneasiness of their natural temper, which they indulge. The Lord called the prophet to cease from his distrust, and to return to his work."

**21 And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible**

God expands his promise to deliver Jeremiah from "wicked Jews" and to deliver him out of the hands of the terrible Chaldeans.

### **Prohibitions**

Chapter 16 is much more tragic than chapter 15.

This chapter also addresses things Jeremiah could not do . . . possibly the very things he was tempted with in chapter 15.

**Taking a wife (16:1)** -- all the women in Israel at this time in their history were odious, treacherous idolaters -- unfit for a prophet. (3:1; 3:20; 7:18, 44:19). God gave this command to Jeremiah for his good -- to save him from a bitter, critical, complaining, nagging, worldly wife. Think of it: there was not one Proverbs 31 woman in Israel at this time. When the whole nation is filled with odious, idolatress feminists, pastors must live as a celibate.

**Raising a family (16:2)**

**Visiting the house of "mourning" (16:5)** - should be translated house of "banqueting" - - applicable to either joy or sorrow.

Visiting the house of mourning is unfitting (16:7) because all would die. Not only were so many people going to die, it would be misdirected energy to mourn the death of the wicked under the judgment of God.

**Visiting House of Feasting or "joining their drinking parties" (16:8)** -- no socializing or reveling with the worldly, unsaved, secular idolaters. All of this was appointed for destruction (16:9); that is, Jeremiah could not visit bars and local pubs.

Thus, the prophet had to avoid the house of mirth and the house of mourning. The only safe place on this tetter-totter was resting in the middle.

## 20. Where is God When I Need Him?

### Genesis 16

◆ Where is God When I Need Him?

## **Unanswered Prayer**

Have you heard about the telephone recording for atheists? They dialed the number and nobody answered.

This touch of humor, however, is not a joke when a Christian dials JER 33:3 and nobody answers.

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

The believer has the opposite problem of an atheist.

While the atheist does not expect answers to his prayers, Christians do! And, when God does not answer on time, the silence unsettles the believer.

Unanswered prayers are a Christian’s worst nightmare. A smile that doesn’t reach the eyes breaks the heart.

It may seem like when you need God the most, He is nowhere to be found – like a lost diamond on black carpet? How can it be? What should you do when your heart sways over God’s delays?

Maybe you have been waiting for God to answer some of your prayers – a new job, healing of a relationship, money for the future, salvation of a loved one, or resolving a health crisis. If the pain of unanswered prayer is sizzling in your soul, you can take comfort from the lessons Abraham learned when the pain of deferred hope overwhelmed him.

## **God’s Delay with Abram**

God’s delays test us. They can bring out the best or worst in us. In Abram and Sarah’s case, deferred hope brought out the worst in both of them (Genesis 16). Abram and Sarah were childless. On four occasions God promised Abram a son (12:2, 12:7, 13:14, 15:5). They believed God and they waited for God to fulfill His promise.

But, days turned into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, and years into a decade (16:3). The biological clock wound down and they

both felt age robbing them of strength. Abram was 85 and Sarah was 75 years old at this time. Had they misunderstood the promise?

**And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.**

It was Sarah who devised the scheme of Hagar's surrogacy – not Abraham! Sarah seemed to have the ability to reason to the wrong solution.

The greater error here is not with Sarah's faulty thinking, but with Abraham's complicity with her twisted scheme – an example of what happens when men shun responsibility and submit to their wives – and an example of the error of women taking the leadership in the home.

**Genesis 16:5 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong *be* upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.**

A second error of Sarah should be recognized. When the attitude of Hagar changed from quiet submission to smirky pride, Sarah became contentious and blamed Abraham for the relational crisis; that is, the sin of Eve, contention, raised its ugly head in this affair – a weakness among women (Proverbs 21:19).

### **Lessons of Waiting on God from the Life of Abraham**

#### **Lesson One: Remember the best about God**

Who can accuse Abram and Sarah of being impatient? Ten years is a long time to wait for anybody. Had they misunderstood the promise? Maybe the promise was for Abram and not for Sarah? Who was sterile: Abraham or Sarah? Maybe this problem was too big for God? Or, maybe God wanted them to take matters into their own hands and help Him answer their prayers?

When God's delays cause our hearts to sway, we tend to over analyze the problem, and think the worst about God. Delays are perceived as weaknesses. Doubts plague our minds. Fears grip our soul.

True men of faith let the peace of God rule their hearts because it is superior to the intellect (Philippians 4:6-8; Colossians 3:15).

It is during these times we must possess true grit and determine to believe the best about the Lord. We change. He does not change. Remember, God's delays are not a "NO!" to your prayers; many times they are a "Not Yet!"

### **Lesson Two: Review the promises**

Ten years of waiting caused Abram and Sarah to become problem-centered instead of promise-centered. As they became increasingly aware their youth was slipping away, they searched for a human solution to a human problem. They reviewed their options. It would have been better for them to review God's promise to them than consider the latest biological solution to family planning.

Instead of reviewing the promises, they reviewed their options. Natural surrogacy came out on top.

### **Lesson Three: Rely on the Promises**

Abram and Sarah knew one of them had a fertility problem. But, they did not know which one of them had it. According to Mesopotamian law, an infertile couple could have a child by a surrogate, and claim the child as their own. With this understanding, Sarah approached Abram and suggested he take her young servant girl to wife, Hagar so she could perform the duty of a surrogate.

With Abram's approval, Sarah deputized Hagar, and Abram inseminated her naturally. This, by the way, was not an adulterous affair or a lusty, passionate act on Abram's part. This was a family business decision – a spiritual compromise – a fleshly, human solution that replaced a divine resolution.

Instead of relying on the promises, Abram and Sarah relied on nature; i.e., they took matters into their own hands and made a human choice. They perceived God's delay as His denial, and then settled for second best instead of God's best.

It is better to fail clinging to God's promise than resort to human pragmatism and succeed. "What works" is not the standard for godly-decisions.

#### **Lesson Four: Respond in the Spirit**

God did not prevent Abram and Sarah from executing their foolish plan. God loves freedom so much, He refused to intervene.

All the parties responded differently: Hagar, feeling used, "despised" Sarah. The word "despise" (qalal) means "to hold in contempt," or "to curse," or "to slight." Hagar felt violated and resented Sarah for using her like a pawn in a chess game. When Sarah realized the infertility problem was with her and not Abraham, a shock wave of doubt buzzed through her soul.

When Hagar became snooty and contentious, Sarah blamed Abram for friction between her and Hagar, "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong (present tensions) be upon thee . . ." Now that Hagar was pregnant, there was nothing Abram could do to undo the threesome dilemma. With complete resignation, Abram simply allowed Sarah to mistreat Hagar. When Hagar lost hope, she ran away.

No one responded correctly to God's delays: Abram and Sarah used Hagar; Hagar became angry at Sarah; Sarah accused Abram; Abram resigned his duty; Sarah mistreated Hagar; and, pregnant Hagar scoured out under the cover of darkness. Division and dissent replaced peace and tranquility in this family of God.

St. James warned us about earthly wisdom:

"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:14-17)

Have you ever been afflicted with good ideas like selling your house and living off the grid in a cave, raising camels in Alaska, or starting a business building inflatable cellars. Too often our “good ideas” are really bad “human ideas” that are doomed to failure.

Like Sarah’s “surrogate-mother program” our plans end up dividing families and churches.

When people are hurt and tempers flare, it is important that everyone involved do a spiritual health check, i.e., to walk in light of God’s Word. Fleshly problems are not resolved by fleshly responses.

You may not have the solution to a particular problem, or be able to straighten out the mess. But, you can walk in the Spirit; i.e., surrender the problems to God and respond with faith and patience. God does not call us to have all the answers, but He does call us to be filled with God’s Spirit at all times (Ephesians 5:16-18). Easier said than done!

### **Lessons of Waiting on God from the Life of Hagar**

#### **Lesson Five: Rest in God’s knowledge**

God’s lesson for learning how to respond to deferred hope came through Hagar, Sarah’s servan. Hurt, and overcome with despair, Hagar ran away from home and headed back to Egypt. She jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. How was she going to make a living? Where would she live? Can you imagine what would have happened to her and her baby among pyramid builders — the seat of Vanity Fair?

The worst day in the house of God is better than the best day in the world! Better to be mistreated in the family of God than to be pampered in the house of the wicked.

Like most human messes, it takes God’s light to heal the wounds inflicted in darkness. On the road to Shur, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar. This is the first mention of the “Angel of the Lord” — the Angel of His presence who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

While God did not prevent the Patriarchal couple from making the defective decision to use Hagar to be a surrogate mother, He did step in

and prevent the servant girl from making a disastrous decision to flee to the Nile Delta.

Why did He appear to Hagar and not to Abram? There are at least two reasons: (a) God loved Hagar and knew she was the victim of the fleshly behavior of His people, and (b) it was God's will to heal the antagonist (Abraham and Sarah) by the wounds of His little lamb (Hagar - a true victim). Are not we "healed by His stripes?" (Isaiah 53:5-7).

The most hurt among us (Jesus) became the greatest Healer. Therefore, it behooves us to follow His example and to heal those who hurt us (1 Peter 2:23, 24).

The LORD instructed Hagar to go back and to submit to Sarah's abuse (16:9)! And, she did! God did not reverse her pregnancy, but he did reverse her fate. The lesson Hagar learned about the LORD, she was able to share with Abram and Sarah for their healing and good. The perpetrator of a wrong has a greater spiritual need than the victim of the wrong.

But, how could she go back and submit to maltreatment? Surely this is not politically correct. No government paid counselor would advise an abused woman to return and submit to her abusers. But, God ordered Hagar to do so and she obeyed. And, we know that Hagar was treated well by Sarah and Abraham after this event.

What did she learn in her encounter with God that would enable her to return to this difficult situation?

**First**, she learned that God knew all about her and her burdensome domestic troubles; that He heard her cries, moans, and pains; that God knew where she was (near a spring in the desert: 16:7); that God knew her name (Hagar: 16:7); that God knew who she was and what she did for a living ("Hagar, servant of Sarai"); and, that He knew where she came from and where she was going.

The Angel of the Lord asked her, "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" He did not ask her these questions because he did not

know the answer, but to let Hagar know that He knew all about her abuse and that He cared for her.

So impressed was Hagar by God's personal knowledge and concern for her that she named the place, "Beer Laha Roi," — "the well of the living One who sees me" (16:14) because "she saw the back of him who sees me" (*ra'i'ti a'har'e roi*) (16:13). Not only did she give God a special title which He was pleased to record in His Word forever, she called her son "Ishmael." The proper noun "Ishmael" is made up of two words, "God" (*la*) and "hear" (*[em'v]*) which means "God hears." The LORD heard the fears, liquid tears, and silent cries of this woman. Isn't this the reason why the sons of Ismael pray to the God<sup>5</sup> of Hagar five times a day?

**Genesis 16:9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.**

Surely, Hagar shared her story with Abraham and Sarah. Most likely, Sarah and Abraham learned a valuable lesson and began to treat Hagar properly. Possibly, Abraham and Hagar apologized to their servant, and treated her quite differently. After all, "the God" was watching her . . . and them.

The paradox astounds us. On one hand, we see the tender grace and love God showed Hagar, and on the other hand, how could God cause good come of the legacy of this carnal union?

**Second**, God knew all about Hagar's child and his future. God gave Hagar special insight into the destiny of the child she was carrying. From Ishmael came the great Arab nation.

**Genesis 16:10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.**

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<sup>5</sup> The name "Allah" is the Arabic word for "The God" and is the unique, personal name for the singular, supreme deity in Islam, originating from the contraction of the Arabic words "al-" (the) and "ilah" (god).

**Genesis 16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.**

God announced the baby's destiny as a "wild ass" of a man . . . but, this is more than knowledge. This is foreordination — a **positive** decision of the Divine will: a wild man . . . independent . . . autonomous . . . despising cities loving the wilderness . . . alone . . . licking up every blade of green grass . . . in constant search of water . . . wandering . . . untamable . . . evading the mule driver's whip . . . plundering . . . living the freewheeling life style of a desert pirate. Can anything be more descriptive of Arab history?

And your life? Free? A matter of choice or foreordained?

### Lessons for Christians Today

Sometimes, knowing that God knows is all that we need to know!

Bob Richards, former Olympic pole vault champion, shared a moving story about a wannabe football player. He gave everything he had, but he just wasn't big enough to star on the football field. Though he always sat on the bench, his dad came to every game. Though the boy never missed a practice, he was not allowed to play. One day the young man received news that his dad died, and asked to be excused from practice. The coach told him to take the week off and not even bother to show up for the game on Saturday. During the 3rd quarter when the team was behind 10 points, the boy arrived at the stadium and suited up. He begged the coach to let him play. Insistent, the coach gave in.

It was not long before everyone was aware of his presence on the field. Making key tackles, he stopped the opposing team's top running backs. Soon, the score was tied. With a few seconds before the game ended, the kid intercepted a pass and ran it back for the winning touchdown. In the locker room, the coach came up to the young man and said, "That was quite a performance out there, son. How did you do it?" With tears in his eyes, the young man responded, "Dad came to all my games, but did you know that my dad was blind? Today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him I could do it."

He played well because he believed His father was looking on. But, unlike the player's father, God always sees. He never misses a single event in our lives.

A little baby named David was riding in his Dad's jeep when his father had to swerve in order to miss an oncoming car. When the jeep hit a pot hole, David popped out of the seat and hit somewhere on the busy highway. Terrified, David's father slammed on the breaks and went back to search for his dead son. To his surprise, David sat on the yellow line in the middle of the highway. Dad quickly grabbed him and began to inspect him. Not a scratch on the infant, the inscription on his Son's T-shirt hit home: "God loves me so much, He can't take His eyes off me."

The fact that God knows is all that we need to know.

Abram and Sarah eventually gave birth to a son. God fulfilled his promise to them, but in a way and at a time they never imagined. His delay, though it appeared to be without purpose, brought glory to God and greater joy and greater depth to Abram and Sarah. Little did either know that their lives would be used to encourage millions who have had to wait on God for a promise to be fulfilled.

If you are unsettled by deferred hope, you are not alone. Waiting for God is the most laborious duty you will have to endure under His tutorship. While waiting, remember the best about God, review the promises, rely on the promises, respond in the Spirit, and rest in the fact that God knows all about your needs and wants.

## **21. Faith in the Fight**

### **Psalm 11**

◆ We're all going to die!" Ever heard that omen?

Maybe you've heard the shout of defeatism from an enemy, or even a friend or a spouse; or perhaps you've heard those little voices in your own head predicting defeat.

How should we respond to the thunder of doom and gloom blasting hopelessness from the canons of doubt in our ears?

In Psalm 11, David listened to the panic and negative reports coming from his own advisors. Late at night he writes this faith-hymn showing us the way to manage fear.

Facing a fierce military foe and surrounded by trembling soldiers, there was one man in the army who expressed trust in God . . . only one man in the fight that had nike-faith in the LORD!

This psalm is **not** a prayer to God, but an exhortation to jittery commanders overwhelmed by the tidal wave of swords and spears arrayed against them. The psalm opens with David's confidence in God.

### **Advice from David's Anxious Advisors**

**Psalm 11:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.> In the LORD put I my trust: how (dare you) say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?**

David and his men marched to the killing zone. The enemy positioned itself on the high ground and appeared to have a strategic advantage. Ready to attack, shouts of hauteur bellowed from the enemy. The smell of death whiffed through the air. Hearts pounded. Knees knocked. Soldiers puked and breath turned foul. Seeking advice from his generals, David respectfully listened to their bleak reports. Each advised David to retreat-to fly away like a little bird, to live and to fight another day.

David's nostrils flared. His steel eyes of determination starred back at his generals as he countered the advice of his military staff: "in the Lord, put I my trust . . . why do you advise me to flee like a bird to safety on a high mountain"

Fight or flight? They advised flight . . . but . . . this was not the time to flee . . . and David knew it. This was a day to trust God and vigorously wield the sword and spear against the enemies of Israel.

**2 For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.**

The reconnaissance reports revealed the enemy was ready to attack. David acknowledged the keen observations of seasoned generals. Every word fortify fear and increased despair. The enemy moved its archers into position . . . arrows were cocked in the bow . . . and a sky full of deadly darts were about to fall on David's soldiers . . . suddenly, secretly, with surprise in hopes of spilling the most Hebrew blood among David's lesser forces ("the upright in heart").

**3 If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?**

The fear among David's generals was not that their army would take some casualties, but that the whole infantry would be slaughtered.

The term "foundation" (*hashatot*) is translated "seth" nine times, "buttocks" two times (2 Sam. 10:4; Is. 19:10), and the "base of a mountain" in Aramaic.

The attack was imminent and the nucleus of David's army appeared extremely vulnerable. If the advancing soldiers defeated David's main force, the battle would be lost.

Possibly, the safety and security of the nation was at risk. It was in lieu of this possibility that David's trembling advisors asked, "What can the righteous do?"

### **David's Answer to His Fearful Advisors**

**God rules**

**4 The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven:**

David assures his generals that though there is confusion on the battlefield, there is no confusion in heaven. The God above rules over the

battle, over the threats they faced this day, over the clinking, clanking iron-sounds of severed-death.

“In his temple”<sup>6</sup> speaks of God’s immanence.

“In heaven” communicates God’s transcendence.

“His throne” addresses authority and assured the generals of God’s royal sovereignty-- His control over the battle. Archers launch their arrows, but God decides where they land.

1 Kings 22:34 But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel (Ahab) between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded."

### **God sees**

**his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men.**

This is David’s way of saying that God knows! God cares! God sees the plight of His army. Though the enemy uses stealth and concealment, God is not surprised by the tactics of the wicked; that is, God is among the troops as a Shield and Sword protecting and empowering them.

### **God tests**

**5 The LORD trieth the righteous:**

David does not underestimate the enemy forces or the seriousness of the battle. Rather, he adds perspective: God uses these conflicts to test the righteous.

The word “trieth” means “to examine” or “prove” or “refine” His people like a metallurgist purifies silver and gold (Jer. 6:27-30; 9:7; Ps. 7:9).

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<sup>6</sup> The temple is probably a reference to the tabernacle either in Jerusalem or at Shiloh. Solomon’s temple was not yet constructed.

There was dross in David's army and impurities among David's counselors. Conflict reveals the fractures and flaws in the faith of the church militant. He uses these political conflicts to perfect His army. . . as well as to humiliate and defeat the anti-god forces threatening Christian soldiers.

**God hates**

**but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.**

The "wicked" refer to the savage foot soldiers planning their bloody attack on David's defenses. . . the anti-god forces . . . those thieves and murderers that "cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10).

The "wicked" here are not just sinners, but professional criminals and strategists who plot the demise of the righteous. In our day, the wicked may not be carrying an AK-47 and wearing military uniforms. Enemies may be carrying microphones, standing in front of cameras, and wearing blue suits slanting the news in favor of some humanist, Satanic agenda while spitting out hate and slander against good and reasonable men.

Contrary to popular belief that God is nothing but a powder-puff sugar bear engaged in a slobbering love affair with every vile human being. Contrary to what men think, All Lives Don't Matter. Innocent lives matter, but wicked lives do not.

David announces to His men that God hates the wicked. We fight because we are right!! We fight evil . . . and evil men.

God don't like ugly and He ain't crazy about pretty. Smart men don't pet rattlesnakes, and a holy God doesn't caress the wicked. He does not love the sinner and just hate the sin. He hates the incorrigible. While God forbids petty, fleshly, childish loathing among His people, it is not possible to be a good man without hating evil . . . and hating evil men. God's rancor against the wicked can motivate us to take on a fight we might normally avoid because we know God wants to use us to tear down "strongholds" and humble the proud. God calls us to be salt, not honey-roasted clusters of mango peach passion pecks.

## God judges

**6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.**

David assures his generals that they were going to be God's artillery to inflict holy justice on the invaders. God is holy and "He will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7).

"Snares, fire, brimstone, and a horrible tempest" are metaphors for punishment. "snares" = nooses or bird traps;

David was familiar with animal traps, and he knew what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah. He was familiar with the sirocco winds that sucked every bit of moisture from Levantine fauna. These forces of nature could turn a promising harvest into a dry, parched land overnight. David knew that God appointed judgment upon the wicked . . . and . . . perhaps God might be pleased to use Israel's army to bathe Israel's enemies in blood.

Likewise, He may use some Christians to put an abortion clinic out of business or oppose some law favoring Sodomites. He might use some mission team to win the lost to Christ or oppose godless legislation. He plans to judge the wicked; and perhaps, some believers in civil government might have the privilege of being His instrument to oppose injustice and promote justice.

*"But since correction lieth in those hands, Which made the fault that we cannot correct, Put we our quarrel to the will of Heaven, Who, when he sees the hours ripe on earth, Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads." (Shakspeare, Richard II, Act 1, Scene 2).*

## God is virtuous

**7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.**

David assures his men that God is virtuous and that He sees their plight. YHWH is righteous—that is, faithful to His covenant. David is confident that his army and his generals would see the face of God. He is not

referring to some theophany, but that they would experience the sunshine of His favor on the hellish battlefield (Psalm 17:15).

### **Conclusion**

In our pilgrimage on earth, we face many conflicts. At times, we are overwhelmed by the power of the opposition like a dam about to break. We may be tempted to flee to higher ground . . . and in some cases, flight is a righteous response to overwhelming force (Mt. 10:23). But, in other cases, God's wants us to engage the conflict; to stand and fight; and not give an inch.

In the heat of the battle, we may hear many voices calling us to retreat, to "flee," "run," an "quit" in our own soul.

Never lay down your arms like wilted flowers without a fight!!

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

"When you have done all according to the word of God and it seems like nothing is happening, then stand. ... Stand firm, hold your ground, and defend your territory against the enemy, by submitting to God and hitting the enemy in the name of Jesus," says Peter Rahm.

Somehow, someday, we would do well to imitate David's confidence in God and his courage on the battlefield. We would do well to rehearse David's orders and instructions to his fellow generals. We would do well to reflect on Paul's words to the Romans: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Let us remember the words of General Patton, "You are here because you are real men and all real men like to fight" (June 5, 1944).

Therefore, let us have nike-faith in the fight.

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# 22. Minding our Minds When our Faith is Tested

## 1 Peter 1:13

◆jj 1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

When traveling through the Valley of Despair, Peter commands “aliens and strangers,” to gird up the loins of their mind on this prickly path lest their faith get snagged on gympie-gympie thorns of doubt — every trail has hidden thorns on its path.

- Doubt that God loves us—for how could a loving Father let us suffer such painful affliction?
- Doubt that God is good—for how could a good God let us suffer this loss and defeat?
- Doubt that God is wise—for how could a wise God lead us into the heat and drought of these wilderness temptations?
- Doubt that God is able to provide a happy remedy to a thorny problem.

**The first step** toward victory is to cinch up the mind with truth knots that our “manifold temptations” . . .

- are strength builders to increase our resolved to resist sin (Hebrews 12:4);
- are evidence that we are true children of God (Hebrews 12:6, 7);
- are never penal -- for Christ absorbed the wrath of God for our sins at Calvary (1 Thessalonians 1:10);
- are for our good and not for our harm (Romans 8:28);are wisely chosen by the Father to perfect us (Hebrews 12:10);

- are not as heavy as they could have been (Hebrews 12:11);
- are not as severe as we deserve (James 3:17; 5:11);
- are not motivated by the anger of God, but by His love (Hebrews 12:6);
- are not valueless for the “testing of our faith is more precious than gold” (1 Peter 1:7);
- are not without purpose, for every trial offers an opportunity to glorify Christ (1 Peter 1:7);
- are not without joy, for there is joy knowing we are beneficiaries of Christ’s passion as well as partakers in His suffering (1 Peter 1:5-11; 4:18).

The exhortation to “gird up the loins of your mind” was an effective metaphor to the early Christians who wore robe-like garments that needed cinching – that required tethering their thoughts to the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19).

The Word teaches us to stride through the Valley of Despair with the loins of our minds cinched tight with truth enabling us to avoid being snagged by thorns of doubt that prevent us from taking sufficient comfort in the “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:5).

This girding is necessary that hope might enable us to receive “the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls” (1:9) “which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us” (1:10).

Therefore, while “girding our minds,” Peter instructs us to be “sober minded” and to diligently tend to “hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

### **Additional Observations on 1 Peter 1:13.**

The first command and main verb in this section is “hope to the end.” “Hope” is an aorist imperative meaning to **stop** what we are doing and to **immediately initiate** the required action like sharpening the ax before cutting down the tree.

The command is preceded by two participles used in an imperative sense, “Gird up the loins of your mind,” and “being sober minded.” These two participles function like two Navy cruisers on each side of an aircraft carrier. They act like destroyer escorts protecting the main craft, “Hope to the end,” even though our Christian hope is being torpedoed with propaganda by the anti-God forces.

Both the term “gird” and “sober” are used metaphorically. Peter sees the mind as a garment that is easily snagged by thorns of doubt and easily intoxicated with novel ideas that oppose our Christian hope.

**The second step is correct thinking.** Peter addresses accurate thoughts—a reasoning process that is easily diverted, corrupted, and propagandized by pagan perspectives that hinder hope in the final harvest of grace attached to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The “Wherefore” in verse thirteen direct us to reflect on the twelve previous verses where Peter addresses the believers’ salvic hopes in Christ. He knows, however, while the saints possess salvation, they do so under severe social pressure to adopt prevailing perspectives rooted in unbelief and woke ideas of the period.

[It was not unlike our day where there is intense pressure to think progressively and to join the push for global government, rejection of capitalism, practice of casual permissive sex, acceptance of abortion as means to prevent unwanted pregnancy, promotions of same-sex unions, and transvestite perversion as normal.]

Pricked with thorns of doubt, these people needed a compressor to pump heat into their air balloon so they could rise above the smog of their day. Peter, therefore, reminds them of the benefits they will inherit when their time on earth expires. The apostle understood how trials can test faith, hang hope on the gallows, and rob believers of the comfort they should enjoy due to victories of our Lord. Pressures are real. Even Peter denied the Lord three times.

Therefore, Peter calls believers, foreigners on this earth, to cinch up their minds and to think Biblically as they set their hope fully on Him Who has provided us with salvation ready to be revealed in the latter time.

## 23. Faith in Faith or Faith in Fact?

### 1 Corinthians 15:5

#### Faith s All About Proof of Claim!

#### ◆ 1 Corinthians 15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

True men believe in Sola Fide (*nike-faith*), that a man is saved by faith alone without the help of Mary or the saints; that the foundation of salvation is in the faithfulness of Christ to obey God's law, and not their own works.

Sola Fide is **not** faith in faith, **nor** faith in the heart, **nor** faith in self, but faith in the historical facts of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

The Scriptures call us to examine the evidence of the claims of Christ, particularly His historical resurrection – to dissect this soaring symphony note by note.

**1 Corinthians 15:14 "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."**

The Christian man is not a fideist<sup>7</sup> with credulity that believes without proof of claim.

Thomas refused to believe in rumors, superstition, hearsay, and passionate pleading by friends to believe their testimony that they had seen the risen Christ. He was not a man oozing with credulity. Gifted with a lawyer-like mind, Thomas demanded to see, feel, touch, and hear Christ in order to substantiate the claim that Christ rose from the dead

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<sup>7</sup> A fideist is an adherent of fideism, the belief that religious truth is a matter of faith rather than reason. Fideism holds that faith does not need to be established or supported by rational proof or evidence. This doctrine, which emphasizes faith over reason, has roots in thinkers like Tertullian and is represented in modern times by figures such as Søren Kierkegaard and Blaise Pascal (Google AI).

(John 20:26ff); that is, his faith and our faith is based on factual evidence, not faith in faith.

Yes, man is fallen, but sin does not make men nonhuman or strip away their ability to look at the evidence and to separate fact from fantasy (1 John 1:1-4).

All the religions of the world, except Christianity, are based on unverifiable assertions; that is, faith in their faith.

But, Christianity is different than other religious faith-claims in that it is based on facts rooted in history. There is evidence to examine, facts to explore, conclusions to decide. Faith-claims in other religions cannot be investigated, proved or disproved.

For example, how do you prove or disprove the notion of reincarnation? Since it has no historical foundation, it can't be taken to court and prosecuted; that is, there is no evidence to examine. It is simply a belief like building castles in a fog. No so with Christianity. It can be taken to court, prosecuted, and examined.

Christianity calls for the application of the rules of evidence. Gospel barristers are not ashamed to take the history of Christ into courtroom for the jury of the world to examine its truth claims.

There is no room in Christianity for blind faith, credulity, or presumption. We follow the facts as recorded in legal instruments called "the Gospels," and we adopt the rules of logic in the legal defense of truth.

The Christian faith is grounded on the historical fact that Jesus died for our sins and literally, tangibly, physically rose from the grave. He is risen! Normal, honest, living men saw Christ alive after his horrible death. They left their testimony in the custody of the church which has been preserved in the Bible (best evidence rule). It is available for cross-examination, investigation, and determination. Legal minds call it "synthetic evidence," "first-hand evidence," "eye-witness testimony," "the original document rule," and the "best evidence rule"-- the only evidence accepted in juridical courts.

You ask me how I know He lives. Well, it's **not** because "he lives in my heart." It is because eyewitnesses of his resurrection saw the risen Christ and recorded their testimony for us to examine . . . the foremost event of history . . . a public act packed with "infallible proofs."

Acts 1:3 "To whom also *he shewed himself alive* after his passion by *many infallible proofs*, being *seen* of them forty days, and *speaking* of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

This is nike-faith: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!"

## 24. Fact, Faith, and Your Feelings

### Hebrews 13:5

◆ Shakespeare taught audiences, "to your own self be true." Modern menn twisted the quote to mean "trust your feelings."

But, Christianity teaches us to trust God's promises and not your changing feelings.

**Hebrews 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content (strong) with what you have, for he has said,**

**"I will never leave you nor forsake you." Ouv mh, se avnw/ ouvdV ouv mh, se evgkatali,pw(**

There are five negatives in this verse. It is the strongest way to express a negation. It could be translated as follows:

"I will never, never, no never, never forsake you!"-- (Dr. Stockton, Greek Professor)

During times of adversity, our feelings may scream, "God has forsaken you!" Even the Father of Lies will get in on the act, "God has forsaken

you!!” But, we dare not trust these frivolous thoughts and mixed up feelings.

His Word is like a compass that always points to truth; feelings are the weather that changes during the seasons of life. Trust the sure Word of God . . . rest . . . be at peace . . . do your duty . . . and enjoy His love.

Remember the caboose follows the engine, not the engine the caboose. Play to the beat of the conductor, not to the taps of the Bohemian drummer.

Plant your flag on truth’s summit – the testimony of the apostles.

## 25. Faith that Moves Mountains

### Mark 11:22

◆ After Jesus cursed the fig tree, he instructed the disciples:

**Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.**

**23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.**

**24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.**

**25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.**

**26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.**

## Wrong Applications of this Text

**This chapter investigates the Charismatic proposition that a person can obtain whatever he desires if he offers to God the prayer of faith.**

This is one of the most abused texts in Scripture by the modern “Name it and Claim it” Faith-Movement Preachers.

The Faith-Movement, John Hagee and the undiscerning, disobedient out-of-control Charismatic pastoreses, et al. use this text to excite their followers to launch their dinghies into stormy seas of unclaimed possibilities . . . but only if they first pass on “seed money” to these dry-dock, tariff collectors. Success stories abound.

On the other hand, many place their blanket of faith in faith or faith in their star-lit dreams, and end up on jagged coastal rocks near unmoved reefs with a broken skiff, broken finances, and a broken heart.

These faith-mariners frequently drown in silence -- overcome by roaring waves doubting God while flogging themselves for not having the kind of faith that can move mountains – that can construct Gerald R Ford Aircraft Carriers that sail smoothly through tsunamis.

The critical craft of interpretation here is to avoid the stunning abuses of this text without robbing it of its powerful message, hope, and instruction.

### What this text does not mean

Let’s look at some correctives:

**First**, this text has limitations. The spurious belief that “faith-prayer” will result in having “whatsoever he saith,” or “What things soever ye desire” is not an unconditional promise from a Heavenly Santa Claus.

The Faith Movement has stretched this text beyond its original intent – a wish whispered into the stars. You can beg God to keep you from dying, or to make you sinless, or to give you a seven-course banquet when you ask for bread, or to raise your dead child from the grave, but Divine intervention is not likely.

In God's maximum-liability universe all promises have limitations. Because Scripture teaches God's nature is unchanging and that He cannot lie, His promises are inherently trustworthy. But, every promise is limited by the intent, purpose, and meaning of words.

Moreover, other factors enter into the equation like man's needs, motives, purposes, obedience, and faith. If God answered every prayer of men we would live in a world of "fat cats" sleeping on beds of cash, women that look like wildfires in silk, and Amazon, wolf-men with cologne wrapped in leather and charm.

Paul could heal others, yet his own prayer for healing did not prevail (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

Furthermore, there are negative conditions and circumstances that exist that are **not** related to a lack of faith. Our Lord corrected the disciples who assumed that the blind man's condition was based on his lack of faith or his parent's lack of faith (John 9).

**Second**, there are conditional pillars that shore up effective prayer and one of them is that we must pray within the will of God (1 John 5:14); and, there are conditions to answered prayer in this text such as forgiving your brother.

The "Name-It-Claim-It" Faith-Movement tends to treat this text as a fantasy-fulfilling promise, and as such offer their followers false hope.

**Third**, this text does **not** support faith in faith. Faith is wonderful, but it is not a human-virtue weaved into the tapestry of the human soul. Faith is not a character trait. Faith is not a living, breathing human asset in a simple heart. Though true-faith often results in positive thoughts, nike-faith is not the power of positive thinking, Faith has no power whatsoever. Faith is not a force like a wildfire in slow motion; and,

**Fourth**, faith is **not** a creative energy. There is no such thing as the "creative word." You, your words, and your faith can't create anything, nada-enchilada! You can't command demons, devils, or the future. It is the *voodoo-abracadabra* occult that seeks to control the future. But, the one with nike-faith obeys His commands and lets God command Him.

Good men don't claim to have dominion over the Word because the Word has dominion over them. You are not in charge! He is in charge! There is only one God and Creator, the LORD God! And, He is pleased to honor the equitable-prayers of His children, but not their "pie in th sky" wants.

**Fifth**, the text says, "Have faith in God." Nike-faith has an object. It is *Theos* that answers prayer. It is the true God that can give us the virtuous desires of our heart. Our confidence needs to be in the living God, not in "creative faith."

**Nike-faith is a view, a trust, a look, a confidence, an emotional investment in the abilities and virtues of Another.**

Faith needs to be deposited in the God of the Bible, **not** the "god" of our own creation; in the LORD God and **not** the Muslim<sup>8</sup> "god," or the Mormon "god," or "the Force," or in "Mother Earth," or "Mother Nature," or the "god within you," or "in the power of meditation," or in "god-government" or in our own warped, truncated, morphed view of the One Who Exists.

For this reason interfaith presidential prayer breakfasts are as about as useful as a pet rock or a lighthouse in the desert.

That God created man in his own image and that man returned the favor is more true than funny.

Faith needs to be in the "one, infinite, personal, virtuous, triune Spirit who is the God of Creation and the God of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, nike-faith seeks to grow in an accurate view of Elohim / Theos and His revealed will while seeking the goal, "Thy will be done."

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<sup>8</sup> Muslim correctly believe there is one God. They call Him "Allah" which means "the God" – if they mean "the God" of the Bible; the God of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Isaac they are on the correct course. "The God" who revealed Himself to Hagar and promised her a son (Ismael meaning "God hears") is identified specifically as the "LORD" (YHWH) Who is the Lord Jesus Christ (See Isaiah 40:3 and Mark 1:3).

**Sixth**, this text has a context. Jesus cursed the fig tree (11:13). As the Inspector High Priest, our Lord Jesus entered the temple and found it infected with the leprous covetousness wherein the Jewish elders had turned it into a “den of thieves” (11:17; Leviticus 14:33ff).

Coming out of the temple, the disciples noticed the withered fig tree and marveled at how quickly the stock perished.

**Mark 11:21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.**

The command, “Have faith in God” was given to the disciples who were focused on the wonder and implications of the cursed fig tree; which by the way, was the only destructive thing that Jesus ever did. Jesus used the event to instruct his disciples about nike-faith, prayer, and the need for pure religion unaffected by Judaism and it's barnacles of legalism.

The context is the cursing of the fig tree which is a symbol of ancient, geo-political Israel and its plunge into cultic Judaism which produced a "faithless generation" (Mark 9:13ff). Following our Lord's instruction on prayer, priests and rabbis scandalously questioned His authority (11:27ff).

The word “mountain” is preceded by the definite article referring to a specific mountain -- *the temple mount* which was the cult-center of Judaism and the corrupted Jewish political system.

That is, the mountain to be removed and put into the sea is an apocalyptic metaphor referring to the destruction of the temple and the leprous nation of Israel who plotted to kill their Messiah (See Matthew 24). Think of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD under the Titus, the Roman general.

The term “mountain” can literally refer to a specific land form, but it can also refer to the location of a political system -- in this case it refers to the politic system of Judaism on the temple mount -- Daniel 2:35; Amos 4:1; 6:1; Micah 4:2; Matthew 4:8, 23-24).

Following our Lord's instruction on prayer, priests and rabbis representing the system of Judaism priggishly questioned Christ's

authority to challenge their unlawful, money-laundering enterprise being conducted in God's House (11:15, 27ff).

"Moving the mountain into the sea" is similar to hanging a milestone around a miscreant's neck and throwing him into the sea; that is, this is an act of judgment . . . of removing Zionistic-Judaism as a stumbling block to true religion.

Jesus was **not** literally talking about moving a land mass into the sea, but metaphorically moving the corrupt, leprous system of national Judaism that was controlled by a hierarchy of madmen and psychopaths leading the people into the graveyard of nations – an entire governmental-commercial system based on franchises (financial benefits) and immunities from violations of common law for its elite members.

Sound familiar?

Christ announced the literal destruction of the temple to the disciples – a political event which would abolish the corrupt, geo-political infrastructure of the nation in 70 A.D. under Titus, the Roman general (Matthew 24:1-2).

Sometimes Christians need to pray for the downfall of governments -- eradication of tyranny and despotism occurring in politics, to wit:

“But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security” (Declaration of Independence).

The cultic Charismatic-Faith-Movement ignores the context and acts like nothing came before or after this text. They treat the passage as a blank check where all you have to do is write in the amount, date it, and cash it.

But, the seeker of truth avoids the hocus pocus of Pentecostal preachers.

### **Correct Applications of this Text**

This is a marvelous passage of Scripture, and in seeking to rescue the text from abuses by charlatans, we dare not rob it of its power and hope!

**First**, the text commands us to place our faith in the God of the Bible. It is our all-powerful, all-loving, all-caring Heavenly Father that has the authority to answer our prayer.

**Second**, while the text implies that “the mountain” refers to Jerusalem and its temple mount, the circumstance was used to encourage the disciples to expand the possibilities of believing prayer.

The moving of the mountain is a metaphor for obstacles that hinder the adoption and development of true Christianity. In this context, Judaism was the religious-political stumbling block that hindered the progress of the gospel. The same is true today. Judaism, omnism, and polytheism and their works-based theologies prevent people from entering into the kingdom. Armenian-Americanism with man as the captain of his fate is the elephant in the room.

**Third**, we learn that “doubt” hinders prayer. The word “doubt” (*diakrino*) means “to pierce through” – a counter-argument with a needle that pops the balloon of hope. Doubt is the mother of all evils as it is a splinter in the hands that pray.

Doubting the Bible, the law of God, the gospel of God, and the character of God hinder answered prayer; that is, when we pray, we are to pray with clarity about God and His will for our lives. This can only occur as we become better Bible students and develop a more accurate knowledge of His Word. God listens to the man who listens to Him. A man may never get rid of all doubt. Both faith and doubt seems to reside in each of us. The key is to pray, “Lord, help my unbelief;” that is, shore up my faith and fill in its weaknesses. Even courts follow the jury rule “beyond all reasonable doubt” and not verdicts beyond all doubt.

**Fourth**, we learn the importance of niki-faith added to prayer: “and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

The “but” (alla) is a strong adversative contrasting doubt with nike-faith. The word “believes” is a subjunctive aorist holding out the possibility of a settled conviction that what a person is praying for is so consistent with the will of God that the Lord will be pleased to answer the prayer.

The lesson here is that effective prayer is work. The petitioner must unite Biblical theology and pragmatic reasoning; that is, to bring his Biblical studies to bear on his pragmatic needs. The confidence here is of such quality that there are no inconsistencies between the prayer and the revealed will of God.

Prayer is like a contract in that nike-faith brings consideration to the negotiating table as evidence of sincerity.

**Fifth**, we learn that effective prayer has simple purity and wholeness about it; that is, there is sweet harmony between acts of prayer and the intents of the heart: “whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

The aorist subjunctive (“believe you have received it”) expresses the kind of assurance that should exist between the character of the request and the character of God. Answered prayer is possible for the the seeker of God seeking change; but, answered prayer is highly unlikely for the seeker of change who is not at the same time a seeker of God.

If solidarity in the man is the great advantage in prayer, then the “double minded” man (James 1:3-5), the bifurcated man, seeking heavenly blessings and earthly riches is the great disadvantage in prayer. Double think, double talk, and double speak are marks of a manipulated, divided man – like a compass with two norths.

Satan’s great trick is to divide and conquer; to split the man and his affections; to create a man devoted to Christ in public, but devoted to bosom sins in private; saying one thing in prayer, but desiring something else in practice. The preacher who is all mouth and no ears comes to mind. Take off your mask and be real.

**Sixth**, we learn that forgiveness towards others is an important condition for answered prayer. Anger is a hindrance to effective prayer. We simply

cannot afford the high cost of bitterness. If we can't forgive others for their miniature-sins against us, how can we expect the Supreme Judge to forgive our giant-sins against Him? We must let go of our anger and bitterness in order to lay hold of the willingness of God to act on our behalf.

Now, our Lord is not talking about automatic forgiveness or cheap forgiveness to unrepentant people, but real forgiveness towards those in our lives who truly want and need to be reconciled to us . . . or us to them. Spouses, friends, and church-members come to mind; that is, we must confess our sins to the people who we injure; and, the "offended" must commit themselves to the task of not using people's past failures to control them! Forgiveness sets people free. If we are wronged, those who seek our forgiveness seek freedom from being controlled by our bitterness. If we can't bless those who sin against us, how can we expect God to bless us who have sinned against Him?

English playwright and poet William Congreve wrote, "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned," and there is no more painful whipping post than a flogging with a cat-o-nine-tails delivered by an embittered spirit.

One illustration might be helpful: Our family of seven had outgrown our home of 1,200 square feet. My wife searched for weeks and then announced to me she had found the right one: double the size, near where I worked, and nearer to the kid's school. We made a low offer, and it was accepted. The next day the real estate agent informed us someone had come in with a cash offer on the same house. We had three days to come up with the money, or vacate our contingency contract. That meant, we had three days, to sell our small home. That Monday night, my wife and I prayed with a strange certainty and peace that God could not only do it, but would do it. At 9:00 on Tuesday morning, the real estate lady arrived with a potential buyer. The buyer made an offer, and we accepted it. On Wednesday, the paperwork went through, and we handed the owner of our new purchased home the check for the full amount of our offer! We started packin' like maniacs, and Thursday night, three days after our prayer, our family sat down for a lovely meal in our new home.

We have seen this kind of miracle-working power by God again and again. But, I don't want to leave you with impression that this is always the case. We've also stood in wonder at unanswered prayer, God's silence, and His seeming indifference to our prayers. And such, tested our souls.

Job developed unshakable faith because his faith had been shaken. And, we trust that God, in the good and bad, in the ups and downs, in the answered prayers and unanswered prayers in this pilgrimage, is perfecting us and conforming us to the image of His Son.

In conclusion, this is a wonderful passage of Scripture that can bless our prayer life. But, it first has to be rescued from the charlatans that abuse this passage and victimize others by their wild-eyed, woolly-haired claims. If applied correctly, there is a prayer life that can move mountains.

## 26. Faith that Flourishes in Old Age

### Psalm 92:11-15

◆ **11 Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me.**

Righteous men grieve over evil crawling over stone like ivy in society and long to see justice dispensed on evildoers.

“Mine eye shall behold the fall of mine enemies; and mine ears shall hear of the destruction of the wicked?” (Benson quoting Horne).

This promise is similar to promises in Psalm 37 and 91 where the righteous are permitted to see about the fall of a portion of the wicked in his lifetime. The righteous will not see all the wicked crumble, but the

man with an expectant heart and open eyes will observe many of "the rich and famous" crumble like crackers in the hand of a giant. But, he must look and listen for it.

## **12 The righteous shall flourish (*parach*) like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.**

David uses the metaphor "palm tree" to expand imagery in the mind – a tree with a strong but flexible trunk – a tree that yields 10-20 coconuts a year for natives to enjoy. Just coconut water is a marvelous source of antioxidants that protect cells from damage.

The Bible says, "Many are the troubles of the righteous" (34:19), but here the psalmist contrasts the fall of the wicked with the growing prosperity of the righteous. The wicked are compared to mowed "grass" and the righteous are compared to "flourishing trees."

The verb "flourish" (*parach*) means "to bud, to blossom, or to sprout."

The palm tree, being tall and upright, is a sacred symbol of peace, victory, and life in the Levant (Psalm 92:12; Jeremiah 10:5).

The cedar tree is an icon of powerful nations (Ezekiel 31:3; Amos 2:9), the flourishing of saints (Psalm 92:12) and the majesty, strength and glory of Christ (Song of Solomon 5:15; Ezekiel 17:22-23).

**Warning:** This psalm is a caution about over-connecting material prosperity to happiness. Many a Christian man with a rich soul has died in poverty -- a great mystery regarding "kings afoot." And, many a rich man has died a spiritual pauper -- another mystery regarding "fools on horseback" (Ecclesiastes 10:7). The reader would do well to consider how the "health and wealth" gospel is a fraud perpetrated on struggling populations in society.

## **13 Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.**

"house of the LORD:" In case the reader is inclined to read into the text what is not there, the psalmist notifies us that the spring that renews life is located in the House of the LORD. This happiness is not found in the

seats of Congress, in tenured positions at universities, nor in high class nightclubs, but in "the courts of the Lord."

The verb "be planted" is in the passive voice indicating the Lord planted these trees of righteousness in his own court-yard garden. It is an agricultural metaphor that refers to one's domicile and residence in the kingdom of God (the Garden of the LORD).

"shall flourish" is a Hithpael imperfect verb demonstrating confidence in future growth and prosperity.

The "courts of our God" where men "flourish" were not only a place of worship, but the seat of government; that is happiness is not only of the heart, but in the head; not only by salvation by grace, but sanctification by obedience to God's law. He is our God that created us; and, our King that leads us.

#### **14 They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;**

The "they" refers to all believers planted in "the house of the Lord," particularly those in their golden years. *The palm trees and cedars of the church are its godly, senior citizens.* A congregation of old people is a testimony to God's faithfulness . . . of the strength God gives to run the race and finish the course – a resource to satisfy hunger . These "old" saints do not wilt, wither, or fade away. They flourish like a garden after winter!

The word "old age" (seybah) refers to those with a crop of grey hair on their head.

These promises are not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles; not only for Israel, but for all Christian-nations; not only for men, but for women; not only for youth, but for seniors.

Terms like "fat" and "flourishing" are metaphors for health and growth. In David's day, skinny people were considered sick and frail, while fat people were deemed healthy.

Ellicott says this text means: "Still shall they sprout in hoary age, sappy and green shall they be" - an analogy alluding to flourishing of the Palm and Cedar trees. Because godly men continue to grow and flourish in Christ, they are the most valuable assets of a church -- a lesson that one can be productive in their service to Christ even in their senior years. **A church does not need young people as much as young people need palm-tree veterans in the faith** -- people who have walked with God their whole life.

Young people looking for a church would do well to find one with older people who have walked with God through the "thick and thin" of life and not one with youth who have dreams in the clouds.

### **15 To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.**

The infinitive "to shew" indicates God's purpose of planting palm and cedar trees in the house of the Lord -- to showcase his sustaining power at work among the palm trees of righteousness a.k.a "old people."

The term "upright" means "straight" and "plumb." God uses older saints to instruct youth about how the LORD is true to his Word and faithful to his promises. The presence of old people in church is proof of claim that God does not leave nor forsake those who invest their lives with Him.

Leviticus 19:32 (NAS) You shall rise up before the gray headed (seybah) and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.

Honoring the grey headed is case law attached to the Fifth Commandment to honor one's father and mother. Oh, that parents would teach their children to stand up when grey heads enter the room and to show them honor and courtesy.

At one time these grey haired "old people" were young and tender trying to find their way through life. They too faced challenges and took steps of faith. Sometimes they succeeded and at other times they failed. But, as they matured they learned that God's Word is true; that He can be

trusted; that they were better off trusting Him than pursuing idols in the market place.

All the "old" people that have ever trusted in God, though they often walked with God alone, found him to be faithful to His promises. None were made ashamed of their hope in him. Each can say they were made better (holy) by his disciplines; that His mercies are known every morning, and that his grace made them stronger in hope and love.

Every Christian-senior citizen is a quilt stitched with stories. Listen to them. Honor them. Be their friend. And, one day you will be a palm tree in the House of the Lord.

## 27. Faith that Accepts Suffering

### Hebrews 11:32ff

◆ 36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

The most difficult faith-truth to grasp in Hebrews 11 for modern man is that faith does **not** always end in triumph over adversaries; that life ends with faith over the fear of what enemies can do to you.

Western Christians seem to have great difficulty understanding the phrase “and others.”

Modern men love winners and despise losers; wealth and not poverty; strength and not weakness; success and not failure; pleasure and not pain.

Thus, developing a proper perspective of the place of suffering in the Christian life can be a struggle for many. Men need a lighthouse near the rocky shores of prosperity to warn them of dangerous shoals near the harbors of financial success.

Yes, there is a faith that obtains victory over enemies; BUT, there is also a nuke-faith that triumphs even though the believer may lose his battle to powerful adversaries.

Yes, there is a faith that leads to health and wealth, but more powerful is the faith that keeps the believer true to Christ while having to endure sickness and poverty – a faith that acts like a compass in a fog of lecherous materialism.

*That the exercise of faith always leads to prosperity is the heresy of money-conscious Americans and the cultic Charismatic Movement.*

**Note the subtle change in subject matter that takes place between verse 34 and verse 35!**

Up until verse 35, we have nuke-faith that enables a man of God to “escape the edge of the sword” (injustice in the courts of men) and to gain victory in some political battle.

In verse 36-37, we have nuke-faith that enables a child of God to suffer the indignities of “torture,” “mocking,” “scourging,” “imprisonment,” death by court-ordered “stoning,” execution by “the sword,” homelessness, ragged economic times, “afflictions,” agony, and dire living conditions.

**The victories of faith in action**

**Hebrews 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:**

**33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,**

Think of Joshua, the judges, David, Samson, Daniel, and the Maccabees.

**34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.**

**35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:**

"Women received their dead" refers to the sons of the widow of Zarephath in Elijah's time (1 Kings 17) and to the great Shunamite woman in Elisha's time to whom these prophets imparted life (2 Kings 4).

The verb "tortured" (*tumpanizo*) refers to the repeated beatings with a stick or iron instrument. Devices like the Brazen Bull, the rack, and the thumbscrew come to mind.

The phrase "not accepting deliverance" refers to the rejection of a contract offer for freedom in exchange for pledges of loyalty to a political agenda.

### **The triumph of faith that endures difficult trials**

**36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:**

Think of Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23, Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:24, and Jeremiah (Jeremiahs 22).

**37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;**

The last prophet, Zechariah, was stoned by a judicial order of thankless King Joash in 2 Chronicles 24:1. Joseph experienced the misery of being imprisoned and chained causing his feet to bleed because he ran from Potipher's seductive wife – a honeypot of Egypt who falsely accused him of attempted rape (Genesis 39: Psalm 105:18).

Tradition informs us Isaiah was sawed in two by sychophant-thugs under the persecution of King Manasseh.

Many prophets were executed with the sword during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19:10).

The word "tempted" (*peirazo*) could refer to the rigors of a court trial, a long period of testing circumstances, or the temptation to relieve suffering by compromising their stand against political pressures due to their religious faith.

The verb "sandered about" refers to a fugitive fleeing "the long arm of the law." Think of those people who have been unlawfully prosecuted by powerful state officials operating under statutory authority in defiance of God's law. In the minds of many politicians, the first remedy to a political problem is to kill the Christians.

"Hillary Clinton makes yet another case for violence against white Christian men – the constant drumbeat against huge segments of the population . . ." (NYP).

"Sheepskins and goatskins" describes clothing for the destitute. This was not a fashion-choice of attire, but crude outerwear forced on men and women due to necessity.

The word for "destitute" is *hysteroumenoi* in Greek. We get the word "hysteria" from the root word; that is, these men of faith lived in extreme circumstances that would drive aristocrats insane.

The word "oppressed" (*thelibo*) means "to press" or squash or "to narrow." It refers to the persecution of men and the deliberate harassment of those practicing the goodness of their religious faith.

The word "tormented" refers to ill-treatment or bad dealings of political prisoners -- the restraint of common courtesies and honest dealings with prisoners.

**38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**

"Worthy" denotes weight – a star among candles. The presence and suffering of these saints was worth more than all the ore in Nevada gold mines.

"I'd rather have Jesus than anything" or everything - George Beverly Shay.

Forced into isolation, many people of faith lived the life of lonely hermitage like Elijah – a golden nugget on a sandy shore – an echo in an empty cathedral.

***39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:***

These saints were men of faith, yet they did not receive the ultimate answer to their prayers. Their "faith," not their deliverance, is the victory (nike) that overcomes (nika) the world (1 John 5:1-3).

**40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.**

The goal for all the people of God is "perfection" or maturity in Christ-likeness; and, the means to perfection is by invoking the "God of peace."

Do you want to be Christ-like? Then accept the difficulties Providence hands to you. Exercise patience, goodness, righteousness, and love even though you are weighed down by personal adversities or by the corruption in a decaying society. Be at peace with Him. Show goodness to men.

This is the Spirit's way of informing us that the godly of this age must suffer in order to achieve excellence. Excellence can be achieved by

exercising faith that devotes itself to a life of obedience in these stressful times against all manners of injustice.

This obedience expresses itself in fearless living, bold confrontation of secularism, love toward the brethren, and sound decision-making ( 2 Timothy 1:7).

There is a faith that overcomes sickness and death; but there is a faith that accepts sickness and death as from God.

There is a faith that escapes the cruel "justice" of the courts; but, there is a faith that accepts the privilege of being tried by the corrupt, black-robed imposters pretending to offer justice under color of law, color of due process, and color of righteousness.

A key to the faith battle is *to reject the presumption that real faith results in deliverance from every trial of life*, or that suffering is the consequence of a lack of faith; AND, to accept your circumstances from God by responding to the call to happily rejoice in those difficult circumstances for His glory.

Understand this and you will overcome the heresy and distortions of modern faith-preachers who collect seed-money from their victims.

## 28. Spurgeon's Devotional on Psalm 101:1

◆ "I will sing of mercy and judgment."

Faith triumphs in trial. When reason is thrust into the inner prison, with her feet made fast in the stocks, faith makes the dungeon walls ring with her merry notes as she cries, "I will sing of mercy and of judgment. Unto thee, O Lord, will I sing." Faith pulls the black mask from the face of trouble, and discovers the angel beneath. Faith looks up at the cloud, and sees that

'Tis big with mercy and shall break

In blessings on her head."

There is a subject for song even in the judgments of God towards us. For, first, the trial is not so heavy as it might have been; next, the trouble is not so severe as we deserved to have borne; and our affliction is not so crushing as the burden which others have to carry. Faith sees that in her worst sorrow there is nothing penal; there is not a drop of God's wrath in it; it is all sent in love. Faith discerns love gleaming like a jewel on the breast of an angry God. Faith says of her grief, "This is a badge of honour, for the child must feel the rod"; and then she sings of the sweet result of her sorrows, because they work her spiritual good. Nay, more, says Faith, "These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So Faith rides forth on the black horse, conquering and to conquer, trampling down carnal reason and fleshly sense, and chanting notes of victory amid the thickest of the fray.

"All I meet I find assists me

In my path to heavenly joy:

Where, though trials now attend me,

Trials never more annoy.

"Blest there with a weight of glory,

Still the path I'll ne'er forget,

But, exulting, cry, it led me

To my blessed Saviour's seat."

# Part II

Faith as applied to salvation, justification, and sanctification;  
that is,

- faith to fight for the faith,
- faith to discern truth as well as error,
- faith to believe in justification,
- faith to apply the principles of sanctification,
- faith to walk with God with a clear conscience.

**John 6:29** Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work (ergon) of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

**Acts 26:18** 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

## 29. Contending for the Faith

### Jude

◆ The book of Jude is an iron bell struck by an apostle during turbulent storms threatening the foundational doctrines of Christianity – Faith rings out even as doubt and skepticism try to smother it.

Nike-faith demands Christians defend “the faith” with true grit from assault by apostates working overtime through fake science, financial schemes, feminism, wokeness, LGBTQ+ Movements, and democracy.

Jude challenges believers to contend for “the faith” (the gospel) once delivered to the saints in hope they would take the hammer truth and nail the doctrines of the faith into boardwalk of the church so they would be stable and secure.

Jude urged his people to create a verbal wildfire around apostates that deny the Scriptures and defy logic by diluting the gospel and replacing it with “damnable heresies.”

The pivotal verse in the Book of Jude is found in verse five which addresses the purpose of the book: "to put in remembrance" where a sudden case of amnesia beset those who apostatized from the faith. Though Jude does not quote the Old Testament, he refers to characters and events in the Tanach at least nine times.

He wants his readers to identify apostates, and to fire canons of truth at the naysayers creating a firestorm around them. A fear of lighting giant lanterns in a lighthouse in the name of tolerance out of fear of offending the storm was ridiculous to Jude. Stand! Fight! Use roundhouse punches and spinning back kicks in this duel of tongues.

The main idea in Jude is don't be a doormat in a thunderstorm — soaked, stepped on, and silent.

Doctrinal and moral apostasy exposed by Jude (vv. 4–18) closely parallels that of 2 Peter 2:1–3:4 -- the difference being that Peter predicted the coming of apostates, while Jude identifies their arrival in the first century – heresy coming from anti-Christ Jews – barnacles on hull of a ship.

We don't know the date that Jude wrote his book but we presume it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (63-69 AD).

The key challenge is in verse three where Jude urges the believers to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints;” i.e. wielding truth into a sword.

For a complete understanding of the struggle to preserve the faith consider studying verses 3-5 and v. 24.

### A Commentary on Jude 3-5, 24-35

#### Remember to Fight for the Faith

**3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.**

"Beloved" (*agapetos*) is a strong term of endearment -- an assurance that though this community was infested with false teachers and needed "to go to work to clean out the rat's nest," they were very much the object of the Father's love.

"all diligence" (*spoude*) means "haste." It refers to the intense, urgent, heart-felt desire of Jude to communicate with his readers. Writing in those days was a laborious task that required supplies and preparation of ink, quill, and parchment.

"needful" (*anagke*) refers to a necessity. Very few things are necessary, but going to war against the apostates took priority over the daily routines of life . . . over all other desires . . . over all other occupations. Jude moved war to the top of the priority list in this chessboard of capturing pawns and knights.

"to write unto you of the common salvation" appears to be the theme that Jude wanted to address in his epistle, but because this community was infiltrated by apostates, Jude had to adjust his theme to warn them about the dangers of these false teachers and to urge this community to put on their combat gear and launch a verb assault against these enemies of the gospel; that is, to release the lion within – the raw, unstoppable power of claws and teeth in motion.

"to earnestly contend" (*epagonizomai*) is a translation of the Greek word "to agonize" which means "to strain every muscle," to "put every effort" into fighting for the faith. "earnestly contend" is opposed to the fat, overweight, casual, complacent, apathetic, nonchalant, lukewarm, lackadaisical attitude so common among "pew-sitters" and "TV-watchers." Sharpen your swords. Put on your pauldrons. Wield the Scriptures. Arm yourself to fight these aggressive, proud, sensual, self-confident, wolf-like predators.

War against arrogant spinsters is the will of God for the church (Judges 3:1-3; Ephesians 6:10ff; 2 Corinthians 10:4).

"the faith:" At stake was the truth and foundation of the gospel . . . and its ethics.

"The faith—i.e., that which is believed by Christians: not the expression of the doctrine, nor the holding of it, but the substance of it." - Ellicott.

"Once for all delivered to the saints" - refers to the perfect, complete revelation of God about our Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. No change, No addition, No amendment, and No prophecy need be added to it!! -- A contrast to the false prophets with all their creative additions, fanciful insights, and permissive moral practices. The canon is complete. Those claiming to have dreams, visions, and a "word of prophecy" from God are heretics. Rebuke them. Avoid them. Shun these gnats of distraction.

**4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

"certain men" refers to the apostates called "ungodly" men. Jude is not addressing an opinionated saint or a backsliding church. He addresses a church infiltrated with apostate teachers – termites of trust -- a powerful minority of attendees that sought to uproot and disfigure the gospel of Christ.

"crept in" (*paraeisduno*) refers to "something secret;" "to deceptive hidden motives;" to a velvet glove hiding a clinched fist. And, it is this stealthy, insidious invasion of these heretics which constituted the necessity underlying Jude's motivation to write his epistolary. The misinformation, disinformation leavening covertly pushed on the Christians needed to be confronted, exposed, and expunged by scrappy-ambassadors for Christ.

The word "ordained" (*prographo*) refers to something "written down," "written aforetime" predicting their condemnation; that is, a gloomy forecast of what the penalty for this unlawful conduct would be. Literally "written down" or in modern vernacular "written up" like a summons -- a demand for a court appearance containing a sworn indictment, lawful charges, accusations, allegations containing a verifiable claim deserving strong condemnation.

"of old" refers to facts in history -- not to divine purposes. Best not to use this text to support strong, Calvinistic leanings.

"condemnation" (*krima*) refers to a divine decree . . . some act proscribed in law . . . to a judicial decision whereby the judge repudiates a certain type of unlawful behavior.

"this condemnation" refers to a particular degree -- to a category of unlawful acts.

"turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness:" "turning" (*metatithemi*) is a present active participle meaning "to change," "to transpose," "to transfer," or "to fall away from." The charge is turning away from the grace of God and using it to promote lasciviousness; that is, modifying it; altering it; amending it; editing it; and, revising it to incorporate "lasciviousness" or "permissiveness" by those with a compass that points to lust and greed.

This "turning" or "bending the grace of God" involves **two deviations**: one moral, the other doctrinal.

**(1) The moral deviation:** "lasciviousness" (*aselgeia*) refers "to unbridled lusts," "excess," "licentiousness," "outrageousness," "wantonness," "reckless freedom," "avarice," and "shamelessness" that are orbits outside normal, decent behavior. "a" negates; "*elgeia*" means continence; that is, *aelgeia* refers to "incontinence" or "unbridled lusts" "uncontrolled urges," or to one who is unable to control his passions. [shock videos by Hollywood performers comes to mind,]

**(2) The doctrinal deviation:** The KJV translation "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" is confusing.

There is a textual variance in this passage. The issue is whether or not the accusative noun "God" (*theon*) should appear in the final phrase of the text of v. 4. The modern critical text: *kai ton monon depoten kai kurion hemon Iesoun Christon arnoumenoi*: "and denying the only Sovereign, and our Lord Jesus Christ." This reading is supported by p72 and the leading manuscripts like Sinaiticus and B.

Metzger (Textual Commentary, 2nd Edition, p. 656) suggests that *theon* was added by the orthodox for Christological reasons "to avoid the ambiguity" as to whether *despoten* refers to Christ or God. Was it intentionally omitted for Christological reasons to avoid a direct affirmation of Jesus as God?

NIV: "and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

NASB: "and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

RSV/NRSV/ESV: "and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

The title "God" is not in the text and should be omitted and replaced with the term "Lord" or "Master." The proper translation seems to be, "*while denying the only Master and Lord of us, Jesus Christ.*"

The idea here is that the apostates will not have Jesus Christ as their Lord. The heretics seem to be advocating some type of omnism -- that

there are many gods and lords while insisting on a belief that there are no absolutes, no risen Christ, and no Trinity.

Denying the humanity (Gnosticism) or deity of Christ (Arianism) or even his visitation to earth would be included in this damnable heresy.

### **Remember the Fate of Apostates**

**5 (de) I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.**

The conjunction "but" (*de*) shows Jude taking a stand against the apostates. There is no doubt where he stands -- he stands opposed to these false teachers and their false doctrines with a rapier honed by fire, anticipating the clash of metals.

"Remembrance" (*hupomimnesko*) means "to review and call to mind" like a mirror that never fogs. Jude calls his readers to reflect on three examples of apostates in the Old Testament:

- The apostate Hebrews that came out of Egypt;
- The apostate angels;
- The apostate cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**A textual notice:** "how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt" -- a reference to the Passover and deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 10-14).

There is a textual variance here. Some translation use the term "Lord" or "kurios", while others use the name "Jesus" as the one delivering and judging.

If the proper translation is "Lord" (*kurios*), Jude implies that it was "Jesus" was the One who led Israel out of Egypt (v. 4).

But, there is textual uncertainty about the original text.

The best Manuscripts A, B, 33, 81, 322 and others require the presence of "Jesus" indicating that it was the Lord Jesus Christ that delivered the people out of Egypt. (See Bruce Metzger, "Textual Commentary", p. 657).

The context in Jude favors the ESV and Berean translations:

**Jude 5 ESV "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe."**

"having saved the people" refers to Israel being saved from the wrath of Pharaoh, slavery in Egypt, and drowning at the Red Sea by the "LORD" (YHWH) **Who is identified as "Jesus" in Jude.**

"afterward destroyed them that believed not" refers to the plague of death upon that unbelieving generation involving a myriad of apostate acts – a reference to those who died because of the golden calf and those Hebrews that rebelled and died in the wilderness (Exodus 32; Number 14, Numbers 16).

The three main sins of the unbelieving Hebrews were idolatry, complaining, and immorality (1 Corinthians 10).

**Remember the Fate of Apostate Angels v. 6**

**Remember Sodom and the Character of Apostates v. 7-16**

**Remember the Prophecies of Christ's Apostles v. 17-19**

**Remember your Duties as Faithful Men v. 20-23**

**Remember the Faithfulness of God v. 24-25**

**24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,**

Notice the use of the 3rd person. Jude now announces what God is able to do for his readers.

"Keep yourselves . . ." in verse 21 is now balanced with the Source of that power,

"Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling . . ." What the Spirit commands, He also provides; What the Summoner orders, He also empowers.

Having seriously denounced the somber fate of the apostates in the drumming sounds of a death march, Jude transitions to a break beat-calypto challenging believers to seize divine powers available to them.

"Now unto him that is able" - Can you feel the power, potential, and proficiency of of the Lord God who is able "to keep you from falling"?

"to keep" (*tereo*) involves thundering canons blasting promises of protection and preservation.

"to keep you from falling" would better be translated "to keep you unfallen" (Ellicott) -- "unfallen" morally and doctrinally.

"and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory" -- God is able to provide protection and power so one can stand blameless before the judgment-seat of Christ.

"faultless" (*amomos*) means "blameless" or without moral weakness. It is possible to stand in front of pure holiness without fear and trembling.

"with exceeding joy" -- arriving in His presence with extreme joy as opposed to stumbling across the finish line; that is, there is power available not only to enter heaven's gates, but to finish the course with extreme joy bubbling with confidence -- "O, taste and see that the Lord is good."

**25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.**

Though the word "Savior" is used of Christ most of the time, it can properly be applied to God since He is the author of salvation.

"be glory and majesty" -- all that is good, excellent, and noble belong to God. To speak of goodness is to speak about God, and to speak about God is to entertain what is good in life.

"dominion and power, both now and ever" -- Because God is good and righteous, glorious and majestic, sacrificial and giving, He has a right to have dominion over all things.

Oh, that all men might personally confess His Lordship and surrender to His authority now in this life.

## 30. Beware of Selective Faith

### Hebrews 10:39

◆ In Hebrews 11 the apostle informs us "that without faith, it is impossible to please Him;" that is, exercising faith during all seasons of life is the key to pleasing God – a garden blooming in the heart.

#### Looking at Faith

Faith is a compass on a moonless night – a sunrise in a tea cup. It doesn't erase the darkness, but it keeps you moving in the right direction when the skies are cloudy all day.

#### Looking at Selective Faith

One of the wretched things about the human heart is that it can believe God for some things and chose not believe Him for others; that is, it can grow weeds as weeds as well as flowers. It is like King Saul, who obeyed God's command to destroy the Amalekites but selectively spared the best livestock and their king

It is this selective, wavering, flickering faith that causes one to get lost in the darkness. It is like having a candle in only one room when the electricity goes off; that is, it is essential to believe the entire Bible and to light all the candles in the house when black storm comes your way.

The Word of God teaches us that "the just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4); that is, faithfulness is the compost that causes the garden to grow.

**Abraham** was justified by faith. According to Genesis 15:6, Abraham believed God and "His faith was counted to him for righteousness."

**Israel** was delivered from slavery in Egypt by faith:

In Exodus 4:31 : "the people believed" and God declared war on Egypt in order to redeem His people from slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus 14:31 : "they believed the Lord and His servant Moses" after they passed through this Red Sea.

Psalms 106:12 : "then believed they His word, they sang His praise."

This was good, but later the sacred text informs us that they would not believe God . . . and the results were bad – like a desert that forgot to rain.

When God ordered the people to go into the land of Canaan to wage war on the Canaanites, the people froze with fear, hardened their heart like rapidly cooled metal, and chose not to believe that God would be with them and that they could be victorious in war (Numbers 1:26).

### **Looking at the Result of Selective Faith**

Because of their unbelief, God disciplined the nation and prevented them from receiving their inheritance in Canaan.

It was this selective faith that was the good and bad of Israel-- the choosing of what to obey and not to obey like the pilgrim path is one great big smorgasbord with Italian pizza -- crispy crust, tangy tomato sauce, gooey cheese, and endless toppings.

Deuteronomy 1:32 : "In this ye did not believe the Lord."

Deuteronomy 9:23 : "ye rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and believed Him not, nor hearkened to His voice."

Because it is possible to believe some promises and not others, let us beware of a divided heart . . . a divided faith . . . a selective faith . . . a wavering faith that chooses what commands to obey or not to obey.

James 1: 6-8 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Paul informs us of a direct-result of a selective faith

Hebrews 10:39, "if any man draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him."

### **Looking at the Result of Nike-faith**

But, the opposite is also true. The one who believes God and obeys His commands is the one who pleases him – an echo of grace in God's mansion of glory – a pearl captured by one diving into the waters of obedience.

Psalm 73:1 Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!

Hebrews 11:6 . . . for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him"

## **31. Justification and the Faith of Abraham**

### **Genesis 15**

◆ Christians today live in a house of mirrors that distort reality because fictions are preferred to pure truth – because entrenched traditions,

myths, and superstitions guide the conscience like a compass in a room full of magnets.

In a world of fiction, it is important to have a reliable compass and this is never more true when it comes to salvation and the doctrine of justification. Lights in the lighthouse can prevent one's ship from crashing on the jagged reefs.

Justification is the pinnacle doctrine of Paul's gospel in the Book of Romans – a treasury of gospel truth of which he was not ashamed.

The gospel is **not** about the work of the Spirit in us, but about the work of Christ for us; not about regeneration, but justification. Thus, Reformers lit the flames of Sola Fide and Sola Christus which many enjoy today.

### **Definition of Justification**

Theologically, **justification means to be declared righteous by a court of law, and to be treated as such.** Furthermore, the believer needs to understand that just as *our sins were imputed to Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us* who believe.

***\*Justification, therefore, is the judicial act of God whereby He declares a man righteous and treats him as such.***

Biblically speaking, it is important to understand that the court's declaration of "justification" does not change the object to satisfy the demands of law, *but it does change how the object is regarded in the eyes of the law.* While regeneration creates a change in character and is an act of a that transforms character; justification changes one's status by an act of a Judge. The renewal of regeneration, which follows justification, must not be confounded with justification.

Luther reasoned:

A capuchin says: wear a gray coat and a hood, a rope round thy body, and sandals on thy feet. A cordelier says: put on a black hood; an ordinary papist says: do this or that work, hear mass, pray, fast, give alms, etc. But a true Christian says: I am justified and saved only by faith in Christ, without any works

or merits of my own; compare these together, and judge which is the true righteousness [306]. (Luther)

The Formula of Concord [1577] put it this way:

Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above, that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness [Article III, no. 9].

### **The Justification of Abraham**

In Genesis 15 Abraham was scared spittleless that the five marauding kings he defeated in his rescue of Lot would return and retaliate against his household. Wanting assurance of God's favor, he prayed. Here Abraham received an answer from the High Court of Heaven. God gave him a verdict. Abraham believed God and the Judge declared him judicially righteous in his sight and secure in his status. What a blessing! What a comfort! What revelation!

**Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**

The declaration was a comfort to Abraham, but it immediately raises the question: What if I blow it? What if I sin in the future? How will God treat me?

*Justification encompasses more than being declared righteous; it also involves being treated as such by the Court.*

**In Genesis 20**, we see how God treated Abraham when he deceived an eastern prince. When Abimelech, King of Gerar eyed Sarah and sought to procure her for his harem, Abraham instructed Sarah to say, “I am the sister of Abraham.” This half-truth strategy was designed to keep powerful kings from assassinating Abraham in order to take Sarah as a wife – a symphony carved in motion.

Governments often use intimidation and coercion to obtain what they want. Out of fear and weakness, Abraham lied (a half truth) to protect Sarah<sup>[1]</sup>; and Abimelech, out of ignorance, took Sarah into his harem. God did not condemn Abraham for his protection strategy - a man does not owe the truth to an abuser of truth. From the story we learn that Abraham deliberately, consciously misled the king in order to save his life. Abimelech believed Sarah and innocently took her into his harem. But . . .

- It was Abimelech who was judged, not Abraham.
- It was Abimelech who was rebuked, not Abraham.
- It was Abimelech who was in danger of capital punishment, not Abraham.
- It was Abimelech whose life was in danger, not Abraham.
- It was Abimelech’s household that needed healing, and not Abraham’s.
- It was Abimelech who needed prayer, not Abraham.
- It was Abraham who prayed for Abimelech’s healing.

From this Biblical story we learn that when God declares a man righteous, *he also treats him as such!! Selah!* And, this is the faith that the Spirit calls us to believe.

Knowing, understanding and believing in justification is the fire in the lighthouse that guides ships on the sea of religious ideas while drifting toward reefs and shoals.

<sup>[1]</sup> Abraham lied to Abimelech, but God did not condemn him for it. No one owes the truth to a government tyrant who abuses the truth.

[1] Ontology (from *onto-ὄντος* or “being; that which is,” present participle of the verb *εἶμι* “be” - logia: the philosophical study of the nature of being, of existence, of reality.

## 32. Justification and the Charismatic Movement

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

◆ The Corinthians were a flock of birds flying in a circle. In order to give them a nest to rest in, Paul penned his simplified gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-12.

This section exposes the fake faith of the Charismatic Movement using true faith centered on death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

When Napoleon launched his conquest of Europe, William Pitt told the British Parliament, "Roll up the map of Europe. It will not be wanted for ten years."

The Charismatic phenomenon is a movement without a map or compass to keep it on the straight and narrow path. These are a people following their own belly button in a room full of mirrors.

The Charismatic revolution is like a blender on maximum speed without a lid on – slashing the truth of the gospel and making a mess of their lives.

Like a prairie fire, the Charismatic Movement is a roaring inferno in the United States. Blurring distinctions between what is Catholic and what is Protestant, they set fire to churches, and then butter survivors in the false hope of wretched subjectivism.

The Charismatic Movement which embraces "holy-roller Pentecostalism," neo-Pentecostalism, and revivalism, is sweeping the world in a delusive frenzy of subjective, Armenian, anti-gospel religious sentiment.

People searching for a "deeper religious experience" are attracted to the delusionary optimism of this apostate dynamism like foxes are attracted to a dead rabbit above a copper trap.

### **Subjectivism and the Gospel**

The original sin of *libido dominandi* sucked man into the vortex of subjectivism -- a movement with a spinning compass-needle in a magnetic storm.

Note how many times the pronoun "I" was used by Adam in one sentence:

**Genesis 3:10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.**

What a contrast between God and man! God came to the garden to seek man only to find a man preoccupied with himself and his fears. Captured in a metaphysical snare of self-centered subjectivism, Adam could not escape the fetters that bound him to his egotism: "I yi, yi, yi, yi."

All religions are subjective in nature except Christianity which believes in the objective Christ.

Whether we look at Catholicism, Buddhism or Hinduism, all can trace their origin to the religion of Cain. Though the language is different, all sink into the mire of subjectivism. Take Hinduism for example:

"In Hinduism, you can know God through various paths, such as through meditation and internal worship to realize the divine within, practice of devotion (bhakti) to cultivate a relationship with the divine" (Google AI).

### **God's Cure for Subjectivism**

Naked and afraid, God slew two animals to clothe the first couple -- a marvelous remedy typifying ultimate deliverance through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and His gift of righteousness to those who believe.

**Consider Paul's remedy for Corinthian subjectivism:**

**Corinthians 15:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:**

This verse is stated so simply, we tend to overlook its context.

This truth of the gospel which takes our eyes off self was delivered to the Corinthians slopping around in a cesspool of wretched subjectivism.

After Paul left, they dropped a hornet's nest in the sanctuary creating a mess of bickering, rivalries, carnality, indulgent in incestual acts, permissiveness, divorce, arrogant possession of knowledge, stinginess, and idolaters concerned only about eating and drinking. This subjective community was oblivious to the headship of Christ and His law-order for the home. Unable to love, they pursued spiritual gifts, competed for prominence in the church, prayed in foreign languages in order to impress others, argued about meat and vegetables, and chained themselves with iron-fetters to feed on self-interests.

In order to correct the Corinthians who were overly concerned about spiritual gifts and their religious experiences which they held as proof of a higher spiritual life, Paul left them with his crowning argument -- the wonder and splendor of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15).

The Christian religion is unique in that it is a historical truth that proclaims salvation through the work of Another. It is **not** centered on the worshiper's religious, ecstatic experiences. When Peter was filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), he did not stand up and talk about his new power, inner peace, his gifts, or flurry of feelings. He spoke about the Christ and his death, burial, resurrection, and session at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2).

Talk to Charismatic people and they will mention the pronouns “I,” “me,” and “my” a hundred times before they ask a question about you. They seem to live in a house of mirrors -- always looking at themselves and never seeing the outside world.

These people passionately think they are the center of the universe -- acting like crowing roosters who think the Sun comes up because they cock a doodle do in their prayer pen.

Moreover, they are a garden with no fences — open to every breeze, every bloom, and every whisper of sensation.

### **A Historical, Theological Perspective**

History has shown us that the human tendency is to forget the objective gospel and to drift back into wretched subjectivism; to neglect justification, and to emphasize sanctification; to ignore redemption, and to center on regeneration; to slight Christ's work on the cross for us, and to spotlight the Holy Spirit's work in us; to ignore Christ's experience outside of us, and to focus on our feelings inside of us; to turn from Luther and to return to Rome.

### **The Victory of Another**

Consider the importance of federal headship. In Romans 5, Paul informs us we DO NOT BECOME sinners because of something we do or experience. We became sinners because of something that happened outside of us near a tree in the experience of Adam.

**Romans 5: 18-19 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.**

Likewise, saved men do not become righteous by something they do or something within their own experience. They become righteous by the vicarious work of Another, in His experience on a tree, outside of them! Selah!

His victory is our victory. We share in the benefits of His work Sola Fide.

### **Imputation (Romans 4-5)**

God does not redeem us by producing a change within us. He redeems us by imputing our sins to Christ and by imputing His righteousness to us. When we were dead in Adam, God gave us life in a New Adam. By virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection, our Savior ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the father as OUR REPRESENTATIVE.

We can raise our hands in victory and say with Luther (1519):

"Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: 'Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying; mine as much if I had lived, done, spoken, and suffered, and died as He did' (Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957, vol. XXXI, p. 297).

We say this with confidence because ". . . the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

The Charismatic will no doubt ask, "What about the Holy Spirit?"

Charismatics confuse the gospel by putting the work of the Spirit in the center of the gospel instead of seeing Christ crucified as the hub in the middle of the wheel; like putting the cart before the horse; like reading a map in a room full of mirrors; like aiming after shooting an arrow; like eating dessert before one eats his vegetables.

**John 16:13-14 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.**

The Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself. A mature Christian does not say, "I am a spirit-filled believer. Let me tell you about my religious

experiences . . . my feelings . . . my gifts . . . and how I was baptized by the Spirit when I felt the thrill down to the balls of my feet."

The most Spirit-filled man on the Day of Pentecost said,

**"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22).**

"He shall not speak of Himself." The great affirmation of the apostles was not their spiritual feelings, but God's act of redemption in Christ.

### **Objective Faith**

The Charismatic Movement appears to be a costume party of subjectivism where everyone wears what feels right, but no one knows who's telling the truth.

The worst form of subjectivism is religious subjectivism because it takes a man in . . . and in . . . and in to self. Eastern religions whether Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism (psychology), or psychological humanism all take a person on inward journey into the abyss of self.

The ugly fruit of eastern subjectivism was planted in America through psychology. Any archaeological journey into people's historical experiences by psycho-therapists is a journey into the midnight of wretched subjectivism. The Spirit commands attentive Christians to vigorously avoid the dark clouds of popular philosophical movements (Colossian 2:8).

The great call of the gospel is *Sola Fide* -- to believe and rest in the Victory of Another. Biblical faith is not about feelings, euphoria, ecstasy, spiritual gifts, or demonstrations of brick-breaking power. Men are saved when the eye of the soul is upon the admirable beauty and awesome power of Another. Faith is objective for it glories in the doing and dying of Christ - in His victory at Calvary outside of our own experience. Faith rests in the finished work of Christ at Calvary. There is no rest for the sensitive soul in the unfinished, incomplete work of the Spirit on the human heart.

But, nike-faith, though objective, is not dead. It is alive and active. As Paul said to the Galatians, faith works by love (5:6). But, this love is also objective because love "seeketh not her own" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Self is NOT the center of concern for a Spirit-filled believer. The Spirit-filled Christian is not one who sees himself as flame in a room full of shadows, but one who is self-sacrificing and God-seeking.

**Isaiah 58: 6-7 "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"**

God's love is not an emotion. It is goodness in action – “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6) and edifying charity (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Charismatic love is like a wind that whispers “forever” but never stays – fleeting, seductive, and gone before it takes root; like the calm that flees when the storm arrives.

The Charismatic movements confounds *eros* with *agape* where adherents become infatuated with sensual, exciting experiences which they call "love" but in no way is it associated with nike-love. Love produced by the Spirit leads to a death of self - a love that transcends one's own personal feelings; a love that becomes an anchor in a hurricane (Colossians 3:1ff).

By way of illustration, see the beautiful art work of Italian Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini in his masterpiece, St. Teresa of Avila -- a physical representation of the Roman Catholic Theology which emphasizes the heart as being the locus of salvation.

The Spirit-filled believer does not listen to uncertain voices from within or seek signs from without! He does not use his belly-button as a compass, nor does he live in a hall of mirrors that only reflects images of self.

“I used to live in a room full of mirrors

All I could see was me

Then I take my spirit and I smash my mirrors

And now the whole world is here for me to see" (Jim Hendrix).

He does not confound inner impulses with the sure Word of God. He obeys Scripture seeking to conform his inner life with the absolute, objective standard of right and wrong (law).

Karl Barth of Swiss descent said it well. When asked what was the most important theological principle he had learned in his life time, Barth replied,

"Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

The great message of the gospel is that God "so loved the world that he sent His Son" to "save his people from their sins."

The sinner can find a way out of wretched subjectivism, a maze surrounded by mirrors, by focusing on the victory of Another outside his own experience. Upon believing the Savior and being justified, our Lord gives His Spirit to men to deliver them from the swamp of subjectivism.

## 33. What is the "Faith of Christ"?

### Romans 3:22

◆ This e-book is about nuke-faith – the exercise of believing God and the object of faith – the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is, nuke-faith shifts through ideas to determine what to believe; that is what is "the Christian-faith." It is like panning for gold in a sandy creek full of yellow pyrite.

Likewise, the foundation of the gospel is not about my faith, but the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

What good is faith without the faithfulness of Christ and His carefulness to obey God's law and to do His will? It is like building a house without a foundation; like trying to ride a skate board without wheels; like eating salt soup without the stew; like lighting candles in a cathedral and forgetting why you are there.

The rest of this chapter is on the scholarly side and is written for skilled pastors, theologians, and translators.

**Romans 3:22. "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ [διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] unto all and upon all them that believe [τοὺς πιστεύοντας]: for there is no difference." What does the phrase "faith of Jesus Christ" mean? (Greek fonts man not be available).**

### **The contextual argument**

Paul's treatise on the Gospel in his letter to the Romans is explained in legal terms. It is a courtroom drama with Paul acting as both a prosecutor of mankind and a defense attorney for believers. Prior to this verse, Paul, plays the part of a prosecutor in the case God v. Mankind [Romans 1-3], He pronounced all men guilty of breaking God's law [3:10-20]. But, in verse 21, Paul crossed to the otherside of the bar to put on the wig of an English barrister in order to argue the case for the justification of the believer.

Paul's forensic argument is as follows: To be justified in God's Court, a man must possess real, tangible righteousness [Romans 2:1-13].

**First**, the bad news: all men are guilty of breaking God's law so that *there is none righteous, no not one* [3:10ff].

**Second**, the good news: There is a righteousness that comes from God that enables flawed men to possess what the Court requires. But, **what is this righteousness, and where does it come from?**

### **The semantic argument**

Semantically, the phrase, "faith of Jesus Christ," is usually interpreted as "faith in Jesus" – the Protestant translator's default position. But, if this is so, why did Paul say "unto all that believe?" Why a reference to two

responses of “faith” in the same verse (3:22). Could it be that the phrase “faith in Jesus” is a poor translation and should be translated “faithfulness of Jesus” instead of the “faith in Jesus?”

### **The theological argument**

Theologically, it is my contention that Paul is saying that sinners are declared “guilty” in His Court; that in order to stand before a holy God, a man needs real righteousness — substantive righteousness, not synthetic righteousness; that in the gospel, substantive righteousness is available to the believer, even the righteousness of Christ; that faith is not a virtue required by God, nor is faith a substitute for substantive righteousness; that nike-faith is the confidence that Christ lived a righteous life on behalf of His elect and that God gives the believer Christ’s righteousness when he trusts Him.

For example there is a big difference being paid a hundred dollars in gold bullion and being paid a hundred dollars in FRNs. When God justifies a man he gives him substance-- the silver and gold of Christ’s righteousness, not synthetic paper debt notes.

### **The linguistic argument**

Linguistically, the phrase “faith of Christ” should be translated “faithfulness of Christ” for the following reasons:

**First**, the phrase “faith of Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) is either a subjective genitive (indicating origin or source), not an objective genitive. A genitive defines and limits the substantive. It asks the question, “What kind” of righteousness?” The subjective genitive is very personal. In this case the righteousness offered to believing men is the righteousness of Christ.

The term “faith” (πίστεως) is a feminine noun which can also be an ablative of agency. Genitives and ablatives employ the same case form (ως φεμέ οὔ μαθ )

While faith (πίστεως) can be translated “faith,” it can also be translated “faithfulness.” Since “Jesus Christ” (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) is in the genitive /

ablative form, this “faith” or “faithfulness” must be coming from Christ. The righteousness offered has a source. It is in Jesus, the obedient Son. Furthermore, because this righteousness comes from Christ it behaves like an ablative indicating something separated from him and given to believers.

Obviously, Paul is not talking about Christ’s faith, but his acts, deeds, and works of “faithfulness.” Paul is not calling for an exercise of faith from the believer at this point in his argument as much as he is informing us that the “righteousness from God” that is available to the believer by faith is none other than the “faithfulness of Christ.”

**Second**, Romans 1:17 states: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: “As it is written, the just shall live by faith.” The phrase “faith to faith” [ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστι] contains two prepositions and is difficult to translate.

The first preposition [ἐκ πίστεως] appears to be an ablative of source, or that which is produced by a person. Is this “faith” produced by us or does it refer to “faithfulness” produced by Christ? Surely, our faith is based on the obedience of Christ to God’s law; i.e., the “faithfulness of Christ.”

The second prepositional phrase [εἰς πίστι] is either an accusative of purpose or accusative of result.

This phrase could be saying that “our faith produces faithfulness,” or it could be saying that Christ’s faithfulness is the foundation of our faith, or God’s righteousness comes from Christ’s faithfulness to produce man’s faith.

**Third**, Romans 3:3 says, “For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” The phrase “faith of God” [τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ] indicates that the “faith” comes from God. “From God” is a genitive indicating the source. Obviously, this does not refer to “faith” being produced by God but the “faithfulness of God.” That is, man’s unbelief does not nullify God’s faithfulness.

Paul uses the term “ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ” in Romans 3:26: “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of

him which believeth in Jesus (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ, faith of Jesus)."<sup>9</sup> Again, is Paul calling for man to exercise faith in Christ or is he referring to the faithfulness of Christ? This seems to be saying that God justifies the one who stands on the fidelity of our Lord.

**Fourth**, Romans 4:16 discusses the "faith of Abraham" [τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ]. Does this refer to Abraham's response of faith to God or does it refer to faithfulness resulting from his faith? Here it appears to refer to Abraham's response of faith and not his faithfulness. Because Abraham trusted God's faithfulness, God was faithful to justify him.

**Fifth**, the phrase "ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ" is used twice in Galatians 2:16: "know that a man is not justified by (his own) observing the law, but by faith (faithfulness) in Jesus Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ)" who was faithful to obey God's law.

The phrase "faith in (ek) Christ" is another genitive - ablative and can be rendered "faithfulness of Christ." So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, faith of Christ) and not by (our) observing the law, because by (our) observing the law no one will be justified." It appears best to render "ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ" here as the "faithfulness of Christ." Paul taught we are not saved by our personal observance of the law. We are saved because of Christ's personal observance of the law. We live because Christ was careful to do all that God requires so the believing man can be justified in His sight.

**Sixth**, Galatians 2:20 also uses the phrase "faith of (ek) Christ" (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ). "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of (ek) the Son of God (ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ), who loved me, and gave himself for me."

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<sup>9</sup>

[1] See John 17:15 on the preposition "ek:"I do not ask you to take them out of the world (ek – indicating separation) but that you keep them away (ek – indicating separation) from the evil one.

The title "Son of God" is in the genitive indicating that "the faith" comes from Christ (a subjective genitive or ablative, not an objective genitive). Paul is not saying that "I" continue to live my Christian life by faith, but that I live before God because the Lord obeyed the law perfectly on my behalf.

**Seventh**, Philippians 3:9 says,

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ (διὰ πίστεως Χριστου) the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Is Paul saying, "I want to stand before God being one who is justified by my faith" or, is Paul saying, "I want to stand before God, not having my own righteousness, but having the faithfulness of Christ credited to my account which comes by faith"? It appears this is a genitive or ablative of source modifying "righteousness," and therefor referring to the faithfulness of Christ.

### **The legal argument**

The word "justification" is a forensic term having to do with the courts. In God's Court, only a man who keeps the law can be justified (Romans 2:13). Christ was "born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). He obeyed the law (Philippians 2:9-12), and He was the end of the law (Romans 10:4). Consequently, He was "justified" (declared righteous) by the Spirit when He was raised from the dead (1 Timothy 3:15, 16).

Even in God's Court, faith is not a substitute for righteousness. A man must possess real, substantial righteousness if he is to stand before an all-holy God. The good news of the gospel is that the substantial righteousness of Christ is given to the one who believes.

Even in God's Court, faith is not a substitute for righteousness. A man must possess real, substantial righteousness if he is to stand before an all-holy God. The good news of the gospel is that the righteousness of Christ is given to the one who believes.

## An argument from substitution

When we say, “Christ died for our sins,” we are saying He became our substitute. If Christ took our sins, then we must take His righteousness. If sin was imputed to him, then his “faithfulness” is imputed to us. In other words, we are saved by works—HIS WORKS! We are saved, not only by his death, but also by His life of obedience to the law.

In Summary, while it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between “faith” and “faithfulness,” it is at times important to do so. It would be incorrect to always interpret *pistis* [faith] as objective—something being demanded of man. Sometimes, it is subjective and can refer to that which is produced by an agent—in this case something produced by Christ; i.e., His faithfulness.

It is important to understand the phrase “faith of Christ” [πίστεως Χριστου] as the “faithfulness of Christ.” Without His faithfulness to the law we build our house upon sand.

I once asked a Catholic neighbor [Mary] if she had any hope of eternal life. She said she did. So, I asked, “Mary, why do you think you will go to heaven?” Pounding on her heart, she said, “I have faith!” For 10 minutes she discussed her great faith and how much she believed in God. Mary did not believe her works could save her. Her hope rested in her faith. However, not once did she mention Christ, His life, His death, His atonement, His redemptive accomplishments or His resurrection. It was all about faith in her heart . . . and because she had subjective faith, God was somehow obligated to take her to heaven.

A few days later, it dawned on me what she was really saying. To her, “faith” was a virtue and she had this virtue that God honored dwelling in her heart. She expected to enter heaven because she had what God required, “faith.” But, I asked myself, “Where was Christ in her testimony?” And, if faith is all that is required to go to heaven, why did Christ have to live and die?

Peter Kreef, a Catholic apologist, has this to say:

But many Catholics to this day have not learned the Catholic and biblical doctrine [of justification]. They think we are saved by good intentions or being nice or sincere or trying a little harder or doing a sufficient number of good deeds. Over the past twenty-five years I have asked hundreds of Catholic college students the question: If you should die tonight and God asks you why he should let you into heaven, what would you answer? The vast majority of them simply do not know the right answer to this, the most important of all questions, the very essence of Christianity. They usually do not even mention Jesus! [Catholic Educator's Resource Center, Kreeft, 1988]

The answer lies in our ability to understand the phrase "faith of Christ" [πίστεως Χριστοῦ].

Our personal faith is **not** the basis of our salvation. The faithfulness of Christ is the basis of our salvation. What men need in order to be saved is substantive righteousness, not virtuous faith. The good news of the Bible is that this righteousness is given to those who believe as a free gift. This "righteousness" is none other than the faithfulness of Christ [πίστεως Χριστοῦ]. As a Judahite, Jesus was born under the law. His obedience was tested and the Spirit declared,

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" [Philippians 2:8].

Nike-faith understands that He obeyed the law perfectly; therefore, we can be justified perfectly. We are saved by works—**not** ours, but His. We are saved by obedience—His obedience, and when we believe, His "faithfulness," His "works," and His "obedience" is credited to us (believers) as a gift of God [Romans 5:15ff; Ephesians 2:8-9].

(Source: Stockton, "Five Pillars of the Gospel", unpublished seminary lecture notes for New Testament Theology)

# 34. Walking in the Light

## 1 John 1:7-2:2

### Claiming the Power of the Blood by Faith

◆ Have a troubled conscience? This verse is for you.

*7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,*

This wonderful text has three important clauses.

**First, the apodosis:** The contingency word "if" introduces a 3rd class conditional clause with the subjunctive" -- maybe you do, but maybe you don't, but if you do, you will walk in the light.

**Second, the protasis:** *"we have fellowship one with another",*

John did not say, "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God;" but, "fellowship one with another."

Walking with God's people is primary evidence one is walking in the light. Instead of calling the pretenders "liars," John flips the coin on its edge to expose false claims; that is, those claiming to walk with God must also walk happily with the flawed, fractured people of God. God's heart is with His people, and if professing Christians do not love God's people, they don't know God. If one claiming to know the Shepherd does not hang around the sheep, he is probably a wolf in sheep's clothing lip syncing with the baaing herd.

**Third, another protasis:** *"and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

The verb "cleanseth" (*katarizo*) introduces the subject of sanctification, and not justification.

We get the word "catharsis" from this Greek stem. "Catharsis" is "a **metaphor used by Aristotle in the Poetics to describe the effects of true tragedy on the spectator.** The use is derived from the

medical [term](#) *katharsis* (Greek: "purgation" or "purification"). Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse "terror and pity" and thereby effect the *catharsis* of these emotions" (Britannica).

The spirit uses the term "catharsis" to define the healing of lepers in Matthew 11:5.

The concern in 1 John is not being saved from the penalty of sin, but the power of sin and its haunting influence on the conscience. He is not discussing being "redeemed" by blood, but being "cleansed" and "healed" by blood. Even the best of saints sin and "feel" the ring, pop, and thump of guilt pounding away like kettledrums in the conscience. This text ministers to the conscience informing believing men that nike-faith in the blood cleanses and qualifies them for moment by moment fellowship with the Father and the Son. Faith in the blood, therefore, silences the percussions of a troubled conscience (Hebrews 10:17).

*Rest, soul, rest in the sufficiency and efficiency of the blood of Christ which is working now, this moment, to cleanse your conscience.*

- Believing men are propitiated through His blood - Romans 3:25
- Believing men are justified by His blood - Romans 5:9
- Believing men are redeemed by His blood - Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 5:9
- Believing men are made near to God and His promises by His blood - Ephesians 2:13
- Believing men secure peace with God through His blood - Colossians 1:20
- Believing men obtain a clean conscience through His blood - Hebrews 9:12-14
- Believing men attain boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus - Hebrews 10:19
- Believing men are sanctified by His blood - Hebrews 13:12, 1 Peter 1:2
- Believing men are repaired and equipped to serve God by His blood - Hebrews 13:20-21
- Believing men are cleansed by His blood - 1 John 1:7
- Believing men are washed from their sins by the Blood of Christ - Revelation 1:5

- Believing men are made white in the blood of the Lamb - Revelation 7:14
- Believing men gain victory over Satan, the accuser of the brethren, by His blood - Revelation 12:11

In 1 John 1:7, the apostle is not occupied with the cross, but with the throne; not with the blood that purchases sinners, but the life-giving blood of Christ which purifies and sanctifies the saint. Blood in this text has "the cleansing power of life" similar to Paul's statement in Romans 8:2 'the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ makes me free from the law of sin and death.'

We are not only saved by his death from the penalty of sin, we are saved by his life from the power of sin (Romans 5:10); by the cross, and by the throne; by His sacrifice and by His Priesthood.

When Zachariah gained insight into the Christ-child, he saw the hope that "we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear" (Luke 1:74). How can we serve Him without fear? The answer is in 1 John 1:7 and Hebrews 13:20-21).

In Hebrews we read, "*through the blood* of the everlasting covenant, *make you perfect (katartizo) in every good work* to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight" (13:20-21).

The word "*perfect*" (*katartizo - tisai*) (aorist optative - a wish) means "*to equip thoroughly*" and "*to repair.*" It is translated "*perfectly joined together*" in 1 Corinthians 1:10; "*fully furnished*" or "*equipped*" in 2 Timothy 3:17; "*to mend*" *nets* in Matthew 4:21; "*to restore*" in Galatians 6:1; and "*to frame*" in Hebrews 11:3. In using the optative the apostle is expressing a wish – the possibility that a believer's faith-consideration of the blood will fully equip him to serve God.

Christ not only saves us through the power of His death unto justification; He saves us through the power of His risen life unto sanctification. The One saving us through His death from the penalty of sin is the One now saving us through His life as the present-risen Christ from the power of sin. He saves men from the condemnation of sin through faith in His death, and saves men from the domination of sin

through faith in His highly exalted life at the right hand of the Father (Colossians 3:2).

A growing cleansing from the dominion and the power of sin is granted to us, if the life of Jesus Christ is breathing in our lives as we depend on His heart-beat operating within us by His Spirit.

The sacrifice on the Cross is the basis of everything, but that sacrifice does not exhaust what Christ does for us. He died for our sins, and lives for our sanctifying. He died for us, He lives in us. Because He died, we are forgiven; because He lives, we are made pure (MacClaren).

That only way we can become free from the tyranny that dominates us, is having the life of Christ as the animating principle of our lives. When we depend on His life as the animating principle of our lives, the spirit of Jesus emancipates us from the power of sin and death (MacClaren).

The blood of Christ at the cross redeems us from the penalty of sin unto justification (being declared righteous), but the quickening blood of Christ in His intercessory work at the right hand of God cleanses us from the power of sin unto sanctification (being made righteous).

The verb "cleanseth" is a present active indicative meaning His blood cleanses and keeps on purifying the believer. Believing men are not only redeemed by His blood, but cleansed day by day, moment by moment by His blood in order that men might be sanctified and qualified to walk in the light. Like silver is refined by heat, the heart is refined by continual reliance on the life of Christ as the animating power of one's life.

If the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from ALL sin, what does that leave for baptism . . . or prayer . . . or penance . . . or saying the Rosary to cleanse? Ans: zero, zilch, nada, zipppo.

### **Claiming the Power of Confession**

**8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

John was an apostle of love, but he was also a "son of thunder" totally intolerant of "goodie-two-shoes" type Christianity where people claim to

have achieved a state of perfection. His intense moral sincerity and his love for Jesus made him hate evil and vigorously spiritual pride.

That men are sinners is a fact regarding our humanity. To deny the presence of sin in the flesh (the unregenerated part of man) is to deceive ourselves and to build life on a fiction and not truth. That men are born good is denied in the gospel (Romans 3:10-12). Failure to see the problem makes it impossible to see the remedy.

Even after we are both justified and regenerated, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. Those in the kingdom of God have experienced the blessings of salvation in a first fruits way, but not the full harvest. Men are regenerated in soul, but still possess an unregenerated body. Christ saves men from the penalty of sin and the power of sin, but not the presence of sin – that blessed state awaits the *Parousia*.

The wretchedness of deception is the deceived does not know that he is deceived. Those around him know he is a deeply flawed, but the deceived can't see it because they are like marionettes controlled by puppeteers on a string.

**9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Truth be known, many Christians are tied up in knots over their failures which prevents them from enjoying the Lord and His accomplishments for them at the cross and the throne. Thus, 1 John 1:9 is the remedy for the misery that many feel.

The word "confess" (*homologeō*) means to agree with -- part of the 3rd class conditional clause involving a subjunctive – a call to honesty.

The word "just" in this context means "faithful to His promises;" that is, God is a promise-keeper.

"Walking in the light" involves naming and confessing one's sins as the Spirit identifies them to him. Formal admission of sins to God is evidence the believer is walking in the light with God. Silence, denial, and concealment belong to the darkness.

**Know** that confession by itself does not sanitize the soul. There is no forgiveness apart from the doing and dying of Christ. Confession is the catalyst that enables the blood to be applied to our sins so we can maintain our walk with the Father and the Son moment by moment. Light cleanses because the Truth reaches the man.

**Know** that as light dispels darkness, confession exposes sin so that light of Christ's accomplishments can heal the man. Mothers used to say, "Play in the sunshine" because of the therapeutic nature of sunlight. As sunlight disinfects and heals wounds, walking in the light with an honest and open heart heals the sinner; that is, confession enables the man to come into the sunlight where the blood of Christ can be applied to the soul (1:7).

**Know** that confession to a priest does not cleanse the soul. The "blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin." Confession of sins to God (and forsaking them) enables the Spirit to apply the cleansing power of the blood to our soul (Proverbs 28:13).

**Know** that God is faithful to purify the believer because of the doing and dying of Christ.

**Know** that confession connects the Christian with the cure (blood) to effectively maintain the man in his walk "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Because Christ is the believer's Representative at the throne of God, he can afford to admit guilt before God. Walking in the light means the man can be humble and acknowledge the worst about himself knowing that he will not be rejected. The one honestly confessing known sins in their full extent has the full assurance of free and full forgiveness necessary to walk in the light "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

**Know** that those walking in the light are given a promise. Confession, as opposed to suppression, enables the believer to claim God's forgiveness and enjoy the cleansing of the conscience from ALL unrighteousness. This confidence is not based on one's "victory" over sin or the strength of one's resistance to sin, but upon God's character: i.e. when we come into the light and confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us

because His Son shed his blood as a payment for our sins. Being so cleansed equips us to pray and serve Him.

1 John 2:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Know that confession of sin is more like a "foot washing" than a total bath (See John 13) -- a necessary process to wash away the defilement that comes from being on this earth.

Know that confession must be accompanied by *nike-faith* to feel the effects of forgiveness. Faith has to be aggressive after the conscience has knowledge of failure. For this reason the psalmist (Psalm 32) exhorts confessors to triple down on laying hold of the benefits of confession by **denying** one's feelings and **believing** the promises until one's feelings match the truth of God's promises.

**Know** that joy over forgiveness is evidence of *nike-faith*. These acts of obedience make the heart glad. Believe it, then achieve it.

Psalm 32:11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The verb "sinned" is part of a 3rd class conditional clause. It is a perfect, active indicative meaning that one has sinned in the past and continues to be a sinner in the present. The adverb "no" negates the verb; i.e., these pretenders deny they have sinned in the past, are still sinners still, and that their sins are really sins.

Again, John reveals his intolerance of those with a "holier than thou" attitude. Those claiming perfection or a superior spirituality make Him a liar, and are disobedient to His Word!

### **Claiming the Power of His Intercessor Work**

#### **John's Intolerance of careless, reckless living**

John's words are so simple that a child can understand them. He does not argue or reason, he declares the truth in the most understandable way in order to open the windows of the mind.

**2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.**

John's purpose in writing is clear! He writes so believers will "man-up" and not sin! He is totally intolerant of casual, haphazard, careless, reckless living and the tolerance of those that support an irresponsible, permissive, indulgent lifestyle.

**And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:**

An advocate is a representative, interpleader, legal-counselor, or defender; that is, one who pleads the cause of another in a court of law.

The believer has two advocates (*parakletos*): (1) the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Christian's Advocate in Heaven; and (2) the Holy Spirit who is his Advocate / Comforter / Helper on earth (John 14:16 ).

This Advocate is said to be "righteous;" that is, John wants believers to know their standing in this Court is based completely on the merits of Another -- a Christian truth that ought to produce peace in the heart and praise on the lips -- sunlight breaking through a London fog.

John does not want his flock to sin, but if any do sin, he doesn't want them to despair or self-flagellate themselves as if one has to wear a crown of thorns on his own head. He reminds the people that **Jesus is their competent, effective Advocate before the Father . . .** and that He is the "propitiation" for their sins.

**Claiming the Power of His propitiatory work on the Cross**

**2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.**

The term "propitiation" comes from the Greek term "*hilismos*" which is the root word for "propitiation" or "mercy seat" resting above the ark. As the cherubim looked down on the ark they saw the law (two stone tablets) -- a

giant metaphor instructing students that God is obligated to punish sin. In OT times, the priest put blood on the "mercy seat" cover -- another Herculean metaphor instructing students that the debt of sin has been fully discharged by the doing and dying of Another.

The New Testament points us to the cross and to the fact the blood of Jesus paid the debt for sin; that He is God's Mercy Seat; that the Judge accepts His blood as currency to settle the debt of sin. Therefore, He is our propitiation, mercy seat, and *hilasterion*. Since the Creator-Judge is satisfied with this transaction, then the sinner's soul can be at rest. The debt is paid! Hallelujah! Rest, Soul, Rest like you are wrapped in a cocoon of love!

### **John's Evidence that One is in the Faith**

Over the next few chapters, John lists the marks of a true Christian in contrast to the Gnostics and fake Jews who claimed to know God but in their works denied Him. The marks, like obedience to God's Commandments, is the evidence that one truly walks in the Light. We have the right, even the duty, to judge whether one is truly in the faith.

#### **Notice a few marks of a true Christian in the Book of 1 John:**

True believers keep the Ten Commandment and all relevant case law in His Word - 2:3, 3:24

- True believers love the brethren - 2:11, 3:14; 4:8, 20
  - True believers do not love the world - 2:15ff; 4:4-5; 5:4
  - True believers confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God - 2:22; 4:2, 15; 5:1, 13
  - True believers have the Holy Spirit - 2:20, 27; 4:13
  - True believers seek to do what is right - 2:29-3:10
  - True believers make a break from sin - 2:9 (i.e. do not continually keep on sinning)
  - True believers practice charity (1 John 4),
- and, more evidence.

# 35. The Perfected Conscience

## Hebrews 10

◆ Q: How can a sensitive believer conscious of his sins find relief from the squawking accusations about his transgressions bellowing from his conscience – transgressions that separate him from fellowship with the Father?

The answer is in Hebrews ten and the exercise of nike-faith in the cleansing power of the cross.

Hebrews nine announces eternal redemption and remission of sins due to the shed blood of the Savior; and, chapter ten announces the perfect effect of faith in the blood has upon the believer's conscience. Thus, a perfect conscience is based on claiming the effects of a perfect sacrifice.

Chapter eleven informs us of the importance of combining faith with the blood in order to enjoy eternal redemption.

**Hebrews 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.**

This passage addresses the first century Jewish mindset due to their sacrificial customs.

"The law" refers to the sections of the Torah that establish and fortify the Levitical System.

A "shadow" is an incomplete reflection of a thing. In this case, Levitical law shadowed Christ and His righteousness. The Savior is not the shadow; He is the substance of OT offerings.

Like shadows cannot be heard, touched, tasted or smelled, the Torah and the sacrifices offered could not silence the blaring sirens coming from a guilty conscience. Thus, these shadows could not quiet the conscience.

The Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross not only sprinkled the golden altar in the heavenly sanctuary to quiet the wrath of God, but touched the guilty conscience with sin-cleansing, stain-removing power.

The law and sacrifices were silhouettes of the cross which could **not** remove the dark stains of sin corrupting the heart; but, Christ and His work at the cross "perfects" the cleansing of the conscience; that is, the cross cleanses, purifies, sharpens, hones, and betters the conscience. The precious blood of Christ scrubs a man clean from all the grub and grime caused by eating fruit at the Poisonous Tree.

The word "conscience" means "with knowledge" and refers to that part of man's soul which is sensitive to right and wrong. It is that part of the soul which senses danger.

The conscience acts like a fire alarm notifying the man that he is in eternal jeopardy. When a man sins the buzzer goes off and sometimes stays on keeping the sensitive soul awake and agitated. The shadows have no power to silence the alarm, but the doing and dying of Christ bring rest to the soul when believed. One only needs to investigate Calvary and claim its benefits by faith.

The word "perfect" describes the purifying effect of the blood upon on the conscience when perceived by faith – His blood cleanses us from ALL sin (1 John 1:7).

### **The weakness of the Levitical System**

**2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.**

(a) the offering of goats and lambs could **not** remove the knowledge of sin from the Jewish conscience. Because Hebrews were battered by guilt, they had no sense of real pardon. Annual ceremonies were a testimony to the imperfections of the Levitical system to maintain a relationship with a holy God. If the temple offerings, bulls and goats, could remove sin from the worshippers' consciences, they would not have been offered year after year.

### **3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.**

Instead of relieving the roaring of a guilty conscience, these sacrifices only caused the priests and the people to experience hyperthymesia – the ability to remember sins with unfailing accuracy – This ritual was like flogging yourself with a beat stick.

### **4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.**

(b) Not only were the sacrifices ineffective at cleansing the conscience, it was impossible for these Levitical offerings to purify the sinner. At best, the sacrifices shadowed the reality of the cross.

### **5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:**

"Wherefore" (result or reason) – on account of the powerlessness of these offerings, God sent His Son bodily to do what Levitical sacrifices could not do -- to save and purify the sinner from sin.

"Sacrifice and offerings" represent two divisions of offerings -- the former of necessity, and the latter as an act of worship.

The verb "wouldest not" refers to the will and pleasures of the LORD God. The Father took no joy in those sacrifices except for the fact the bull and lamb offerings reflected in shadow-form the willingness of Christ to do the will of God in His body – the instrument for doing the Father's will; c.f. with Psalm 40:6-8 and Hebrews 9:25-28; 10:7.

### **6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.**

(c) the sacrifices did not please God. In looking at the two offerings, (1) OT burnt offerings and (2) the living, obedient Christ, there is no comparison. Moreover, the Father had no pleasure in the death of lambs except for the fact they foreshadowed the obedience of the Son unto death to satisfy the judicial standards of a holy God.

**7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.**

The “I” is direct reference to the Messiah-Son. Every promise, prophesy, and command of law was fulfilled in Christ to the delight of the Father.

**8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.**

(d) The purpose of OT sacrifices was a temporary system -- a stop gap until Christ appeared in history to resolve man's sin issues. They were merely a shadow of the Son – a paving of the way for the Savior – an announcement of the Lamb’s work at the cross. These shadows, to the shock of the Jews, were removed so men could study and grasp the efficacy of His blood shed at Calvary.

**10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

**First benefit of the cross – sanctification.** The word “sanctified” (hagiozo) means “holy” and it is the opposite of being “unclean.” It is a perfect indicative announcing that His substitutionary, propitiatory work redeemed believers from sin and made them “holy” (clean) in His sight . . . by one act at the cross for the benefit of all believers.

Want to be “holy” in God’s sight? Embrace the Son by faith and claim the marvelous, day-to-day benefits of His sacrifice for your sins – a perfect offering that cleanses every stain and silences every alarm when grasped by faith.

**11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:**

(e) The ineffectiveness of temple sacrifices: Priests never sat down in the temple. There were no chairs. They stood as a statement that redemption required continuous effort to satisfy the claims of Divine law and the cries of the conscience. The contrast between the Old Testament Levitical

sacrifices and the one-time offering of Christ continues. The Spirit wants us to know it is an undisputable fact those animal sacrifices could **never** take away sins . . . but the sacrifice of our Lord **takes away all sins**, big and small, ugly and sweet, near or far, forever.

**12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;**

**Second benefit of the cross – acceptance**; i.e. the action of being received as suitable. How do we know this? What is the proof? Fantastic claims demand proof with strict proof of claim.

Christ's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God in history (Acts 1) is proof of claim that God accepted Christ's redemptive work at Calvary to satisfy man's debt.

**13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.**

**Third benefit of the cross -- a guarantee of victory**. Not only did Christ defeat the main enemies of man at Calvary -- Satan, sin, and death, His resurrection is proof that all enemies of righteousness will be put under His feet – the flesh, the world, and the proud.

**14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.**

**Fourth benefit of the cross -- perfection**.

"For" introduces the main truth of this chapter. His redemption not only satisfies the claims of perfect justice, they also cleanse the conscience.

"one offerings" is set in contrast to the "oftentimes" offerings in verse 11. The Savior died for the sins of all men born BC and to be born AD; past sins and future sins. His work at Calvary perfects all who come to Him for salvation. He cleanses all men: big sinners and small sinners. His blood washes away sins of men and sins of women; ugly sins and comely sins; mammoth sins and peccadillos; scarlet sins and grey ones.

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The word "perfection" (*teleioo*) refers to the end of a matter, the omega at the end of the Greek alphabet, and the Z at the end of the English alphabet, the finish line in a race, the maturity of a matter.

As a verb "perfected" is in the perfect tense indicating a past action with present results. Perfection (justification) is a fact to be enjoyed. The verb "sanctified" is a present tense participle indicating that practical holiness (sanctification) is still in the process of being accomplished in our lives.

**15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, 16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;**

**Fifth benefit of the cross -- regeneration by the Holy Spirit as a result of the inaugurated covenant.**

Christ not only cleanses sinners; he perfects believers by empowering them to do good and to serve Him with a clear conscience; that is, to obey His law and to keep His Word (Romans 8:4).

This blessing is not for all men, but it is available to those those who believe and are under the new covenant.

When a man believes he is saved from the penalty of sin and the power of sin. He is not saved "from law" but from the penalty of breaking the law - - not saved from law but to law -- not saved by law, but saved in order to keep the law.

Saying, "I will put my laws into their hearts . . . and minds" is the writer's way of announcing the effects of the new birth. The believer's position is one as "justified;" but his condition is one of being born again with holy desires. When the Spirit regenerates the man, he not only receives power to keep the law, he receives a desire to keep the law.

Though the believer may fail many times, he wants to do what is right and will constantly make decisions to live consistent with the will of God.

“Putting law into their hearts” means the law of God is engraved in the man so that doing righteousness becomes part of his character; that is, he now has the power and will to keep and obey God's law.

### **17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.**

**Sixth benefit of the cross is that sins in the mind of God are consigned to oblivion** -- a state of being buried or erased from history and from God's consciousness.

So perfect is Christ's work at cross, it removes our sins from the mind of God; that is, He has buried the record of our sins in the sand.

I can remember my sins, but God can't; and, since God forgets my sins, I must leave the corpse in its coffin and not go digging it up.

In offering the OT sacrifices there is a remembrance of sins every year. When God looks at the blood of Christ, there is non-remembrance of our sins; that is, His blood effects God's forgetfulness. What a shower does for a filthy farmer coming in from the field after a day's work, the blood of Christ does for the soul.

### **18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.**

**Seventh benefit of the cross -- complete satisfaction of debt**; hence, a man can live debt free in his life – he is no longer a debtor, but a creditor.

The word “remission” refers to being released from the debt of sin. Since the debt has been discharged, there are no more payments to make. If I sin, Christ need not come again and die again. But, I must claim the power of the blood by faith. Nike-faith affirms the benefits of the death of Christ and applies it to the sirens blaring in his own conscience.

### **19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus**

**Eight benefit of the cross -- spiritual boldness to walk with God.**

“therefore,” touches the application of eternal redemption.

The word "boldness" (parrthesia) refers "to freedom" and "courage" to enter into the holy place to fellowship with God. The word is translated "openly" in Mark 8:32; John 7:32; "plainly" in John 10:24; "freely speak" in Acts 2:29; "boldness" in Acts 4:13; and "confidence" in Acts 28:31.

This kindness is not a license to sin more, but a solemn reminder that though we are not debtors to justice, we are debtors to grace.

Out of debt, we have boldness to accept the invitation to come into His presence . . . a boldness not based on pride, but one based on assurance “His blood cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9).

There are only two religions in the world; the religion of Cain and the religion of Abel; the religion of beans, broccoli, and beets; and, the religion of blood. Christianity is a very bloody religion. Hebrews announces the cleansing power of blood that satisfies the Divine claims of holiness which perfects the conscience. Salvation is meant to be enjoyed. Moaning and groaning over personal failures does not please the Lord.

Let us enjoy the cleansing power of the blood by nike-faith. The foundation of salvation keeps us sane and from going insane due to the siren of guilt roaring within our hearts.

## 36. Peace, the Means to Perfection

### Hebrews 13: 20-21

◆ **Hebrews 13: 20-21** Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This is a prayer for the complete restoration of the sheep; that is, as silver is refined in the furnace, let us be refined so we might perfectly reflect His image under heat of trials. qq

The title “God of peace” is the subject of the sentence and “make you perfect” (*katartisai*) is the optative verb; that is, it is a wish, not a command; a hope that is not yet a fact. Thus, the “peace of God” is lighthouse on rocky shores; a candle in the dark; a compass that always points towards concord.

“Perfect” (*katartisai*) means “to mend what is broken; to make whole or complete; to sew a rip in a garment”

Paul’s prayer is grounded on the work of the “God of peace” – not the God of truth or the God of righteousness, but the “God of peace.”

This “God of peace,” having been propitiated by the death of His Son on the cross; and, our debt having been fully discharged by the blood of Christ; and, God having forgiven us of our sins by the mediation of the Savior, reached into hell and raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

Use of the title “God of peace” implies there was some kind of strife or conflict to which His work was needed. Possibly, (a) the strife and division among the Hebrews needed repair or (b) the conflict regarding God and sinners having ended through Christ, God being at rest restored the life of His Son. Walking with the “God of peace” is like sailing with the wind at your back on a starry night.

Jesus is called “the great shepherd of the sheep.” He is great in character; great in wisdom; great in love; great in holiness; great in courage; great in His accomplishments, and great in Shepherding of God’s flock.

Believers are called “sheep” probably because we do not understand what the Shepherd did for us at Calvary and does for us in His present exalted life. As **the good shepherd**, our Lord died for the sheep and protects them from Divine wrath (Psalm 22); as **the great shepherd** He lives and provides for His sheep (Psalm 23); as **the Chief Shepherd** he reigns . . . and rewards the servant-sheep with eternal blessings (Psalm 24).

“The blood of the everlasting covenant” implies that God works to mend us completely based on His covenant promise and consideration of the price paid for our salvation; that is, since blood is the currency of the spirit world, and we were purchased with His blood, “making us perfect” in His sight is a continuation of His promise.

There is an illusion here to Isaiah 63:11 “Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?”

Here the shepherds are Moses and Aaron (Psalm 77:20), God having delivered the people from death also brought Moses and Aaron out of the Red Sea to lead His flock to the Promise Land via Mt. Sinai.

His salvation at the Red Sea was based on the covenant of blood – a completion of His promise to deliver His people from bondage. The blood that saved the people from the death angel secured all other blessings including their redemption from Egypt by way of the Red Sea.

The great work of mending and bringing the people to perfection must have a strong foundation: God of peace, blood, covenant, raised from the dead, a living Shepherd, great in power, love, and peace.

The great work of conforming us to His will is total reconciliation of the total man to the total image of Christ; that is, that there might not be any part of the man that is not committed to the will of God. To wake up thinking one has a choice whether to do good or evil demonstrates the lack of reconciliation of the man to God. The perfect man has no choice but to do, “every good work” and what is “well pleasing in his sight.”

When praying we do not look at ourselves, but to the resources of Another – the God of peace. We start with the fact of God’s accomplishments through the Son, and reach for the impossible – perfection. Let us remember, the *Good Shepherd* died for us to save us from the penalty of sin and that the *Great Shepherd* lives to save us from the power of sin. One day the *Chief Shepherd* will save us from the presence of sin.

The “God of peace” is used six times in Paul’s epistles (Romans 15:13; 16:20; Philippians 4:7; 4:9; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:23)

The title “God of Peace” acts like a benediction over our restless lives, unsettled hearts, and heated conflicts to bring us peace that we might walk where angels walk (MacLaren).

His peace is like a calm sea -- undisturbed by winds and waves; like a still forest at dawn – the hush before life stirs.

Tapping into the “God of Peace” would calm their fears, temper their anger, repair relationships, and restore their ability to pursue holiness.

This “God of Peace” dwells above the conflicts, gloominess, and irritations common to men; and in His presence the restless heart finds *shalom* and shelter from the anger of men. His peace can shed light on our shadows, calm the waves on our turbulent seas, minister sweetness where there is bitterness, and bring a dove’s wing where there are clenched fists, bent brows, and tight jaws. “My peace” I give unto you declared Jesus.

The only way to obtain peace is to be good – “Make you perfect in every good work to do his will . . . ” There can be no peace on earth where there is not conformity to Heaven’s will. Want peace? Then lighten the load on your ship and throw your mutinous captain-self overboard, your iron anchor attached to the underside of this world, your heavy burdens of collecting silver and gold, and your steel desires to have your way on this voyage.

Philippians 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you

Moreover, the peace of God orders our holiness (See: 1 Thessalonians 5:23). What a man needs for peace is to request his vessel to be captained by the Lord Jesus Christ, to allow His peace to be the steersman, and to debar frivolous anger, lusts, and bitterness from standing at the helm.

Exercising the peace of God impacts our relationships for good (Colossians 3:15).

The peace of God acts like an umpire guarding and protecting our hearts (Philippians 4:7).

This peace can only come by prayer. The heart is like a stormy sea tossing our ship on top of white caps and then burying our vessels under tons of wet darkness, fear, and marine debris. Only Christ can say, "Peace, be still!

Come Thou fount of every blessing  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace  
Streams of mercy never ceasing  
Call for songs of loudest praise

This passage is the only reference to the resurrection of Christ in the epistle. We do not serve a dead martyr, but a living Savior – the high priest of our profession within the veil – the living Shepherd – the Great Shepherd of God's flock risen from the dead ready to perfect us.

We don't have to live in the shadows away from the sunshine or sail our vessel on stormy seas during cold, windy nights. Believing in His peace and praying to the Great Shepherd increases the possibilities of happy, holy service. The power that raised Christ from the dead is available to us. There is no mountain we cannot climb; no river we cannot cross; and, no burden we cannot carry when the sunshine of His peace is at our back.

So, like a little bird, open your mouth and let him fill it. He lives to provide for you; to protect you, and to perfect you. Don't worry about storms on the sea, or getting lost in the forest, or wolves in the pasture, or thorn bushes near the path. The Great Shepherd of the sheep leads. Will you follow?

Rest, soul, rest! Peace, Peace!

Source: Stockton's e-book, "Shalom, Shalom"

## 37. Faith that Works

## James 2

### Faith v. Works

◆ The relationship of faith and works has been shrouded with difficulty partly because of the disparity between Paul's treatise on justification by faith in Romans, and James mention of justification by works in his epistle 2:14-26.

These two views are not opposites; rather, they are two sides of the same coin. Paul emphasizes faith toward God and James stresses charity towards men.

#### Doctrinal positions

The Jewish faith contends that a Jew is saved by the quality of their works and that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation. Christians reject this view because the New Testament *kerygma* (proclamation) advanced the necessity of faith in Christ as the basis of salvation (John 1:12, 3:16, 36; 14:6; Acts 4:12). .

Roman Catholics, the Church of Christ, and many cults use this passage to support the view that faith plus works achieve salvation; that sanctification produces justification. To these people, human works by the power of the "indwelling Christ" is necessary to have a right standing with God – a view that morphed from Cain.

Those of the Reformed faith believe that one is saved by Sola Fide (faith alone) and that this passage does not support the view that human works are essential for salvation; that this passage supports the doctrine of the "perseverance of the saints," that is, true faith will produce works and where there are no works, there is no salvation.

To the reformers works were evidence of salvation, not the cause of salvation. Both Paul and James taught that faith saves and that saved people love others (James 2; Galatians 5:6; Corinthians 8:1).

Those in dispensational circles (DTS & Associates) agree with the reformed position except they prefer not to say that works are the necessary and inevitable result of salvation.

Those in the Baptist faith generally agree with the Reformed position and take a strong stand that this passage is not teaching you are saved by works.

Martin Luther wrestled with James and questioned whether the book should even be allowed in the Sacred Canon.

### **Paul and James**

Bible students agree that Paul taught “justification by faith alone” (Romans 3:21-25; 4:4-5; 5:1ff). Since James taught, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone,” the relationship between faith and works has not been embroiled in a dispute.

Did James contradict Paul? Are the Catholics correct in saying that man is justified by faith and works? These kinds of question demand an accurate interpretation of the passage.

### **Background**

In the Book of Romans, Paul lays out the tenets of the gospel doctrine (1:16). With the exception of Romans 6:11-14, there are no commands in the first eight chapter of Romans. James, on the other hand, is not a discourse on gospel doctrine but gospel living. James wants his readers to respond correctly to life’s trials. Over 50 commands can be found in the short letter of James.

There is a difference between Paul and James. Paul was concerned about correct believing and that James was concerned about correct living. Paul advanced what to believe about the faith, and James advanced how to live out the faith.

James one is about Christian maturity (1:2-5) and how believers need to respond to the Word of God during times of testing. James 2 is about the detestable practice of favoritism; that is, showing preference to the rich above the poor.

You can understand the relationship of faith and works by noting three types of faith.

### **Dead Faith**

**James 2 14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?**

The word “use” (ὄφελος) can be translated “profit” or “benefit.” James is asking, “What profit or practical benefit is a faith that does not help others who are in need?”

The word “save” (σῶσαι) is first used in James 1:22 and does not refer to Pauline salvation, that is, salvation from the penalty of sin (Romans 3:12-20), but to being saved from an unproductive and unfruitful hypocritical life. Salvation in James is from sin (1:13), from being lured and trapped by temptation (1:14), from the deception of sin (1:15), and from self-delusion (1:22).

This was the weakness of Martin Luther. He tended to always equate the word “salvation” with one’s eternal standing before God.

**2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**

James proposes a hypothetical human scenario where a true believer meets another who is hungry or naked. He wants his readers to question the veracity of a faith that “speaks a blessing” but does not “act to give a blessing.”

The word “use” or “profit” is used at the end of verse 15. James is asking another question. He wants to know, “What good, what benefit, what practical use is a faith that does not respond to true need?” Paul argues the same question, “what good is faith without charity?”

By using the conjunction “even so” (οὕτως), James creates an analogy between the human body and faith. As the body dies when the spirit departs, so faith dies when works depart. Just as the spirit is the

fundamental life principle of the body, works is the essential fruit of faith.

In the absence of works, faith is dead. The word “dead” could be translated “aborted.” Without works, faith is aborted; that is, fruit cannot be produced without living-faith. Apparently, James is talking about faith that was once alive, but over time began to shrivel and die because of a man’s wrong response to trials. James is not saying a man can lose his salvation. Rather, he is concerned that a man will be tempted in his struggles and give birth to sin (1:15-21).

**18 But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**

This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret.

Note the strong adversative in verse 18, “But.” James now offers a hypothetical situation where an opponent raises an objection to what James is saying. He is called, “the Objector.” Scholars agree that it is the Objector who speaks in verse 18 and not James.

BUT not all are agreed on where the quotation ends! Since there are no quotation marks in the Greek, scholars differ as to where the Objector ends his objection and where James begins his answer.

Robertson reads:

Objector: "You have faith, and I have works"

James: "Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works."

The NAS Bible reads:

Objector: "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

James: "You believe that God is one . . ."

J.P. Lange, J. J. Van Oosterzee, and J. Dillow (The Reign of the Servant Kings, p. 192) reads:

Objector: "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."

James: "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? "

Where one ends the quotation will determine how he interprets the text. Personally, I tend to agree with the longer quote of the three because it is obvious that James is addressing the Objector when he says, "you foolish fellow" (2:20).

The purpose of introducing the Objector is to contrast James' argument with the common mentality of the day—a way of thinking that made a bifurcation between faith and works. The Objector does not share James' view that there is a strong connection between one's faith and one's works at all.

The Objector says that he has good works and that James has faith. The Objector challenges James to show him his faith without deeds, but he knows that James feels this cannot be done. The Objector offers to show James his faith by his works, which the Objector believes cannot be done. He is saying, "that just as you, James, cannot show me your faith without works, I cannot show you my faith by my works." The Objector claims that there is no necessary relationship between faith and works.

The Objector continues his argument by appealing to the fact that demons believe and have no works. When the text says, "You believe there is one God, you do well," it is the Objector speaking and not James. Believing in one God is a cardinal principle of true religion (from the Shema). The phrase, "you do well" (καλῶς ποιεῖς), is also used in verse 8, (καλῶς ποιεῖς).

When the Objector says, “you do well” (καλῶς ποιεῖς\), he is not saying, “Good for you!” Rather, the Objector is saying to James, “Believing in one God counts as a good work.” The Objector’s conclusion is that there is no connection between faith and good works; that there are different ways of expressing true religion, some through verbal expressions of faith, “Be warmed and filled,” and others through acts of kindness that supply food and clothing to the needy. The Objector seems to be saying that because religion is not manifested in the same form, it does not mean that true faith does not exist in both.

The argument by the Objector, of course, is flawed and part of the delusion James discussed in chapter one (1:16, 22).

### Dallying faith

#### **20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?**

James argues with the Objector and calls him, “a foolish man,” one who is “emptied handed” (Mark 12:3) and states that, “faith without works is useless.”

The word “useless” (ἄργη) is the same word translated “idle” in Matthew 20:3. James is saying that faith that does not work is idle, lazy, sluggish, slothful, lethargic, and dallying. It is in danger of dying. A dying faith does not pray well (2:5) nor does it live well (1:26, 27). Dying faith succumbs to delusion and death (1:15, 16).

### Dynamic faith

**21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another**

**way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.**

James believes that true faith produces works, not for salvation but as the fruit of a new creation (1:18), and that a faith that does not produce works is a “dead faith.” James proceeds with his argument and introduces us to the dynamic faith of Abraham and Rahab.

One of the key words in this section is the word “perfected” (ἐτελειώθη). This is the same word that James was used in chapter one which can be translated “mature” (1:4, 17, 25). James is saying that the fruit of good works grows in the field watered by “alive,” dynamic, mature faith..

James’ readers know that God justified Abraham in Genesis 15. God saw Abraham’s faith and declared him righteous in His sight. But, it was not until Abraham offered up Isaac in Genesis 22, years later, that we see the maturity and fruit of Abraham’s nike-faith.

The same is true of Rahab. It was because she hid the spies, that Israel knew she was a woman of faith.

When James says, “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone,” James is not talking about justification before God, but justification before men. Paul (on justification) takes us into God’s Court Room (Romans 2:5-16), but James takes us into man’s courtroom where the jury is from Missouri – “show me!” Justification by faith vindicates us before God; Justification by works vindicates us before man.

Calvin put it this way: “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone.”

In conclusion, James is warning his readers of possessing mere intellectual faith that brings forth fruit unto death (1:15; 2:26) in contrast to possessing a mature faith that is fruitful unto life. He is challenging his readers to possess a nike-faith that rejoices (1:2), prays (1:4-5), obeys God’s Word (1:22), visits the orphan and widow, honors the poor (2:6), and meets the needs of the destitute (2:14-15).

James is **not** saying that a man must produce works to be justified before God in heaven. James is saying that there is a necessary connection between faith and works, and that a faith that does not produce works is dead and dallying, but a faith that produces fruit is alive and dynamic.

## 38. Stages of Maturity in the Faith

### The Beatitudes

#### Matthew 5:1-12

##### ◆ Nine Stages of Development in Christian Maturity

Before you begin a journey, it is nice to know where you are going; otherwise, no road you travel will get you there.

Where will nike-faith lead you?

The Christian life is a pilgrimage, and the Sermon on the Mount is God's road map that tells you what you will be when you grow up in Christ. Nike-faith embraces the road less traveled.

Matthew 5-7 is the most famous sermon ever preached.

When **Augustine** preached this sermon he titled it, "*De Sermone Domini in Monte secundum Matthaenum.*" Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount According to Matthew.

**Harry Ironside** titled it "The Principles of the Kingdom." Others refer to it as "Ethics of the Kingdom."

**The Scofield Bible**, edited by the Jewish Oxford Press, classified the Sermon on the Mount as "pure law" intended for the future "kingdom age," not for the present-day church, which of course, is nonsense.

**We will look at the nine beatitudes from the point of Christian growth as they represent stages of growth in Christian maturity.**

**Q:** If we follow Christ, where do we start? What is on this road? Where will the journey end? What is the final stage of development?

This spiritual journey begins with being poor in spirit; and it ends with the pilgrim being rich in Spirit -- A seed rising from cracked earth to wear a crown of orchids.

The Christian life is not static. It is progressive. For the ones who love the Father, He sends them to His training camp so they can compete in the race. He has a direction for their lives. And, the beatitudes show us the starting line as well as the finish line.

Matthew introduces us to Beatitudes which present the progress of development in the Christian soul. For the sake of utility, we shall call them "Stages in Christian Growth."

### **Introduction**

The major message of Jesus Christ was the arrival of the kingdom of God in history (4:19), and getting into it the supreme objective—a dynamic opportunity that demands a vigorous, violent, radical decision (11:12).

The kingdom of God is compared to a king's banquet and formal white-robe attire is required.

**Only** the righteous enter the kingdom. Jesus taught that unless your righteousness is greater than the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter into it (Matthew 5:20)<sup>10</sup>.

Many Jews thought they were righteous enough, but our Lord taught that these bandits will be thrown into outer darkness (8:20).

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<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, the righteousness required to enter the kingdom is a gift to those who believe – even the righteousness of Christ (Romans 2:21ff; Ephesians 2:8-9).

We have here, if you will, Kingdom Theology 101, or **Requisites for Entering the Kingdom of God**.

**The first four beatitudes** define the spiritual condition that characterizes the souls who enter the kingdom: spiritual poverty, grief, meekness, and hunger. Does this define you?

The difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God is the difference between a Hebrewism and a Greek idiom.

Each of the first four beatitudes addresses a problem with mankind that prevents men from entering the kingdom which we could label as pride, resistance, defiance, and complacency. In other words, the kingdom of God is for those with a need and a desire to know Him.

Part I are **four stages of spiritual development** necessary for justification.

### **Stage One: Poor in Spirit**

**Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Matthew begins the sermon with “Blessed are the poor in spirit;” Luke simply has “Blessed are the poor.” Both are true.

First, a Christian is not one who is born in a “Christian” country, but one who surrenders to the authority of King Jesus and kisses His scepter (Matthew 1:22; 11:28-29; John 1:10-13; Psalm 2:12; 97:1; 99:1).

The world teaches us to think positive, to possess high self-esteem, to believe in the humanistic doctrine that men are born good, and that only the environment corrupts. Some psychologists go as far to infer that all of man’s problems are the result of poor self-esteem. However, this is far from what our Lord taught as those involved in psychoheresy are living on the edge of the map; the last echo from a dying scream; swable adrift on the sea of ideas following their own belly button.

A man touched by God begins his journey realizing that his problems are not in the environment, but within him; that he is a poor transgressor that has broken God’s law; too bankrupt to get into heaven; too wretched to

avoid prison; that his lifeboat has a hole in it. The knowledge that one is a sinner in need of a Savior, and this feeling of shame connected with his wretched condition removes the cloud of pride – the stumbling block that prevents man from entering the kingdom.

God's Word acts like a mirror. Humility comes by looking at one's self in the lens of God's Word and realizing how poor one is in relationship to the righteousness the Son requires to enter His kingdom.

Jesus pronounced a blessing on the man who feels poor in spirit. The kingdom of God is for the humble, broken man, and not for the proud, arrogant man “who did it my way.”

Because individuals are so full of themselves, it is a miracle when one recognizes his own depravity. Admission that one is not "a good person" is so rare, the angels rejoice when a man comes to his senses and realizes that he is a transgressor of God's law. When one wakes up out of his dream world and admits that he is spiritually bankrupt, that person is not far from the kingdom of God.

The pre-Christian reaches “first base” on the road to the kingdom when he realizes that he is spiritually poor and insolvent in his relationship to Christ; that is, when he realizes he is dead broke and needs to be redeemed by Another. The psychobabble that one needs more self-esteem to improve his condition is a suicide pill offered to men insuring they never touch life in the kingdom of heaven.

[Note: It would be an error in judgment to totally spiritualize this text as Luke says, “Blessed are the poor” (6:20). Economic poverty often goes hand-in-hand with being “crushed in spirit” and “broken hearted” because of the way poor people are treated sociologically (Isaiah 61:1; Psalm 34:18). Luke emphasizes economic poverty, while Matthew emphasizes spiritual poverty.)

The opposite of being poor in spirit is personal autonomy which is the idea of being self-ruled and there is no greater evil among men than the notion that they are free to choose their own law.

You know a person is not poor in spirit when every sentence begins with the pronoun "I."

One of greatest signs of personal autonomy and too much self-esteem is the sporting of tattoos in violation of Leviticus 19:28 - "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or put any tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord."

In summary, the kingdom of God is for the poor, the humble, and the broken. A poor soul feels his destitution, penury, indigence, pennilessness, want, beggary, impoverishment, and pauperism in relation to the golden righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven. The condition of being in love with self and self-focused keeps men from salvation. Consequently, men need less self-esteem and more Christ esteem; to avoid self-confession and to confess Christ as Lord and Savior.

Moreover, do not hear what is not being said. Our Lord is not blistering a man's soul or suggesting that men take out a beat stick and begin a life-long process of self-flagellation or that teachers act like an army sergeant squashing men's dignity in order to make them subservient to man-made authority. Rather, the Scripture wants us to be our best but to know that at our very best, we are not qualified to enter the kingdom. We need something more – the royal robes of Christ's golden righteousness.

### **Stage Two: Mourning**

**Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."**

We don't logically associate mourning with blessedness. Most men would rather go to a fun fest than to a funeral, to be happy than sad, to sing than sob.

Love of self, happiness with self, and contentment with self, and high self-esteem characterize the man entering the gates of hell. Over 5000 books have been written on self-esteem, and each one of them is a stumbling block, a suicide pill, a ball and chain that keeps men from finding the gates of heaven. This sense of self-worth and worthiness may characterize self-promoting salesmen, but it doesn't characterize kingdom citizens.

If the first Stage is realizing that one is a sinner, the second Stage is the grief and sorrow that springs up within a man when he realizes he is a debtor and not a creditor before God.

The pronoun "they" is emphatic; i.e. God is concerned about those who suffer.

The promise is for comfort; that is, there is pardon, peace, rest, and freedom available for the one grieved over his sin and imperfections.

It is good when men experience sadness of heart because such a state causes them to seek happiness in the Lord. Such a condition calls for handkerchiefs and the wearing of black. It is not good to sin, but it is good when transgressors cry and weep over their sin – tears that signify deep sorrow, repentance, and grief for one's actions against God

Anguish over one's wretched condition motivates the man to find a remedy for his guilt. For this reason, Jesus pronounced a blessing on the mourner that wears ashes on the soul.

### **Stage Three: Meekness**

**Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."**

The world teaches blessed are the strong, the ambitious, the aggressive, the fighter, the go-getter, and the avenger. There is even a song extolling the pride of self-achievement, "I Did It My Way."

I've lived a life that's full  
I've traveled each and every highway  
But more, much more than this  
I did it my way  
Regrets, I've had a few  
But then again, too few to mention  
I did what I had to do  
And saw it through without exemption  
I planned each charted course

Each careful step along the byway  
And more, much more than this  
I did it my way

Was there ever a more anti-kingdom song than this? Isn't "I did it My Way" the very definition of sin? The pronoun "I" is used 9 times in this godless song.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way . . . " -- Isaiah 53:6

Because man is desperate for relevance, and will do everything to bolster his self-worth and to increase his wealth, Christ pronounced a blessing on meekness -- a reference to Psalm 37:11 which says the meek (afflicted, humble, poor) shall inherit the land.

Meekness here is not weakness. It refers to a man who accepts life as it is; who accepts God's indictment against him; who agrees with the verdict -- "guilty as charged." It is not the same as apathy, passivity, being laid back, or contentment with one's wretched condition. It refers to the one who has a correct view of God and an a realistic view about himself. He is not offended when the Spirit exposes his sin, because he knows that he is a sinner.

Meekness is that condition of mind which does not resist the convicting work of the Spirit; that accepts the truth that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;" that attitude which receives the Spirit's accusations that he is a sinner deserving hell; that conviction of soul which shuns fictions like "self-esteem," "I am great," and "I am a good person," or "I can do it." A meek mind accepts the ontological reality that he is made in the image of Adam and will one day meet the Grim Reaper.

The meek heart is a free heart because it has escaped the "ball and chain" mantra of "self-esteem;" the Brahman religious system that teaches

advaita Vedanta<sup>11</sup> or "it's your parents' fault," or "you are a victim," or "you are a good person."

Meekness is the opposite of the Victimization Movement which blames everyone else for their problems. A meek heart accepts responsibility and cries out to God, "Be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13).

In contrast to the impulsive, passionate, aggressive man pursuing wealth is a promise to the meek – a permanent inheritance. He not only enters the kingdom of heaven by faith, but acquires rights in the "new heavens and new earth;" that is, paradise restored. His inheritance is not "pie in the sky" when he dies; clouds in the heavens, but terra firma in paradise; that is, "firm land" true riches in the world to come.

#### **Stage Four: A Hunger for Righteousness.**

**Matthew 5:6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.**

Men are hungry for many things, but righteousness is not among them.

Men yearn to be rich and famous, but who thirsts to be blameless before God?

This is what we might call the stage of nuke-faith that grasps what God has done for sinners at Calvary.

A person who realizes that he is a debtor before God, and who seeks to be right with the Creator, has a healthy soul. Sick men seek a physician. Sick souls seek the Great Physician. Knowing he has no righteousness of his own, he pursues a righteousness that comes from God alone, through faith in Christ alone (Sola Fide; Sola Christos).

The hungry heart "shall be filled;" that is, he will find a feast in Christ. For when one believes on Christ, God decks him with kingdom jewels -- the righteousness of Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> Advaita Vedanta teaches that the individual soul (Atman) is ultimately identical with the Supreme Reality.

The possession of righteousness is a pre-requisite to enter heaven. Eternal life awaits those who patiently do good and seek immortality (Romans 2:7).

But, what is a man supposed to do who has sinned and not been patient in doing good? (Romans 3:23).

Job asked the most important question a man can ask, "How shall a man be just before God?" (Job 9:2)

The good news is that God provides golden righteousness through the gospel to men who trust Christ as their Savior:

Romans 3:21-22 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from (one's personal obedience to) the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (an ablative) for all who believe (in Christ). For there is no distinction:

A man who investigates the gospel will find that He is saved by good works—not his works, but by the works of Christ. A man is not only saved by the dying of Christ, he is saved by the doing of Christ.

The sinner is called to cease from his own performance-based, self-esteem acceptance program (Maslow's self-actualization ambition) and to accept the performance of Christ on His behalf.

Theologically speaking, Christ took our debts to the cross (for our forgiveness), and in exchange, He gives His royal righteousness as a free gift to us who believe (for our justification). He first declares us just (justification), then proceeds to make us just (regeneration followed by sanctification). When arrayed in His white robes of righteousness, the believer is qualified to enter the banquet.

This is justification—the day God declares a man righteous and treats him as such.

But, there is more. Not only does God justify the sinner by faith (Romans 4:5), he regenerates the man by the Spirit of God (Titus 3:5). This dual

state of being justified and regenerated is the blessing which Christ promised to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

### **This is the day of salvation!**

Justification is a judicial ruling whereby God declares a man right with the Court (Genesis 15) and treats him as such (Genesis 20). This is the central hope of Matthew 5:1-6.

The rest of the sermon concerns sanctification (Matthew 5:7-11).

Sanctification is the beautifying of the Christian by obedience of the man to God's Word (law-order) with the assistance of the Spirit. While a man is justified by "faith alone" without man's assistance, sanctification requires man's obedience while seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to make him holy. A man is saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone (Calvin).

In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church made justification dependent on regeneration and sanctification.

While the Reformers agreed that it is not totally possible to separate justification and regeneration completely, they insisted that the act of justification (judicial declaration) be logically separated from the work of regeneration (infusion of righteousness) and from the process of sanctification (being made holy).

Men are justified by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone; the justified are then regenerated (by faith); and, then for the sake of holiness, God requires the regenerated to obey His Word so they will become like His Son (sanctified).

So, where are you in the process of salvation? If you are poor in spirit, grieved over your wretched condition, humbly accept the fact that you are a sinner, and you thirst to be right with God, then look at Calvary. You are in the gateway of the kingdom of heaven.

## **Part II Growth Towards Sanctification**

### **A description of the Christian soldier**

The first four beatitudes describe the condition of souls at the gates of the kingdom; the second five describe the requisites for being a mature Christian; servant of God; and, a soldier in the Lord's army.

A strong Christian is a soldiering Christian – a man at war with the world.

The next five beatitudes describe God's training course for His army.

Theologically, the first four beatitudes are requisites for justification; the second set of five are requisites for sanctification; practically, Jesus gives a condensed lesson on Christian character; traits that mark the kingdom man.

### **Stage Five: Growth in Showing Mercy**

**Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**

When a person enters the kingdom, they discover the grace of God. Consequently, they are inclined to show grace and mercy toward others who are in need. Mercy begets mercy.

A young believer may not know how to express his faith, but he shows his faith through little acts of kindness towards those closest to him. He does not love others to gain salvation, but because he has salvation. He is not better than other men, but he helps to better other men.

Because he is secure in the Father's love, he is able to show love through acts of mercy, service, giving, helping, and assisting ministers of the gospel.

Mercy is the opposite of disdain, discretion, and a demanding spirit.

Because the Christian has received mercy without merit, he shows mercy to others without merit. He not only starts his Christian life with grace, he serves with grace, grows in grace, and finishes with grace. His daily prayer is, "Have mercy, O Lord; and help me to show mercy, today."

### **Stage Six: Growth in Purity**

**Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

The opposite of purity is defilement, compromise, contamination, double-mindedness, pluralism, hypocrisy, and inconsistency.

Purity is the fruit from the hardwood of holiness growing in the heart. Purity makes a man stately. It beautifies the man and makes him strong. The more he says "Yes" to love, the more he says "No" to sin.

By purity, our Lord addresses holiness, cleanness, morality, ethics, honesty, power, clarity, and separation from sinful habits. The promise is that they shall see God; that is, to know Him, perceive Him, and have a relationship with Him.

This is the period where the trials of life refine the soul, unshackle the believer from habits of sin, and where the Spirit progressively works into the heart of the believer the desire to be a holy man set apart to be his competent servant.

Soon after a man comes to know the Savior, he learns that while sins have been taken off him, sin is still in him. He learns he has been saved from the penalty of sin, and that he must now be saved from the power of sin. His spirit is born again, but there are parts of him which are not yet regenerated. He is a true child of God, but he may not share the family resemblance . . . yet.

Being saved from the penalty of sin by the Savior is one matter (justification, forgiveness); being saved from the power of sin by the Spirit is quite another (sanctification).

God commands his children "to be holy as He is holy." Personal holiness is not necessary to attain salvation, but salvation produces desires to obtain holiness. God has no need of our goodness, but we have a need for God's goodness -- to love more and to sin less. Holiness beautifies the man and makes him a storm in denim; an oaktree with a heartbeat for goodness; a rock among cotton balls. Purity and humility are the sweet fragrances of a manly man – the cologne of a man dressed in the leather of Scripture. Holiness is the strength of the soul, and it comes to the man of faith by obedience to God's laws and commands.

The more a man reads the Scripture, the more he understands how destructive sin is to him and to others. The more one understands the Lord, the more he desires to be like Christ free from sin's defiling influence – a disciple with his "feet washed" (John 13). The goal to give more replaces the old desire to have more. The desire to love more and to sin less is a gift from heaven—Christ's home where there is no sin and lots of love.

A Christian may lack many talents, but no Christian should lack holiness. In the eyes of God, a pure man is a useful man (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

### **Stage Seven: Growth in Peacemaking**

**Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."**

A peacemaker is the opposite of a prickly, thorny, grouchy, touchy British stepmother that heads a house full of wounded, angry, bitter, brawling children.

This is a stage of growth where God begins to use the man. Having grown in Christ-like character, He sends his soldier into the arena of conflict for the ministry of reconciliation in a good faith effort to bring peace to warring, grouchy, thankless souls. The peace sought may be between God and man, or between man and man.

Not all is well in the world. Conflicts between husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, men and women, bosses and employees, and political parties abound. And, where there is strife and struggles, there are needs for peacemakers.

We call this the ministry of reconciliation. People are at war with the Creator and His law-order. Thus, there is a need for evangelists who can help reconcile men to God.

People war against each other. Thus, there is the need for Christians with the gift of exhortation and wisdom to assist people to be reconciled one with another -- To be able to say with power to those who are bitter foes, "Sirs, ye are brethren" (Acts 7:26). This is the call for men to pursue

shalom – “as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).

As one grows in holiness, he will find himself in the middle of marital disagreements, family disputes, and community divisions.

The key to success is not to be alarmed or shocked by all the ugly head butting among God's sheep . . . and goats, but to accept the fact that God is training you to develop the skills of conflict management, reconciliation, and peacemaking. Those who embrace conflict will be called the “sons of God.”

### **Stage Eight: Growth in Convictions and Courage**

**Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

While God calls us to be peacemakers, He does not call us to be nice, pettable pugs. He does not call us to ride sidesaddle through flowery meadows, but to clean out the barn. In so doing, he may find himself being kicked by a mule or scratched by two scrapping cats.

God's man is less like a white-collar car salesman talkin' sweet, and more like a plaid-shirted rigger wearing steel-toed boots and a hard hat with garlic on his breath.

Due to intense study of God's Word, this is a stage of development where the Christian-soldier trains for war against hostiles. You'll never see God's man dressed in white handing out flowers beggin' for money! Never!

Spirituality has to do with one's relationship to the Holy Spirit; Christian-maturity has to do with one's relationship to God's Word, to doctrine, and to truth. Because he is mature in nuke-faith and against omnism, feminism, and alcoholism, he will be persecuted!

The word "persecuted" means "to make run." This is a stage of life where the active-believer experiences opposition to His devotion to Christ and his salty-message. He is opposed, not because he preaches the gospel, but because he seeks to apply green-herb principles churned by the gospel to

the open sores of society. The blessing is not "persecution," but the peace he enjoys while confronting the proud power-brokers of idolatry.

The key word in this statement is "for righteousness sake." Most Christians in the West are not persecuted for preaching the gospel, but they are persecuted for asserting the law of the Lord God and applying it to the social ills of our time.

As a student of law, the Christian develops steel-convictions about righteousness. Rejecting caramel-Christianity and its honey-roasted, sun-kissed, passion-pecked sermons, he eats iron man Wheaties from God's Word for breakfast. His riveted convictions put him at odds with the dreamy, impossible "equality" ideals of liberalism.

In this stage of growth, the believer finds himself soldiering against humanists, secularists, abortionists, lesbians, feminists, perverts, maskers, vaxxers, transvestites, social engineers, journalists, and politicians who force their perverted religious values of equality and moral relativism down the throats of Americans.

Because he no longer sees abortion as a women's right to control her own body, but murder; and, no longer sees living together as consensual sex, but fornication; and, no longer sees homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle, but sexual perversion; and, no longer sees feminism as social progress, but rebellion against God's law-order, the man of God will find that himself being called a misogynistic, anti-Semite, homophobic racist. The more effective he is at articulating the truth and calling rebels to repent, the more he will be defamed and denigrated.

It is a blessing, not because of the suffering incurred, but because the man has Biblical confidence in his relationship to the Lord and convictions which motivate him to address the decadence of his age.

"Woe unto you when all men speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26).

### **Stage Nine: Growth in Faithfulness to Christ**

**Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."**

It has been said there are two kinds of people in the church: pillars that hold it up, and caterpillars that crawl in and out.

Before us is a rock, the reliable soldier -- the stable, anchored, unwavering, secure, poised, steady, fixed, enduring man of integrity. He is the opposite of crumb cake and a shooting star.

This is the final stage of maturity. It involves character and peace of soul that is secure, persistent, and confident in the face of resistance. It is the ability to stand with joy for a righteous cause while one is being slandered and maligned. Not an easy place to be!

In this stage, the man walks alone with little support from family and friends. He has the ability to stand when others call for him to sit; to advance when the fearful call for retreat; to be defiant when mush-balls call for complacency.

The ultimate goal of the Christian life is not to sit on a cushion of strawberries, but to be a blood-splattered soldier with spear in hands piercing the dragon; not to be nice and marsh mellow-sweet, but to be a salty, briny soldier of the cross rescuing souls near the gates of hell. The goal is not to create conflict, but to boldly confront the decadence of our age with a golden tongue. And, when this happens, tempers flare. You can't avoid a street fight if you are opposed by bullies advancing the Devil's agenda.

Enemies morph in life. The longer one lives, the more the militant Christian engages the fight against entrenched, well-organized political opponents composed of vigorous, Satanically-inspired antichrists.

In the final stage of Christian maturity, the man of conviction will find himself facing powerful, well-funded, well-connected adversaries: politicians, elected officials, local bureaucrats, cops, judges, lawyers, deacons, false witnesses, prosecutors, and churchmen. His fight may be political or legal, commercial or judicial, social or relational, ecclesiastical or civil.

Because his enemies are people of means including officers in the government, they may have the power to crush your reputation, fire you

from your job, destroy your career, tax you into poverty, seize your possessions, and injure you emotionally and physically. This is true of Christians who served the gospel through the centuries, and it is true in the United States where the government promotes omnism, communists, socialists, feminists, transvestites, humanists, abortionists, and every other godless segment of society.

John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Peter spent the last years of their life in court facing judges that had the power to put them to death.

These bone-crushing enemies of militant Christians are not only in journalism and government, they are in compromised 501 c 3 church organizations.

The more you move away from caramel Christianity and the candy-coated desire of church leaders to be compliant with State policies, the more you will receive the right fist of Christian fellowship. *When pleasing the government is more important than pleasing God, you cannot expect churchmen not to betray you.* Even Jesus was betrayed by his own brethren. Why should you expect anything less? "Beware of the man who picks you up at the airport!" wrote one pastor.

There is a blessing here. You are blessed because of what you have become -- a man of courage and conviction, an experienced soldier on the battlefield, a competent spokesman on the right side of the issues standing for the Lord you love.

In Summary: What is the final stage of growth for the cross-carrying Christian?

In the first stage of growth one is poor in spirit; in the final state one is rich in spirit. Thus, the beatitudes are a rags to riches program; a coward to courage course; a journey from fear to nuke-faith.

In the first stage of growth the man is useless to God; in the final stage exists a strong competent soldier of the cross.

In the first stage of growth, one is insecure in faith; in the final stage, one is secure in his faith.

In the first stage of growth, light leads to sadness of heart, in the final stage of growth, light leads to unspeakable joy.

In the first stage of growth everything about the man is shaky, but in the final stage of growth the believer is unshaken.

In the first stage of growth is a revelation about one's lack of spiritual character; in the final stage of growth, the steel character of the man is being tested against Satan's warlords.

If you have taken up the cross, God will work into your heart deep convictions about truth and righteousness.

As you seek to apply the Word of Truth to a corrupt society, you will experience fierce opposition. It is not encouraging to be opposed, but it is a blessing to possess the faith, to exhibit courage in the face of conflict, and to be constant in the application of righteousness when surrounded by the wickedness.

May the Lord increase your convictions and give you a melody to sing when you experience the screeching sounds of opposition for doing what is right. You will be in good company. Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, and Paul went from being poor in spirit to being rich in spirit.

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