



# Increase Our Faith: An Introduction

Donnie V. Rader

Do you ever feel like your faith could be stronger? Do you ever feel weak? Have you ever looked at another Christian and thought, “My, I wish my faith was that strong!”? Has a sermon or class ever made you think, “I don’t know if I have the faith to do that”?

The apostles had such a reaction to some instructions Jesus gave (Luke 17:1-10). The discussion between Jesus and his apostles follows on the heels of the story of the rich man and Lazarus which involved one offending (sinning against) one of God’s people (16:19-31). Then, Jesus talks about offenses and warns his disciples saying, “Woe to him through whom they do come” (17:1). Jesus then adds instructions of what is to be done when one sins against you (17:3-4). The disciples were instructed to rebuke those who sin against them and then forgive that person if he repents. Then Jesus added a point about how forgiving they were to be, “And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (v. 4).

Consider the progression of difficulty. If one sins against you, it may be hard to rebuke him (at least to do so in the manner it should be done). However, it is even harder to forgive if he repents. Then it is even harder to forgive him over and over again. The apostles must have thought it hard for their reaction to the instruction was to ask the Lord, “Increase our faith” (v. 5). The rest of this section (vv. 6-10) is Jesus’ explanation of how their faith could increase.

## WHO NEEDS TO INCREASE HIS FAITH?

There are more than a few who could identify with how the disciples reacted to the commands of the Lord.

**1. The new convert.** One who has recently obeyed the gospel is a babe in Christ. Obviously his faith is not as strong as it will be in time.

**2. One who has not grown as he should.** Some who have been Christians for years have not grown as much as they should. They too are babes, but not *see “Increase Our Faith” on p. 280*

magazine

Vol. XLVII

No. 9

May 1, 2003

# TRUTH

Vol. XLVII May 1, 2003 No. 9

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— Subscription Rates —

\$22.00 Per Year

Single Copies — \$2.00 each

Foreign Subscriptions — \$25.00

— Bulk Rates —

\$1.50 per subscription per month

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Subscriptions, renewals and other correspondence should be sent to Truth Magazine, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Book orders should be sent to Truth Bookstore, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Phone: 1-800-428-0121.

Web Address: [www.truthmagazine.com](http://www.truthmagazine.com)

Postmaster: Send change of address to P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Truth Magazine (ISSN 1538-0793) is published twice a month by Guardian of Truth Foundation, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY

42102. Postage paid at Bowling Green, KY and additional mailing offices.

## Checking Your Faith

### Taking Heed Lest You Fall

Joe R. Price

The possibility of falling away



from God is a real threat to every child of God. For any Christian to think otherwise is to dangerously miss the point of the familiar warning: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). In this text, the nation of Israel is offered as an example of warning to help Christians remain faithful and true to the Lord.

As Israel was “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” even so we have been “baptized into Christ” (1 Cor. 10:2; Gal. 3:27). Like Israel, who stood before God as his own special people (“For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure,” Ps. 135:4; Exod.

19:5-6), the church of Christ is “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9). Yet, Israel’s faith was not firmly fixed on the One who had delivered her from bondage. Instead, her eyes looked back to Egypt (Num. 11:4-6). In foolish and selfish pride, Israel rebelled against the Lord and pursued fleshly lusts and the idols round about her (1 Cor. 10:6-10). God was not pleased, and for forty years the wilderness was filled with the carcasses of a rebellious people (1 Cor. 10:5-10; Num. 14:26-34).

Israel’s tragic fall is our constant reminder so that we do not fall “according to the same example of disobedience” (1 Cor. 10:6; Heb. 4:11). In calling our attention to Israel the apostle drives the point home: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). To “take heed” is to look upon something with understanding, to discern the truth of a warning given. Thus, we should look carefully at Israel’s rebellious fall and discern from it the warnings and lessons needed to prevent us from falling away (Heb. 3:12-13). Please consider these relevant lessons from Israel:

**1. Israel thought she stood with God.** The fact that God had chosen Israel as his own special people did not immunize her from the dangers of sin. John’s rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees scolded this sort of thinking: “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matt. 3:8-9). Thinking we stand

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## Things That Destroy One's Faith

Tom M. Roberts

The goal of every child of God is to develop into spiritual maturity and usefulness in the kingdom of God. Our Lord is willing and able to make this possible and the means by which this is achieved is *faith*. As we know, faith is not a gift of God, independent of and separate from man's study and application (Rom. 10:17), but a fruit that is produced from reading his word and applying it to every issue of life. Faith has been that constant ingredient in all the "*faithful*" (full of faith) men and women of the Bible who overcame great obstacles in their journey toward heaven. Hebrews 11 is filled with the examples of faith and the courage that it engendered that propelled them forward in their pilgrim journey. How did ordinary people find it possible to endure "trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment," being stoned, sawn in two, tempted, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, wandering in dens and caves of the earth (vv. 36-38)? It was by their faith! This "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (v. 1) helped them see beyond their present distress and suffering to victory in life eternal. This was the role of faith in their lives. It is no less the role in our lives. It is faith that binds us to God.



Is it any surprise that the devil wants to take our faith away from us? This "shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16) with which we are able to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" is a vital part of the armor which God has supplied to help us in our spiritual battle. Imagine a soldier in a battle without a shield. Likewise, we will be vulnerable and without protection from the "darts" and arrows of Satan. Indeed, we understand how it is "impossible to be well pleasing to God" without faith (Heb. 11:6). It is literally impossible for us to succeed spiritually without faith. To lose faith is to lose our battle, to lose our soul. To lose faith removes God from our life and puts us at the mercy of the devil. Thus, our adversary constantly seeks to remove faith from our lives. Without this virtue, we are hopeless and helpless. The devil wins when he can destroy our faith.

Thankfully, we are not "ignorant of the devil's devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Scripture exposes the machinations of Satan and this knowledge gives us an

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edge against him. We can foresee how the Devil operates and identify the dangers that would destroy our faith.

### **EXTREME VIEWS ABOUT FAITH CAN DESTROY TRUE FAITH**

Calvinism has two extremes about faith that warp and distort true faith. The twin doctrines of “faith only” and “once saved, always saved” battle against the scriptural description of faith and lead to unwarranted conclusions. Faith only isolates a believer from the works that accompany faith (Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:14-26). Faith only denies the importance of baptism to the plan of salvation (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, *et al*). The result is a dead faith that fails to save, deluding millions. Likewise, the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” lulls believers into a false sense of security, implying that sin is impotent against the believer. Such a doctrine encourages sinful behavior. But sin is no less sinful to the child of God and it is deadly (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). To think that one can sin without guilt being imputed is dangerous and false (1 John 3:4; Ezek. 18:4, 20). These doctrines can destroy a full and complete understanding of faith.

### **WORLDLINESS CAN DESTROY OUR FAITH**

We are spiritual beings, but we live in a tabernacle of flesh. While the flesh, itself, is not evil, it provides Satan with the avenue of temptation (Rom. 6:16-18). The empirical senses (taste, touch, see, hear, and smell) arouse us by both legitimate and illegitimate stimuli that seek fulfillment. God has provided a “way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13) for every temptation whereby we may live in the world without sinning. But the apostle John warns, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16). The love of the world, the inordinate desire to taste, to touch, to experience, wars against the soul and can destroy one’s faith. This warfare is described by Paul (representing himself as every man before being saved) in Romans 7. “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. . . for sin, taking occasion by the commandment deceived me, and by it killed me” (vv. 8-11). Until saved by the gospel, Paul described himself as “wretched” (v. 24). Doing what he did not want to do, and unable to do what he felt he should do (vv. 15-16), he recognized “another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (v. 23). It is this warfare in the flesh that can destroy our faith as we yield to its siren call. All have felt its temptation and none is immune to its danger. But we can be victorious instead of wretched. How can we escape? “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the

flesh the law of sin” (v. 25).

### **THE TRIALS OF LIFE CAN DESTROY OUR FAITH**

Job did not understand why he had to suffer and the Devil afflicted him in an attempt to destroy his faith. Which of us has not felt like Job at one time or another? Have you suffered trials of faith due to ungodly people where you work? Have you struggled with ill health and affliction? Have you lost a loved one to cancer, to a car wreck, to tragic circumstances? How such times try our souls! Like the fires of a furnace, life can test your mettle and measure the depth of your faith. I am persuaded that, like God, the devil has a providence, and will use the natural affairs of life to place stumbling blocks in our way. But we are told by James to use these events to grow stronger in faith. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:2-3). What the devil may place in our lives to destroy our faith can be, in fact, the very thing that strengthens us and brings us to maturity in the Lord. Trials can increase our faith.

### **MATERIAL ABUNDANCE CAN DESTROY OUR FAITH**

Nations that prosper usually turn away from God. Abundance supports the fallacy that we don’t need God in our life: we have done it all by ourselves. Why is it so hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:24)? Why are not many mighty people called (1 Cor. 1:26-29)? Pride and possessions elevate human arrogance against God and convince us that we can “build bigger barns” and “eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:16-21). It was in this context that Jesus exhorted: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (v. 15). America is rich above all the nations on earth today. As citizens of this land, we are exposed to unprecedented abundance and are prone to claim an entitlement to a life of ease. We need to look at the cycle of apostasy in ancient Israel. As God blessed them, they became independent of God and trusted in their wealth. This led to idolatry and every vile sin. Covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5) and, while we would not think of bowing the knee to Baal, we might sell our soul for material prosperity. As America has enshrined wealth, it has turned away from spirituality and accepted immorality, abortion, violence and nearly every depraved act of antiquity. Are we more American or Christian? Do we feel that we have a right to wealth, even if we must neglect God’s work to get it? While it is natural to be thankful to live in this land, we must be aware that materialism can be costly; it can destroy our faith.

### **SPIRITUAL MALNUTRITION CAN DESTROY OUR FAITH**

which parents starve their children to death. Such neglect is unspeakable! But spiritual malnutrition, while not so visible to many, is altogether too real today. If “faith comes by

hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), the reverse must also be true. Not hearing the word of God will destroy faith! Separate us from God’s word and we perish. Spiritual malnutrition is recognizable if we know how to look for its signs. Untaught members, worldly members, broken homes, immodest young people, rampant divorce, empty pews, gospel meetings unattended, cries for shorter sermons and less specific condemnation of sin, impatience with demands on time and money, lack of congregational harmony, lack of leadership, demands for social entertainment, these and many more things are evidence of spiritual starvation among God’s people in our time.

We are spiritually malnourished when we fail to read our Bibles, when we fail to attend Bible study, when we “forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). God has made provision for both private and public stimulation of faith by making his word available. Daily Bible reading at home will feed the soul and increase our faith. Being a part of an assembly where the Bible is respected and directs our worship increases our faith. To wilfully miss the occasions of worship and study will deprive us of the food we need to survive.

Preachers are sometimes guilty of starving members where they preach. They substitute pithy stories, entertaining tales and words of sophistry in place of the gospel. Some churches advertise entertainment activities provided by individuals in conjunction with their meetings and youth programs (the Coppell, Texas church, for example, advertises magicians; see [www.coppell.org](http://www.coppell.org)) because they do not trust the truth to “build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The “whole counsel of God” (v. 27) is deemed unfit for our refined ears. So much has been said about “negative” and “positive” preaching that it has become the measuring stick for every pulpit today. The fact that no such measurement is found in the Bible is irrelevant. Even the most veteran preacher is now held to this modern standard and it has eaten the heart out of Bible preaching. “Did the sermon make me feel good?” is the acid test. We have become conditioned to soft preaching so much that exposing sin is negative. “Reproving and rebuking and exhorting” (2 Tim. 4:2) is negative. Warning of hell is negative. Warning of the lust of the flesh is negative. Is it any wonder that so few read the Bible anymore? It is such a negative book. Max Lucado has a better grasp of grace than Paul. Charles Swindol has a better writing style than John. Evangelicals know more about how to grow a church than the apostles. Jesus was negative, Paul was negative, Peter was negative. Is it surprising that some have found a new “hermeneutic”? We must find a new way to interpret Scripture. Now the Bible is just a “love letter” and will allow us to disagree over “important moral and doctrinal differences” and continue in fellowship with error. Unity-in-diversity is preached by some of the best known preachers of this

generation. Genesis 1 and 2 are not to be taken literally; the “beginning” was not really the beginning, and science is more accurate than Jesus (Matt. 19:4). The story of the serpent in Genesis 3 is merely a pagan myth incorporated into the Hebrew record, our brightest “scholars” tell us. Is the flood a world-wide event or merely a local deluge, magnified through hyperbole and rhetoric? Some say that we should not take too adamant a stand on such matters lest we become identified with the “Flat Earth Society.” After all, “What difference does it make” if Genesis 1, 2, and 3 are literal or not? Or Genesis 6? Or Isaiah 7:14 (the virgin birth)? Or Matthew 28:6 (“He is not here; for He is risen”)?

It is an anathema to have conviction today in the pulpit. We should be magnanimous, ambiguous, tolerant, non-judgmental, open to alternate views, and absolutely opposed to those few radicals who try to run the brotherhood by insisting on a “thus saith the Lord” or who “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). How can there be anything short of malnutrition in the pews when every kind of error is tolerated but those who preach the truth are slandered? When men who quote Scripture and hold us to that standard are criticized and ostracized, it should come as no wonder that our people lack knowledge (Hos. 4:6) and are starving to death. The Scripture has proven true again: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Fables about the creation (“the big bang”) will destroy our faith. Fables about the origin of sin (is the serpent real or a mythical figure?) will destroy our faith. Fables about the flood will destroy our faith. Fables about the virgin birth will destroy our faith. Fables about the resurrection will destroy our faith. Fables instead of sound doctrine will destroy our faith. That such is happening is not a possibility, nor even a probability. The incipient forms of classical modernism is actually among us in pulpits and on college campuses and in college lectures. I repeat for emphasis: such false preaching will destroy our faith.

### WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

We sing a song entitled, “Give Me The Bible.” Do we believe it when we sing it? This is the answer. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). Preach the word when it is popular and preach it when it is not popular. Again, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). What has always been our distinctive plea has been watered down and soft preaching has stolen our faith. If God’s people of old were destroyed for lack of knowledge, we share the same fate today. Ignorance is the door that allows false doctrines, worldliness, materialism and spiritual malnutrition to enter. Ignorance allows us to be overwhelmed by the trials of life. Many other dangers to our faith exist. The answer is

# Adding to Our Faith: 2 Peter 1:5-10

Johnny Stringer

### GIVING ALL DILIGENCE

God has graciously made provisions for all our spiritual needs to be met through the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 1:2-4). If we are to be saved, however, our own efforts must accompany the divine provisions. Thus, Peter says, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith” (v. 5).

The phrase, “giving all diligence,” should impress us with the urgency of fulfilling our responsibilities. The term *diligence* denotes earnest, zealous effort. Peter’s use of this word precludes a casual, nonchalant approach to serving God. Paul instructed us to work out our salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12); that is, keenly aware of the terrible consequences of unfaithfulness. This attitude will motivate us to diligent effort.

This diligent effort is a product of faith. God requires “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), and if our faith does not lead to obedience it is dead (Jas. 2:14-26). One’s diligence in obeying God will be proportionate to the strength of his faith. Faith will lead to diligence in supplying the attributes Peter urges us to develop.

### VIRTUE

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to turn again to the Word, the Water of Life, the Bread of Life so that we can be nourished, edified and perfected. Faith is the victory.

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The term translated “virtue” is *arête*, meaning “moral excellence.” It was used to refer to the inner strength of character that does what is right regardless of the consequences. Virtue does not ask, “Is it popular?” or “What will it cost me?” or “Will it bring suffering to me?” or “Is it pleasant?” Virtue asks only one question: “Is it right?”

A key element of virtue is courage. Those who compromise their convictions because they fear the consequences will have their part in the lake burning with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8). The divine revelation is filled with examples of those with the courage to do what was right even though it cost them dearly, and some in our age demonstrate exemplary courage. Godly young people, for example, at the risk of losing their popularity and enduring ridicule, have refused to engage in lustful dancing or to indulge in alcohol or other drugs. We must make a diligent effort to do the right thing regardless of the consequences.

### KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge of God’s word is essential because obedience to God is essential (Matt. 7:21). We cannot do God’s will unless we know what his will is. Though some affirm that we cannot know God’s will, Paul commands us to know it (Eph. 5:17). To do so requires diligence. God did not design his word so that a casual skimming of the Bible would render a sufficient understanding.

If we do not love the truth enough to study God’s word diligently, we will be deceived and, consequently, lost (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Through growing in knowledge we can avoid being deceived by those who pervert Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16-18).

Moreover, knowledge is required in order to teach God’s word to others. We must study (give diligence) to learn to handle the word of God properly (2 Tim. 2:15). The Hebrew Christians were rebuked for their failure to grow sufficiently to teach others (Heb. 5:12).

Concerning the Israelites, God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). Through diligent effort, we can avoid that condition.

### TEMPERANCE (SELF-CONTROL)

It is of little value to know what is right and what is wrong if we do not have the self-control necessary to do those things that are right and refrain from doing those things that are wrong. Paul recognized the necessity of keeping his body under subjection (1 Cor. 9:27)

Self-control requires diligent effort. One must be determined, resolute, fully devoted to obedience. In order to control our actions, we must first make a concentrated effort to control our *thinking* (Prov. 4:23; Phil. 4:8). For example, we must not allow our minds to dwell on the sexual attractiveness of one to whom we have no right (Matt. 5:27-28). We must control our thinking, channeling our thoughts in other directions. Nor must we allow our minds to dwell on the desirability of material possessions; instead, we should contemplate the desirability of heaven and thus avoid covetousness (Col. 3:1-2).

Self-control is a challenge especially when we become angry, but with determination and desire, we can achieve it. Despite the difficulty of controlling the tongue (Jas. 3:2), we can and must control that member (Jas. 1:26). With diligent effort, self-control is attainable.

### PATIENCE (PERSEVERANCE, STEADFASTNESS)

It is easy to begin great projects; it is not easy to persevere through all the problems, setbacks, sacrifices, and difficulties necessary to complete those projects. So it is in serving God. The hearts of many are represented by the stony ground into which the seed fell and quickly germinated, but soon withered in the heat of the sun (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21). They do not persevere.

We must give diligence to develop that strength of character that does not quit. We must patiently keep on serving the Lord regardless of problems and discouragements. We must not grow weary and faint but must keep on running the race with patience (Heb. 12:1-3; Gal. 6:9).

Let us be resolute in our determination not to quit. We have the strongest possible motivation to persevere: the hope of eternal bliss with God in Heaven. That hope should prevent us from quitting (Rom. 8:25), serving as an anchor to prevent any force from moving us away from God (Heb. 6:19).

### GODLINESS

*Godliness* is the awe and reverence that is due God. Barclay says that it is “the attitude which gives God the place he ought to occupy in life and in thought and in devotion”

(*New Testament Words* 107). We should ever be diligent to show God the reverence that is due him. We should contemplate his awesome power, his infinite wisdom, his marvelous holiness, his unequaled love, and his role as the Judge who will determine our eternal destiny. In view of those qualities, we should devote our lives to honoring and obeying him.

If we have the proper attitude toward God, we will worship him in accordance with his revealed will, humbly submit to his teachings in every aspect of our lives, and refrain from speaking his name except with an attitude of reverence. We will never use his holy name in a light, frivolous way as though he were just some ordinary guy. We will be terrified at the thought of displeasing him and incurring his wrath (Heb. 10:30-31; 12:28-29).

### BROTHERLY KINDNESS

*Brotherly kindness* is a translation of the Greek word *philadelphia*, which means “love of brethren.” Though we are to love all men, we should have a special love for our brethren in God’s family. We love them especially because they are God’s children (1 John 4:21-5:1). Thus, we do good to all men, but especially to those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Love for brethren involves genuine concern for their well-being (1 Cor. 12:26) and a willingness to help them when they are in need (1 John 3:16-18). It involves seeking to restore them when they sin (Gal. 6:1-2), even to the point of withdrawing from them in an effort to bring them to repentance (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15). Love also demands that we forgive them when they sin against us and repent of it (Luke 17:3-4; Eph. 4:31-32). We should be diligent to “increase more and more” in brotherly love (1 Thess. 4:9-10), earnestly seeking to show love in every possible way.

### CHARITY (LOVE)

In 1611, when the KJV was made, the word “charity” meant “love.” Hence, in this verse, the King James translators used the term “charity” to translate the Greek word *agape*. This Greek word for “love” refers not to an emotional feeling, but to a determination to seek the highest good of the one who is loved. It is the product of the will, not the emotions. We are to be diligent to seek the well-being of others, thus practicing that which men call the “Golden Rule” (Matt. 7:12), emulating the example of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25ff.). This involves seeking not only their *physical* well-being, but their *spiritual* well-being also.

We are to love (that is, seek the well-being of) our enemies (Matt. 5:44-48). Paul quoted a proverb that explains the concept of loving an enemy, instructing us to feed him when he is hungry and give him a drink when he is thirsty (Rom. 12:19-21). We must be diligent to rid our hearts of

# Growing Our Faith In An “Instant” Society

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Charles G. Goodall

One trip to the supermarket should convince anyone that we live in an instant society. There are instant potatoes, instant tea, instant pudding, and the list goes on and on. Our economy reflects this expectation as well. Credit cards maxed out with a new SUV and BMW in the driveway of a new house occupied by a young couple before the first child is on the way reflect the mind set of “I want it now”!

### GROWTH DEMANDS PATIENCE

It should be no surprise when brethren become impatient with their progression in the kingdom. Some will become unduly discouraged because of their inability to conquer their tendency to yield to sinful temptations. Others attempt to prominently assert themselves long before they have matured to handle the responsibilities they seek to be involved in.

The latter is often motivated by pride and the desire to be

preeminent. Paul cautions about giving approval to someone hastily (1 Tim. 5:22). The brethren were warned to not select an elder who was a novice because he might become conceited and fall into the same condemnation as the devil (1 Tim. 3:6). Or as Paul expressed: “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Gal 6:3). Yes, there is a time when one should be a teacher (Heb. 5:12). However, it is not to be done quickly. Teachers are to be brought along slowly and methodically as to allow careful monitoring, discipline, and instruction. Their work will recommend them in due time.

Everything alive must grow and continue to be healthy. Paul told Timothy to give attention to reading (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul recognized that he could become a “castaway” even though he had preached to others (1 Cor. 9:27). In other words, growth is a lifetime process. There is no “quick fix” for maturity. When we think we are grown (fully

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bitterness and ill-will, and desire our enemy’s well-being. By so doing we may turn an enemy into a friend.

### A PROCESS OF GROWTH

When one first becomes a Christian, he is not expected to possess these attributes to the degree that he should as he matures spiritually. He is a babe in Christ. Our Lord expects us to give diligence to develop these qualities. We should desire the milk of the word that we may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). It will build us up (Acts 20:32) and as we allow it to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16) our character will develop. We should spend time in prayer and we should be diligent to assemble with other saints to receive the spiritual benefit

that is derived from engaging in spiritual activities with them (Heb. 10:23-25).

The more we grow in these attributes, the less we will sin. When we do sin, we must acknowledge it (1 John 1:9), repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22), and then continue giving diligence to grow in these qualities. Through so doing, our calling and election will be sure and we will be granted entrance into the kingdom in its final, eternal state (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

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matured and satisfied with our spiritual progress), we die. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

### GROWTH DEMANDS TIME

Our faith becomes weak from time to time. The disciples came to the Lord on one occasion and said, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). That is why we need to “take time to be holy and speak oft with our Lord.” The assembly of the saints becomes a time of admonition for one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Peter admonished us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The Lord does not throw us out when our faith is weak. As we do with our own children from time to time, he feels frustrated with our slowness to catch on. He may want to say to us like he did to Peter, “Oh you of little faith” (Matt. 18:26).

At first we can only handle milk. As we mature, we progress into handling “meat” (1 Pet. 2:2). “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

While we are called to growth, the Bible doesn’t give any rate of growth. We tend to have a baseball mentality, “three strikes and you are out.” Peter came to the Lord and asked for a quota of tolerance in granting “forgiveness.” He even had a figure in mind which sounded very reasonable from a human point of view. He proposed seven times (Matt. 18:21). Surely, from his perspective, repeating a particular sin would be indicative of a permanent pattern to render redemptive hope impossible. Think about it. Suppose we know someone who had been caught stealing seven times and each time, when confronted, he made confession and asked forgiveness. Would we be inclined to be patient with him when he is apprehended the eighth time for stealing? Probably not. Jesus’ response to Peter was not intended to establish a mark of 490 in lieu of seven, but instead to use what mathematicians call the “law of large numbers.” That is, there is not a limit to the number of times reasonable for us to forgive. Christ refused to establish a rate of growth for the struggling Christian who, from all appearances, is fighting a losing battle with sin. As long as he attempts to continue when he has repeatedly faltered, we are to bear him up and be patient (Matt. 18:22).

**We can’t dictate to others how quickly they must grow.** I don’t know what you are struggling with. You don’t know what I am struggling with. The environment of my youth was different than yours. In my mind this is illustrated by a dear friend of mine who was a deacon in the church and later became an elder. He once told me that when he rode by a billboard advertising cold beer, he would always think about how wonderful it would be to stop and have one. The reason, he was entrenched in that

habit before he became a Christian. Needless to say most of you are not allured by those signs, but you have your own temptations.

### GROWTH DEMANDS PAIN

Growing is not without pain. These “growing pains” are common to man (1 Cor. 10:13). Sometimes what we want to do is not what we do. The will gives way to the flesh. It is our mind that has a conscience, not our body. When our body’s desires are allowed to prevail, in our disgust with ourselves and our ineptness to overcome, we cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?” (Rom 7:24). We should not brag about our dilemma, but be ashamed when we struggle with wickedness in our life. It irritates me when people say all you have to do is shrug off sin and it is gone. We all know better than that. Our dilemma gives us no privileges. Jesus said, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

No, growth will not come easily. Do we really expect that the devil who became the god of this world can be dealt with easily? Do we really believe the books that tell us that if we would pray three times a day, read a chapter in the Bible every day, and take food to the sick that we will be spiritual giants in a few months? Neighbor, there is no growth without pain and no success without a cross. Yes, we need to be ashamed when we struggle with wickedness. However, we should not be despondent, but face the reality that we are all in a struggle that is common to man (1 Cor. 10:13).

Say to yourself, “I might not have a lot to give Christ. I may not give of myself as I ought, but I will grow and get better.” With the Lord’s help I’ll renounce and put away every wicked way in my life. While I am growing, my master receives me. Yes, there are instant coffee, potatoes, and tea, but there is no instant maturity.

### GROWTH DEMANDS STEADY PROGRESS

God demands we grow (Heb. 13:20-21). In fact God works in us to grow (1 Pet. 5:10). As lovers of Christ we will be brought to maturity (Phil. 1:3-6). God works in us according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

But you say, “I don’t seem to be making a lot of progress.” Do you want to progress? If so, you will have to exercise what you have. Don’t worry about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself. Give the Lord what you have today. Give to the best of your ability today.

A few years ago I owned a large boat. When approaching the dock, I had to be very careful or by going in fast the side of the boat would be damaged. If I went in too slow, I would often be carried out by the tide or current. So it was “steady as you go” — just enough speed to aggressively approach the dock, but slow enough not to damage the boat.

# Overcoming Indifference

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Mark Mayberry

Indifference is an attitude where we do not distinguish between two or more things. The object is of little importance, and the outcome does not matter. God may be indifferent about certain things (the eating of meat and observing of days), but he does not want any of us to become spiritually indifferent.

New converts are often zealous and enthusiastic. Sadly, over time, many become indifferent to the word and ways of God. Spiritual considerations are no longer important. Truth no longer matters. They just don't care one way or the other. Like the church at Ephesus, they leave their first love (Rev. 2:1-5). Like the Laodiceans, they become tepid and lukewarm (Rev. 3:14-19).

Overcoming indifference is a significant theme of the closing books of the Old and New Testaments. Both Mala-

chi and Revelation were written long after the covenants were established at Mt. Sinai and Pentecost. Initial enthusiasm had waned. Apathy and indifference had become pronounced.

Today many would solve the problem of indifference through gimmicks. Denominations have long preferred watermelons to the word. Drifting is also evident among large and leading non-institutional congregations, who seem intent on becoming "like all the (denomi-)nations" (1 Sam. 8:5). For example, recently the church of Christ in Coppell, Texas sponsored "OASIS 2003: Young People's Praise Weekend." Scheduled events included a combination of spiritual activities (singing songs of praise and encouragement along with prayers and devotional messages), and social activities (Friday night lock-in, complete with magic show, games, movies, karaoke, hoops, volleyball, foto fun,

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When I learned that concept, it made me a much better and more confident pilot. Growing is "steady as you go." Too fast or too slow can be equally harmful.

But we will grow if we do not "grow weary in well doing" (Gal. 6:9). James P. Miller was a well known gospel preacher and debater in the '50s and '60s and I knew him very well. He had no peers in or out of the church as an orator. He was a huge man. When his son Rodney was very young, he would get hold of one of brother Miller's legs and try to pick him up. Jim would pat him on the head and say, "Rodney, eat your food, do your exercise . . . one day you'll pick me up." A year or so later Rodney made the same futile attempt and got the same response. "Rodney, eat your food, do your exercise . . . one day you'll pick me up." When Jim Miller's body had wasted away due to cancer years later, he didn't have the strength to make it from his hospital bed to a wheelchair on his own. Rodney

now grown and a big man reaches down, picks Jim up and sets him in the chair. Though Jim Miller had not repeated the admonition for years, without missing a beat, he said, "Rodney, eat your food, do your exercise . . . one day you'll pick me up."

The apostle Paul said, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). Though inspired of God, Paul understood there was no instant salvation. He understood that the Christian was to choose growth regardless of a lack of apparent progression or attempts by others to hinder. With him it was "steady as you go" but to go was not an option. The reality is clear that there is no promise or prospect of instant maturity.

and a surprise called “Midnight At The Oasis” [Note: The aforementioned social activities are “hosted by individual Christians” but advertised on the church web site: [www.coppellchurch.net](http://www.coppellchurch.net).] Additional scheduled activities include a “Light the Fire” Devotional on Saturday evening (“if weather permits we might light an old-fashioned bonfire”) and several presentations by Physicist Hill Roberts, a well-known proponent of error on the days of Genesis 1. Without doubt, the aforementioned activities are intended to overcome spiritual indifference among young people. However, is this how God would solve the problem?

The book of Revelation offers the following counsel: “Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.” Again, “I wish that you were cold or hot. . . . Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.” Malachi elaborates upon this same theme, discussing various manifestations of spiritual indifference and offering a divine solution to the problem. Therefore, let us examine God’s word for instruction on this matter.

**Indifference is often demonstrated by a failure in respect.** Those of Malachi’s day did not manifest a proper reverence for God (Mal. 1:6-10). What was the solution? Gimmicks would not suffice. Israel needed to rediscover respect. God said, “My name will be great/feared among the nations” (Mal. 1:11, 14). The same principle applies today: Having received a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us serve God acceptably with reverential awe (Heb. 12:28-29). His holy name must be glorified (Rev. 15:3-4).

**Indifference is often demonstrated by a failure in preaching.** Those of Malachi’s day had turned aside from God’s way and had caused many to stumble (Mal. 2:7-9). What was the solution? Gimmicks would not suffice. Israel needed a renewed commitment to the covenant (Mal. 2:4-6). In like manner, we must observe all that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). Faithful disciples will preach and practice the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:18-21, 26-27).

**Indifference is often demonstrated by a failure in families.** Through divorce and foreign intermarriages, the men of Malachi’s day violated God’s law of marriage (Mal. 2:10-14). What was the solution? Gimmicks would not suffice. Israel needed to understand that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:15-16). We also must submit to God’s purpose and pattern for marriage (Matt. 19:3-9). Roles and responsibilities must be respected (Eph. 5:22-33).

**Indifference is often demonstrated by a failure in society.** Those of Malachi’s day called evil good and good evil (Mal. 2:17). They practiced sorcery, immorality, falsehood, and oppression, etc (Mal. 3:5). What was the solution? Gimmicks would not suffice. Israel needed to submit to divine

purification (Mal. 3:1-4). Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we — in like manner — must live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age (Tit. 2:11-14). Holy sacrifices are offered by holy servants (Eph. 5:1-5).

**Indifference is often demonstrated by a failure in giving.** Those of Malachi’s day robbed God in tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:8-9). What was the solution? Gimmicks would not suffice. If Israel would put God first, they would enjoy his overflowing bounty (Mal. 3:10-12). Let us seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, trusting in his promise of provision (Matt. 6:33; Mark 10:29-30).

Malachi closes by saying, “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name” (Mal. 3:16). In other words, those who overcome spiritual indifference learn to respect God and regard one another. Faithful brethren need to stand shoulder to shoulder in defense of the truth.

Digressing brethren manifest a lack of respect for God’s name and word. Intolerant of those who preach the whole counsel of God, they accommodate those who preach and practice error on a variety of socially acceptable sins: marriage, divorce, and remarriage, dancing, drinking, immodesty, worldliness, etc. Yet, these same brethren would overcome indifference through gimmicks instead of the gospel. They are promoters of area-wide youth lectures, long on emotionalism and excitement, but short on the serious examination and application of Holy Scripture.

Malachi concluded his book (and the OT canon) with the following admonition: “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal. 4:4-6). Although Moses’ law is no longer in force, the principle remains. We must remember the word of the Lord. We must make proper application of the Law of Christ to our daily lives. The gospel, not gimmicks, will solve the problem of spiritual indifference. Indeed, it is the *power* of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

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# Daily Bible Study Strengthens Faith

Steve Monts

**So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).**

**a greater knowledge of God's word.**

The Bible says, "Desire the pure milk of the word that you may *grow* there by." "*Grow* in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord." "Giving all diligence, *add to your faith . . . knowledge.*" Why? "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1:5, 9). One who does not grow in his knowledge of God's word forgets all his sins were cleansed by the word (Eph. 5:26).

**We should also want to grow closer to God himself.**

A child does not develop a loving relationship with his father if he runs away from home. Neither does a child of God grow closer to his Heavenly Father when he runs from God's book. My friends, we only know God through his book, not through subjective feelings. Therefore, we must read to know what our Father is like. Many times Jesus would ask the Jews, "Have you not *read*" (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:4)? The Jews claimed to be God's people, but Jesus said to them, "Yet you have not *known Him*" (John 8:55). Don't let that be said of your relationship with God. If you do not read, you cannot know him.

**We must also put on the spiritual armor.**

If you were to go into a long enduring battle, would you want armor that is rusty, corroded, and old? That is what happens to unused armor, and it

will not last in a long battle. The Bible tells us to "put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:13). If we wish to stand and be neither wounded nor slain in the battle, we must use our armor! Don't forget your shield and don't forget your sword (which is the word of God, Eph. 5:17)!

**TO HELP LEAD OTHERS TO CHRIST**

How do you teach to others what you don't know yourself? The answer: You don't. Too many Christians feel inadequate to talk to another about Christ and the plan of salvation, and quite frankly, they *are* inadequate! We must remember to "always be ready to give a defense (answer, KJV) to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Would you be ready if one were to ask you today? Better "hit the books" (all 66 of them)!

**TO IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING AND FALSE TEACHERS**

The Bible says false teaching can overthrow our faith (2 Tim. 2:18). The Bible also says that false teachers can "creep in unnoticed" (Jude 4). With the current controversies today, I am convinced that people have quit reading their Bible daily. In regards to the Creation controversy, when I read "evening and morning" and "day" in Genesis chapter 1, I can understand, can you? In regards to the controversy on divorce and remarriage, when I

This passage provides the key to our topic. Many Christians today desire more faith but are not willing to do anything about it. Sometimes they are the same ones who want shorter sermons with fewer Scriptures and more stories. They cry, "Increase our faith, but give us shorter sermons." It doesn't work that way. Rather, the divine equation for faith is in Romans 10:17. Think about it. If faith comes by hearing, then it would also stand to reason that less hearing of the word equals less faith. But the more we study, the more we hear the word, the stronger our faith will be. The divine equation says so. My friends, there are a number of reasons why we need to study every day. I would like to offer you four reasons why we need to study.

**FOR OUR OWN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**We should simply desire to have**

read “except it be for fornication” I can understand, can you? In regards to the controversy on fellowship, when I read, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them,” I can understand, can you? Of course you can if you are honest. The Bible clearly says, “By which when you read you may understand” (Eph. 3:4). But the point is you must read! Yet, today we have

many that have forgotten the “old paths” because they have forgotten to read and study their Bibles daily; so when false teaching creeps in they are spiritually slaughtered (Hos. 4:6)! In order to combat false teaching we need to be as the Bereans. They tested Paul and his teaching by *searching the Scriptures daily* (Acts 17:11).

**THE WORD WILL JUDGE US**

Jesus said, “The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). You think it would behoove us to know that word that will judge us? How would you like being put on “*Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*” and then not knowing the answer to “What was the apostle Paul’s former name?” Would you be embarrassed at what the folks would think about you back home? You had

**Monthly Goals:**

Read one book of the Bible and memorize two passages from that book. Plan ahead what book you will work on:

January:	February:	March:	April:
May:	June:	July:	August:
September:	October:	November:	December:

**Quarterly Goals (Every 3 Months):**

Take a subject that you wish to know more about and fully study it out (for example: baptism, the church, foul speech, the days of creation, divorce and remarriage, etc.). *\*Please ask an elder or an evangelist for additional material related to your topic. Then take some time to teach the subject to another, this will help you remember your study better.*

Quarter 1:	Quarter 2:	Quarter 3:	Quarter 4:
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**Yearly Goals**

Pick two books of the Bible to fully study out for the year (Do not pick books you are currently studying in your weekly Bible classes). *\*Please ask an elder or evangelist about good commentaries that will help your study.*

Book 1:	Book 2:
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better be embarrassed at what God would think about you in heaven. One day we will stand before God in judgment and “the books” will be opened. One book we know will be the Book of Life (Rev. 20:12). What do you think the other book is? Jesus said his word will judge you on that last day (John 12:48). On that day, would you then wished you knew more or less of his word, the Bible?

### BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

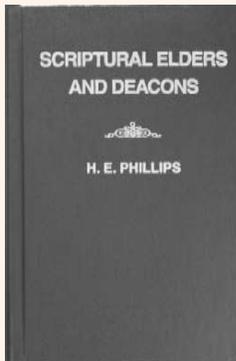
There are a number of good Bible study tools, but with limited space I’ll only mention a couple. There are charts that have been designed to aid one in studying the Bible every day. By following this reading chart (p. 13) one could complete the Bible in a single year. One such chart can be found on our church website ([www.franklinchurch.com](http://www.franklinchurch.com)). This is a very good tool that every Christian should use. Another study tool that I have put together and have included in this issue is my “Study Goals for Spiritual Growth” chart. We must be people who make defined goals for our spiritual life. I realize we all have good intentions to want to grow, but as I have often said, good intentions without

goals remain just good intentions. So take some time and fill out the chart. What you will find is that I have included three different types of study. One form of study is reading/memorization, another is a topical study, and the last is a textual study. That way if you grow weary of one type of study you can switch to another and back and forth, but it keeps you constantly studying which is the goal!

The Bible says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God” (2 Tim. 2:15). When you stand before God in judgment and you hear those great words “Well done,” you will know one thing was for certain, *that you were a serious student of God’s word.*

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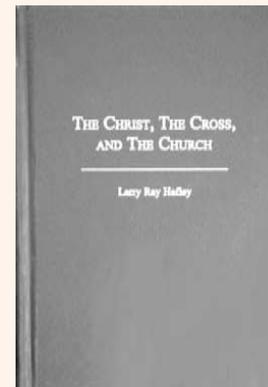
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Joe R. Price

# First Things First: Keeping Our Priorities Straight

Johnie Edwards

The next thing in order after a person has been “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) is to learn to put “First Things First.” One of the problems we all face is that of keeping our *priorities* in the proper order. It is the purpose of this study to help us learn what it means to put “First Things First.”

**1. Giving oneself to the Lord.** In obeying the gospel, one submits his will to the will of Christ. It is, as Paul told the Corinthians, how the churches of Macedonia put first things first. “And this they did, not as we hoped, but *first gave their own selves* to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). These Christians went beyond what Paul had hoped for in putting first things first. When you obeyed the gospel, you gave yourself to the Lord and from then on “ye are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19).

**2. Must have a willing mind.** God has always required that his people have a willing mind. In the building of the tabernacle, God demanded, “Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a *willing heart*, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord; gold, and silver and brass” (Exod. 35:5). As David charged his son, Solomon, in regards to the building of the temple, “And thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind” (1 Chron. 28:9). The New Testament requires the same willing mind. “For if there be first a *willing mind*, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:12).

**3. Clean first the inside.** In obeying the gospel, one purifies his soul (1 Pet. 1:22). The inside must be kept clean. As Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, he said, “Thou blind Pharisee, *cleanse first* that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matt. 23:26). The

Pharisees worked hard to polish up the outside but put little emphasis on the inside. As a Christian puts “First Things First,” he will work to “keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22).

**4. First cast out the beam.** It is easier to see the faults of others than those of our own. In trying to help folks keep their priorities in the right order, Jesus asked, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, *first cast out the beam out of thine own eye*; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:3,5). A beam is something far larger than a mote.

**5. First be reconciled to thy brother.** From time to time brethren disagree. When disagreements occur, each must strive “as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). A reading of Matthew 5:24 will teach us what must first be done when “thy brother hath ought against thee” (Matt. 5:23). Hear the Lord, as he says, “Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first be reconciled to thy brother*, and then come and offer thy gift.” God has no plans of accepting our worship when we are at odds with a brother!

**6. He first findeth his own brother.** As we strive to keep our priorities in order, a Christian will be found looking for others to teach. You do know that we are saved to save! Writing Timothy, Paul penned, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Andrew will help us in putting “First Things First.” After Andrew learned of the Lord, “He *first findeth his own brother Simon*, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus” (John 1:41-42).

# Prayer Strengthens Faith

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Paul R. Blake

“We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race” (Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifesto II*, Prometheus Books, 1973, 16). To this any child of God would rise up and say, “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 14:1). Clearly this is the correct response, as faith in God is one of the defining characteristics of Christians.

Yet what of the Christian who professes faith in God, but lives as if he considers the supernatural as “irrelevant to the question of (his) survival and fulfillment”? In other words, what does it say of the faith of a believer when he does not frequently fall on his knees in private prayer to the Almighty?

Christians often pray when in distress, sorrow, or pain; they solicit the prayers of others when their own lives are in crisis. However, when some find themselves at peace or in abundance, they neglect the faith building privilege

of prayer until their next difficulty arises.

From a strictly human perspective, this neglect is easily excused as one of the conditions of busy living in a hectic world. After all, one must rise early, shower, shave, and dress for work, rush through breakfast while reading the paper and watching the morning news on television. The Christian faces the difficult commute to work while multi-tasking with the laptop, cell phone, and day runner. Next comes eight to ten hours of focused labor in a high stress environment, followed by the same commute home. As per doctor’s orders, he must stop along the way for a thirty minute workout at the gym in order to maintain his health. Once home, he must help his wife transport the children to band practice, drama rehearsals, soccer, and little league games. At seven, the Christian then wearily sits down to dinner with his family where conversation is often centered on the material and mundane. After dinner he must see to his share of the household chores and get a jump on the next day’s work by going over the paperwork

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One reason a lot of churches of Christ are not growing is that there are just not enough folks putting “First Things First” in personal evangelism. How about you?

**7. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.** There is just no way one can have his priorities in the right order unless he learns to put the Lord’s kingdom and righteousness first. In trying to keep people from worrying about the things of this earth life, Jesus uttered, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Often the kingdom and the church are used to refer to the same thing, the Lord’s church. We must not let anything come between us and our responsibilities as a member of the church. To

seek first God’s righteousness is to first obey his commandments. The Psalmist identified God’s righteousness as his commandments. “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172). Writing the Romans, Paul affirmed that God’s righteousness is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). It is, as in the case of Cornelius, “In every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:35). What did Cornelius do when he worked righteousness? He simply obeyed the gospel. Are you putting first things first?

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he brought home. At ten, he collapses into a chair in front of the television to watch an hour or two of sexual innuendo, voyeurism, and violence to unwind, and he justifies it as “much needed entertainment and relaxation.” At midnight he stumbles to bed barely able to mumble a line or two in prayer before falling asleep.

At worship services on Sunday, the Christian feels a momentary twinge of guilt when the preacher speaks of the need for personal prayer, but his discomfort quickly passes when he reminds himself of how tightly packed his daily schedule is. He simply has no time for private prayer. It seems a waste of productive time to spend it talking to God about needs he already knows about. Within a few years his pew will be empty, and everyone will wonder why this good husband, father, and provider fell from grace.

### PRAYER REQUIRES TIME

Jesus Christ made time for prayer. Consider the implications of that statement. Jesus who was with God from before the beginning, who was involved in the Creation, by whom all things consist and are sustained, who saves all obedient believers, felt the need to pray to the Father and took time from all of these great works to go apart by himself to pray. If the Savior believed it needful for him to pray, then no professed follower of the Lord can consider prayer unnecessary to his own spiritual well being. Furthermore, if Christ, who had so many great works to perform and so little time in which to do them, set aside time for prayer, then his followers can make time for prayer.

Jesus got up early in the morning to spend time in personal prayer: “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). Jesus spent considerable time in prayer at the close of day: “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Jesus took the time to pray for persons often overlooked by those who allow themselves to get too busy to pray. He rebuked his disciples for thinking that he had no time to answer the requests of others that he pray for children (Matt. 19:13).

Before the Lord’s crucifixion, a time when most men would be scrambling to get their own secular and material affairs in order, Jesus was enjoying the uplifting benefits of private prayer to God the Father. According to Matthew 26:36-46, Jesus prayed three times that his appointed suffering might pass from him, a prayer that was destined to be answered “no.” However, consider the effect of prayer on his emotional and spiritual state of mind. He went out distressed: “And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt. 26:37-38). But when he returned to his disciples after the third period of prayer, his man-

ner was confident and determined to do his duty: “Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me” (Matt. 26:46).

By pouring out his sorrow and weariness to God in prayer, Jesus’ resolve was strengthened to complete the daunting task that awaited him. If Jesus saw the need for frequent private prayer, can those who are significantly weaker afford to neglect it in their own lives?

### PRAYER REQUIRES FAITH

There is little point in offering prayer to God if one does not believe in prayer. James instructs those who desire wisdom to ask it of God with the conviction that he will give it (Jas. 1:5-7). He further states that one who does not ask in faith has no assurance that his prayers will be answered. James illustrates this principle with the example of Elijah, who he describes as an ordinary man. Elijah prayed “earnestly” for a drought, and it lasted for three and a half years; he prayed again, and the rains came, and the earth was restored (Jas. 5:17-18).

Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24). Obviously, faith is the key to answered prayer. However, it must be clear that the requisite faith is not just intellectual affirmation, but a faith that moves one to obedience. John qualifies this faith by writing: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). In the absence of obedient faith, prayer is little more than an empty conversation with one’s self.

### PRAYER REINFORCES FAITH

In addition, prayer strengthens one’s faith. The relationship between faith and prayer is either a descending or ascending cycle, depending on the petitioner. The weaker one’s faith, the less he is inclined to pray; and the less one prays, the weaker his faith becomes. In contrast, the more one prays, the more his faith is increased; and the more his faith is increased, the more he desires to spend time in prayer.

Jesus prescribed prayer to prevent discouragement that would weaken faith. “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). He recommended prayer to his disciples as a means of fending off temptation that would harm their faith. Then he said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Luke 22:46).

James commended prayer as one of the means of dealing with trials. “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (Jas. 5:13). Bolstered by prayer, one is enabled to bear up under suffering through which he increases his faith (1 Pet.

# Worship Strengthens Faith

Stan Cox

The throne room scene in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 is one of the most stirring passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. At the climax of this wonderful vision we see the entire creation bowing down to worship God Almighty.

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever (Rev. 5:13-14).

Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, gathered around the throne, declared the worthiness

of the Lamb of God to receive worship from all. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (v. 12). We are told of their joy as they sang a new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth" (vv. 9-10). Truly this scene is as it should be, with all of creation gathered together in ecstasy, proclaiming the glad tidings of our Lord's sacrifice and his worthiness as the one to implement God's redemption of man.

It is also a far cry from the present attitude some express

1:6-9). Paul taught prayer as the path to peace and contentment. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

Prayer not only restores the erring to fellowship, it restores the erring to faith. James called it being "healed" when one who freely confesses his faults is prayed for fervently (Jas. 5:16). Simon the penitent sorcerer required assurance of restoration to God's favor through the prayers of Peter (Acts 8:24).

Prayer is the divinely ordained means by which one adds power to the strength he already possesses. Sometimes one knows what is right, but he may lack the will power to do it. When he asks God in faith for strength and courage, he receives what he needs to do what he must.

How encouraging it is to hear that a devout saint re-

members others to God in his prayers! Perhaps the greatest works done in the local church are accomplished by those aged widows who can do little more than pray for others who labor in the cause of Christ. The apostle Paul loved the prayers of other Christians and often solicited them in his epistles. If the prayers of others on one's own behalf have a profoundly encouraging effect on his faith, how much more so will his own prayers have a good effect on him when he prays with the same frequency and fervency as the Lord and his faithful saints?

The neglect of daily, private, personal prayer leads to decline in one's faith. It is possible that local churches do not grow, disciples do not become strong, and individuals fall from grace because God's children seldom plead for his help. Make time for fervent prayer to God. Persons who pray consistently do not report that prayer has ever been pointless or powerless.

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toward worship to God. Too often apathy reigns, and the proper grandeur and purpose of worship go unrecognized even by those who purport to be initiates in the faith. Such apathy expresses itself both in truancy and in the general demeanor of the indifferent member when he does occasionally grace the assembly with his presence. Worship has such potential to uplift the spirit and strengthen the faith of the petitioner. It is a shame that too few appreciate and take advantage of its blessings.

In the infancy of the church, as the apostles and brethren lingered in Jerusalem, Luke records, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:42-43). Worship to God was central to their faith, and had a corollary effect upon their entire lives, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (vv. 46-47).

However, there are examples in the New Testament of Christians who did not fully appreciate the privilege of worship to God. The Corinthians were admonished by Paul for turning their observance of the Lord's supper into a common meal. "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you" (1 Cor. 11:22). The Hebrew writer spoke of those who were in the habit of forsaking the assembly of the saints, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25). The Lord himself dealt with the apathy of some as he called to repentance the Ephesians, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4); the brethren in Sardis, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (3:2); and the Laodiceans, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot" (3:15). Though it would seem that all Christians would enthusiastically embrace their opportunities to worship God, in reality every generation struggles to be faithful in this aspect of their service to him.

Characteristically, those who have an indifferent attitude toward worship exhibit spiritual weakness in all areas of their lives. They struggle to overcome the enticements of the world, and are often beaten down by the trials of life. They complain about how hard it is to live a life of righteousness while they consistently neglect their opportunity to be strengthened by their brethren. They remind one of the recalcitrant child who refuses to eat the meal his mother

has prepared, and with the next breath complains of hunger. They are spiritually immature.

The collective worship of the local congregation is the means God has given for us to encourage one another. This is the reason we are called to assemble, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). In our worship we have opportunity to be edified in song, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). We have opportunity to pray for one another (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Together, we "proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26) when we partake of the Lord's supper. We cheerfully give to facilitate the common work to be done (1 Cor. 16:1-2). And, we are strengthened by study of the word (Acts 20:7). These times of public worship allow us to heed the scribe's exhortation to "strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" (Heb. 12:12-13).

In my own experience I can attest to the thrill of lifting my voice with that of so many others in joyous song to God. I can relate the profound gratitude I have felt toward my brethren as they prayed publicly, specifically for my family and me. I have felt an almost overwhelming sense of awe as I took the emblems of the supper with those of like precious faith, have seen the good done in preaching and benevolence out of the treasury of the local church, and have thrilled to sit at the feet of so many preachers of the precious gospel. As any Christian would, I have been greatly encouraged by my communion with other Christians in our worship to God.

Though the edification of one another is a blessing that comes from our worship to God, it is by no means the only one. The very fact that we can offer up our petitions to the Almighty God in heaven brings great strength and an increased faith. Our prayers are heard by him (cf. Acts 10:4; Rev. 5:8), and he is pleased with our sincere expressions of honor and praise. We are promised his presence in our midst (cf. Matt. 18:20), and God tells the righteous man, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him" (Ps. 91:15).

For such worship to strengthen and edify, it must be that it is sincere and true. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Mere ritual (cf. Matt. 6:7) and the innovations of men (cf. Matt. 15:3-9) will not do. Such worship is vain. God expects those who worship him to be sincere in their petitions (*in spirit*) and to worship in

## Increase Our Faith

# Exercising Our Faith: Use What Faith You Have

Marc W. Gibson

I am happy to participate in this special issue on the need to “Increase Our Faith.” The apostles of Jesus recognized their need to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). Each Christian should examine the level of his faith. There are great and good things we are to do to serve our Lord, and we need the faith to accomplish these tasks and to withstand the onslaught of evil.

### THE DANGER OF WEAK FAITH

Weakness of faith is not a condition one should find great satisfaction in. When Jesus told his disciples that they had “little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26), it was not a compliment. Their weak faith would hinder them in surviving the storms of life. The work of the Lord would suffer if their lack of strong faith caused them to cower in fear and intimidation,

or neglect their responsibilities. So it is with us today. Being weak in faith should not provide an excuse for failure, but a motivating reason to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

One very dangerous problem that can result from a condition of weak faith is the failure to exercise the small amount of faith we have. If one focuses on the fact that his faith is weak, and not on the ways that his faith can be exercised to become stronger, then the resulting discouragement will weaken his faith even more and eventually cause him to fall away. Satan is delighted when we see ourselves, instead of him, as our own worst enemy. We then think we cannot have strong faith because of some problem not treatable within ourselves. The true source of

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accord with his will (*in truth*). Nothing less will appease him, and nothing less will bring the peace and strength that true worship affords the initiate.

Man, as a creature, is designed to worship his Creator. Our purpose on earth is to serve him (cf. Eccl. 12:13-14). If we do not take advantage of every opportunity, we miss out on so much. It is my prayer that all will read again Revelation chapters 4 and 5 and realize the great privilege we have to worship the Almighty God in heaven. May we all have the same desire expressed by the Psalmist, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:4).

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the problem is Satan with his lies, distractions, and temptations. We must fight our evil adversary by exercising our faith in obedience to God.

### THE POTENTIAL OF OUR FAITH

Though you may think that your faith is small and useless, take to heart the words of Jesus: “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (Luke 17:6; cf. Matt. 17:20; 21:21). A mustard seed was considered very small and insignificant, but it had great potential (cf. Matt. 13:31-32). Jesus is saying that even a small amount of faith can do great things. Imagine what a strong faith can accomplish! It may seem incredible to think of pulling up trees and mountains and casting them into the sea, but God has far greater and important tasks of spiritual service to accomplish. We need as much faith as possible to accomplish these vital tasks.

### HOW TO EXERCISE OUR FAITH

Physical exercise is important to gaining and nurturing good health. Weak muscles do not become magically strong (no matter what those infomercials say!). They must be exercised to gain strength, which takes time and consistent effort. Weak faith will not become strong overnight — it will take this same necessary time and effort. We must take what faith we have and exercise it daily to gain stronger faith. Strong faith is gained only through hard work. How can we exercise our faith? Let me suggest three ways: (1) gaining the knowledge of truth, (2) accomplishing good works, and (3) fighting the good fight against error.

### GAINING THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH

Education is vital to exercising the mind in physical and spiritual things. One cannot accomplish tasks without the knowledge of how to do so. The Christian’s faith grows in proportion to what he learns. This is why Paul labored to preach Christ “warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28). The word “perfect” (*teleion*) means complete and mature. This is what we strive for in Christ. This is the goal of our faith.

Paul told Timothy that if he instructed the brethren in truth, he would “be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed” (1 Tim. 4:6). He then further admonished him to “exercise yourself . . . to godliness” (v. 7). Nothing can build up our faith like a bountiful feeding of the word of God (Acts 20:32). This is why it is so important to have strong preaching and teaching that is based in the authority of the biblical text. This kind of preaching causes a hungering and thirsting for truth that motivates a Christian to feed himself constantly with the word of God. This is a sure way of building strong faith.

### ACCOMPLISHING GOOD WORKS

The only thing worse than a weak faith is a dead faith. James wrote that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works . . . But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas. 2:17-18, 20). Whatever level of faith we have, we need to be exercising that faith in good works — works that we are thoroughly furnished in God’s word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). James reveals the result: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (v. 22). This “perfect” is the same word we noted earlier that means complete and mature. Our faith grows as we accomplish the work God commands us to do.

There is no better way to encourage yourself spiritually than to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). What you accomplish will be to the glory of the God of heaven. There is no wasted action when we take the gospel to the lost, feed and clothe the destitute, help a neighbor, and speak words of encouragement to the sad and downtrodden. Our purpose is to serve the Lord in accomplishing his will. Each small task accomplished will cause the growth of one’s faith that will lead to accomplishing even greater works to the glory of God.

### FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT AGAINST ERROR

It is certainly not the belief of many today that fighting the good fight against error is a good means of exercising our faith. A growing number of Christians are of a mind to avoid any appearance of controversy, deciding that toleration (and eventually acceptance) of error, and of those who teach and practice error, is the virtuous way. Perhaps in someone’s book it is the best way to go, but not in God’s book. Nothing can sharpen our focus and brighten the light of truth better than when God’s truth stands in contrast with sin and error. Such confrontations (when necessary) serve to exercise the faith of those who seek truth above all else. Many a Christian’s faith has been weakened today by the confusion of the doctrines and opinions of men on issues like divorce and remarriage, the days of creation, eternal punishment, fellowship with teachers of error, etc. These dear souls would be well served by the strong and uncompromising preaching of the truth of God that upholds truth and exposes error (Eph. 5:11, 17).

Yet, the fear many have is that one who is weak in faith will be discouraged further by the discussion and debate that is an inevitable part of any controversy over Bible issues. If that does happen, let me suggest that his faith was not a faith that is derived from *the faith*, the revelation of truth. In that body of truth we are taught to “contend for the faith” against false teachers (Jude 3) and to “wage the good warfare” when some have shipwrecked the faith (1

# Focusing on the Eternal Strengthens Faith

John Isaac Edwards

This study puts before our minds that which is without end, in an effort to boost and bolster our faith.

### THINGS ETERNAL

The Scriptures often speak of things eternal. The word “eternal” appears 47 times throughout the Book of God, and is Spirit-defined as, “the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:18). God (Deut. 33:27), life (Matt. 25:46), damnation (Mark 3:29), power (Rom. 1:20), glory (2 Tim. 2:10), salvation (Heb. 5:9), judgment (Heb. 6:2), redemption (Heb. 9:12), the Spirit (Heb. 9:14), and an inheritance (Heb. 9:15) are among the eternal things of the Bible.

### SOME WHO FOCUSED ON THE ETERNAL

It strengthens faith to zero in on faith figures whose

minds were directed toward the never-ending. Consider for example:

**1. Job.** The Patriarch Job was a man blessed beyond measure “so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:1-3). In a day, however, his life was turned upside down. Four messengers came to Job with tidings of death and despair (1:13-19). He was afflicted “with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown” (2:7). His help meet became a hindrance to him as she said, “curse God, and die” (2:9). This series of events brought great grief to this great man (2:13). It would seem that Job lost everything, but in reality he lost nothing. He retained his “integrity” (2:3, 9). His faith was firm, and his trust triumphant. Job exclaimed, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in

Tim. 2:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). If one’s faith, though it be weak, is based in *the* faith, the controversy between truth and error will *not* do harm, but rather do immeasurable good in strengthening that weak faith with knowledge, courage, and hope. When souls are threatened by error, it is those who say that we should “stop the fussing” and “leave teachers of error alone” that are the real danger to those weak in faith. Truth will be sold out in order to embrace “peace” with the teachers of damnable error, and the white flag of compromise raised to surrender the weak into the clutches of false doctrine. This ugly scene is being played out among God’s people in our day. May we exercise our faith in fighting the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).

### CONCLUSION

Though we may consider our faith as small as a mustard seed, remember that Jesus said that it could accomplish great things. Whatever level of faith you may presently possess, use it in the exercise of service to God. Weak faith cannot grow strong without exercise. It will only continue to weaken and die. Fellowship with God and the hope of heaven is far too great a reward to let slip away. Grow in the knowledge of truth, do the good works of God, and fight the good fight of faith against error! Strive for the day that Jesus can say to you, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Matt. 8:10).

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him” (13:15). How could his faith be so strong in times of such adversity? The answer: Job focused on the eternal. He looked beyond the things which are seen, as he entertained the timeless question, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (14:14), and declared, “I know that my redeemer liveth . . . And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (19:25-26). “So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (42:12).

**2. Paul.** Paul was a man of great faith. For the call and cause of Christ, he suffered in ways we cannot even imagine (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Paul, I have a question for you: Why did you suffer as you did? “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). The faith of Paul was formed by focusing on the eternal. To the Philippians he said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). When he came to the end of life’s journey he announced, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

**3. The Faith Heroes.** The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives a brief biography of the lives of men and women of strong faith. It is reported, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:13-16). Sometimes we lose focus. We forget this world is not our home, “For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). We entangle ourselves “with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4). We become “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). We put our treasures in corruptible places (Matt. 6:19-21). We seek and set our mind on earthly things instead of “those things which are above” (Col. 3:1-2). We become “conformed to this world” rather than “transformed” (Rom. 12:1-2). And we turn our backs to noble causes as Demas forsook Paul, “having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). May we derive strength for living from those who died in faith. And let us build our hopes on things eternal!

### **BRINGING ETERNITY INTO VIEW**

The Scriptures teach that there is life after death (Heb. 9:27). There is a part of man that is immortal, that lives on and on. We each have within us an eternal spirit (sometimes

referred to as the soul), worth more than “the whole world” (Matt. 16:26), which survives the death of the body (Job 32:8; Zech. 12:1; Jas. 2:26; Gen. 35:18; Acts 7:59-60), and goes back “unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7), to await the resurrection of the just and unjust (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15) and the judgment at the last day (John 11:24; 12:48). The judgment scene is pictured in Matthew 25 and the fate that awaits us is unmistakably clear. “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). The place of the cursed is the place prepared for the devil and his angels — the place described as “the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever” (Rev. 14:11). This is ongoing, never-ending conscious torment! On the other hand, “the righteous” pass “into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46). The place of the righteous is the dwelling-place of God, where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

Man is a creature moved and motivated by punishment and reward. The punishment is commensurate with the reward. The torment of the wicked in hell is for the same duration as the comfort of the righteous in heaven. Any teaching that disrupts the balance between the nature of the punishment and the nature of the reward cheapens the reward, and consequently mitigates the motivation to carry out the desired action! The thought of “everlasting punishment” and “life eternal” should move us to a place of faithfulness in the service of God. If I am not so moved, then either I do not have enough appreciation for the severity of the punishment, or I fail to recognize the immensity of the reward. Stay focused on the eternal and your faith will stay strong!

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## “Increase Our Faith” continued from front page

recent converts. Those in this category should have been growing in the faith long ago. However, for one reason or another they have not.

**3. One whose faith has weakened.** There are some whose faith has grown to the point that it was strong and vibrant. Yet, through neglect their faith has weakened a bit. The Hebrews had weakened to the point that they needed to be taught again what they already knew (Heb. 5:11-14).

**4. One whose faith has failed.** Jesus prayed that Peter’s faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). Yet the very comments Jesus made about that circumstance shows that he knew Peter’s faith would fail. One who has allowed his faith to diminish to the point that it allows him to do things he otherwise would not have done, needs to increase his faith.

**5. One whose faith is strong.** One who has a strong faith and is holding to that faith still needs to grow and increase his faith. If he doesn’t, he is not growing.

This special issue of *Truth Magazine* is designed to help us increase our faith, for we all need greater faith. However, we especially have in mind those whose faith has weakened or whose faith has failed. We seek to compile some studies that will help rebuild a faith that has either grown cold or has been shattered.

### FAITH NEEDS TO INCREASE

**1. The disciples’ faith.** On more than one occasion the Lord rebuked the disciples for a lack of faith (Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 17:19-21). Here in our text (Luke 17) the disciples realized that doing what the Lord expected required great faith. They must have felt deficient in the spirit of forgiveness. They knew that greater faith was needed to do what the Lord was commanding.

**2. Our faith.** Our faith must grow too. In fact, it should grow exceedingly as the faith of the Thessalonians did (2 Thess. 1:3). Our faith must be strengthened as the brethren whom Paul visited on his second journey (Acts 16:5).

There are some things in the service of God that are easy to do. They are easy because they are convenient, we don’t mind doing them or they are not contrary to what we really want to do. However, there are other things that are hard. They are hard because they are not convenient, we do mind doing them and they are contrary to what we want to do. What may be easy for one person, may be hard for another.

Whether it is repentance, confession, not retaliating, controlling our thoughts, being content or standing alone for the cause of the Lord, it takes great faith to do what the Lord wants us to do.

### HOW FAITH INCREASES

Let’s notice some things from the context of Luke 17 that tell us how to increase our faith.

**1. Turn to the right source for faith (v. 5).** Notice the text says, “And the apostles said to the *Lord*, ‘Increase our faith’” (Luke 17:5, emphasis mine DVR). They did not turn to Peter, Matthew, James, John, or Thaddaeus to ask for greater faith. Certainly they could help, but these men are not the source of true faith. The Lord is the only true source of faith.

The Lord speaks to us through his revelation (Eph. 3:3-5). Faith comes from the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Thus, if we want our faith to grow and increase, we must spend time with the Lord and his word.

**2. Recognize your own weakness and deficiency (v. 5).** The apostles made application to themselves when they heard teaching on forgiveness. They didn’t think or say, “We don’t think the Pharisees could be that forgiving.” Rather, they took a close look at themselves and said, “Increase *our* faith” (Emphasis mine, DVR). Honesty and sincerity require that we examine ourselves as we look at any instruction of the Lord (2 Cor. 13:5).

**3. Realize what faith can do (v. 6).** Jesus said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (v. 6). The point is that with faith we can do what seems to be impossible. To the apostles, the requirement to forgive seven times in a day seemed just as impossible as commanding a mulberry tree to be cast into the sea. Seeing what faith can do for us will cause us to strive to increase our faith.

**4. Use what faith you have and it will grow (v. 6).** Jesus said that if one had faith as the grain of mustard seed (the smallest of seeds) he could do great things. The emphasis here is not on how much faith or how large one’s faith is, but on using what he has. As with a muscle of the body, when faith is exercised it will grow and increase (cf. Heb. 5:11-13).

**5. Just do what the Lord commands (vv. 7-10).** Jesus said,

And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and sit down to eat”? But will he not rather say to him, “Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink”? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”

Just as a servant simply does what he is commanded without question and doubt, likewise if we just do what we are commanded, our faith will grow.

**6. Be humble (v. 10).** When we have done all that we are commanded, we are still unprofitable servants. Faith cannot grow in one with a spirit of pride or arrogance. With an humble view of self, one has the attitude essential to increase his faith.

**7. Realize you can't overdo it in the service of God (vv. 7-10).** If one were to forgive another as much as seven times in one day, he may feel he has done a lot for the service of God. However, his best service is just what he owes to God. We never become unusually profitable servants.

#### WHAT IS THE DANGER IF FAITH DOESN'T INCREASE?

If faith doesn't increase then: (1) it is decreasing (Heb. 5:11-14), (2) we are not growing (2 Pet. 3:18), (3) we can drift to the point of unbelief (Heb. 3:13), and (4) our standing ground becomes shaky (Heb. 11:1).

#### THIS SPECIAL

We publish this special issue in an effort to help the reader increase his faith. Some of the articles help us to take a look at our own faith as well as seeing the things that destroy our faith. Other articles point out obstacles and misconceptions we face in growing our faith. The rest of the material focuses on what we can do to increase our faith.

We hope you profit from this study and your faith is increased. May we all strive to be "holding faith and a good conscience" (i.e., hold to a strong faith and doing what we know to be right) lest we shipwreck our faith (1 Tim. 1:19).

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### "Checking Your Faith" continued from page 2

with God is not the same as actually standing with God.

**2. Israel did not take heed.** The citizens of Israel failed to live by faith. They mingled with worldly idolaters and complained against God's care and provisions (1 Cor. 10:6-10; Num. 11:1-6; 14:2; 21:4-6; 25:1-9). Instead of taking heed to avoid sin, they made trial of the Lord (Heb. 3:8-9).

**3. Israel fell.** An entire generation was "consumed in the wilderness" because of their rebellion against God (Num. 14:26-35; Heb. 3:17-19).

#### EXAMINING OUR FAITH

We Christians must look carefully at our faith to see if it is what it ought to be. We must clearly discern the first signs of a faltering faith lest our hearts become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" and we depart from the living God (Heb. 3:12-13).

Inspired Scripture is the only reliable standard of measurement to use when examining our faith (2 Tim. 3:16-17). To test whether we are "*in the faith*" requires that we use "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (2 Cor. 13:5; Jude 3). When thus used, the word of God will cut to the deepest recesses of one's heart and soul, exposing every thought and intent of the mind (Heb. 4:12). Look deeply and earnestly into the perfect law of liberty and continue in it (Jas. 1:25). By so doing we will see ourselves the way God sees us, and we will be able to apply God's remedy for every sin we find (Heb. 4:13; Acts 8:20-24).

Examining ourselves with the word of God must be coupled with "all wisdom and spiritual discernment" in order to "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him" rather than deceiving ourselves about the nature of our faith (Col. 1:9-10). We must honestly and humbly assess our spiritual condition in the light of God's word to then make whatever correction is needed in order to be faithful to Christ (1 John 1:9; 2 Cor. 7:10-11; Acts 26:20).

#### SOME DECEPTIONS WE MUST DISCERN

Paul's warning reminds us we may only think we stand with God, when in fact we do not. The danger of overconfidence is real: "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3; cf. Luke 18:9-14). What causes a Christian to become a victim of such deadly deception? How can a person deceive himself into thinking his faith is stronger than it really is? Here are a few suggestions:

**1. By equating men's estimation of our faithfulness with God's approval of us.** One may have a reputation among men of being faithful to God when it is not so in the Lord's eyes. Men may speak well of us, but that does not assure God's endorsement of our faith (Luke 6:26)! We are deceived if we rely upon a *reputation* of faithfulness as *proof* of faithfulness. Like the church in Sardis, one may have a reputation of being faithful to the Lord, but in God's sight be spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1). Instead of trusting in what others say about your faithfulness, trust in what God's word says about your faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Take heed! It is God's evaluation of our faith that matters, not men's.

**2. By minimizing the corrupting effect of evil com-**

**panions.** “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor. 15:33). Israel’s law had commanded her to “not follow a crowd to do evil,” yet she allowed sinners to influence her choices and undermine her faith (Exod. 23:2; cf. Num. 31:16). Brethren, we must not deceive ourselves with the notion that the things of the world cannot corrode and weaken our faith (1 John 2:15-16; 1 Pet. 4:1-2)! Those with worldly values and evil influences are set before our eyes every day: On the job, a fellow-worker tries to induce you to steal from your employer (Tit. 2:10); at school you are urged by a classmate to cheat on a test; the media bombards your senses with temptations of sensual lust. Although Christians cannot “go out of this world” we must not be “*of*” this world (1 Cor. 5:9-10; John 17:15-16). Take heed! If you befriend the world you are an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

**3. By becoming spiritually complacent, neglectful and apathetic.** There are too many lukewarm Christians! To compound the problem, the lukewarm Christian is deceived about his real spiritual condition. For instance, the lukewarm Christian in Laodicea said, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). We may know to do right and good, but unless we actually do what is right in God’s sight our apathetic neglect deceives us and erodes our faith (Jas. 4:17). Take heed! Avoid the downward spiral of spiritual apathy by always being “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11).

**4. By thinking we are above temptation and sin.** We are warned against the deceptive nature of temptation and sin in James 1:16. It is at the very moment one comforts himself with confident assurance that “I will never commit *that* sin” that he is on the precipice of destruction! When we are convinced that we cannot succumb to the enticing lure of sin, our adversary has us in his sights (1 Pet. 4:8). Have you ever said to yourself that you do not have to worry about the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)? Take

heed! Pride goes before a fall (Prov. 16:18).

**5. By relying on our past faithfulness.** We are thankful for those who faithfully fought past battles in defense of the truth. Yet, we also know that as long as we have life within us the battle continues to rage (Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Tim. 6:12). Some stop fighting the fight of faith far too soon. We are tempted to rely upon the victories of the past to assure our present and future faithfulness to the Lord. It was only when he was facing death that Paul said, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7). Just a few years earlier Paul said he had not yet attained nor was he “already perfected.” He did not yet count himself to have apprehended the prize. Instead, he pressed on toward the goal (Phil. 3:12-14). Paul did not rest on past accomplishments, he pressed ever upward. We would do well to imitate his pattern of forward-pressing faithfulness (Phil. 3:17). Take heed! Do not rest on past accomplishments when present opportunities exist (Gal. 6:10; John 4:35).

**6. By equating believing with obeying.** “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Faith that is not obedient is incomplete, profitless, dead, unseen, demonic and barren (Jas. 2:14-20). Only “faith working through love” has power to produce the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5-6). Take heed! Do not deceive yourself that affirmations of faith without obedient action constitutes spiritual strength.

May we all be admonished by Israel’s fall: We, too, can fall! Continually check your faith in the light of divine truth, walk by faith, and thus please God (2 Cor. 5:7-9).

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## History of the Church Through the Ages

by Robert H. Brumback

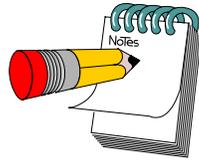
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## Preachers Needed

**Aurora, Colorado:** The Boston Street church of Christ in Aurora, Colorado, is seeking a full time gospel preacher interested in working with an established congregation consisting of approximately 75 members. The church is looking for a man with established preaching experience and solid Bible based knowledge whose desire is to work with a congregation that is striving to remain sound in the faith and true to the Word of God. Full support may be dependent upon preacher’s needs. Send resume, preaching history, and at least three cassette tapes of recent sermons preached to Ernest Kite, 6631 West 112th Place, Broomfield, CO 80020, or call 303-466-7204.

## Quips & Quotes



### "Boston Movement" Founder Quits

"Kip McKean, founder of the controversial International Churches of Christ (ICOC), announced his resignation in a November 6 letter, citing his own arrogance and family problems.

"ICOC critics, however, doubt that McKean's resignation signals that the group will abandon its troubling practices, especially an extreme form of Christian discipling that many believe is abusive (CT, Sept. 1, 1997, p. 64).

"The resignation came a year after McKean took a leave of absence from his responsibilities as World Missions Evangelist. His misdeeds 'have weakened and embittered many in our churches,' McKean said. 'These sins have surfaced in my family as well as the church.'

"McKean also said he was guilty of 'always thinking I am right, not listening to the counsel of my brothers, and not seeking discipline for my life, ministry and family.'

"The confession conceals more than it reveals, says Don Veinot, Jr., president of Midwest Christian Outreach, an apologetics ministry in suburban Chicago.

"McKean's resignation letter is significant because of what it doesn't say,' Veinot said. 'The letter from Kip does not say his teachings are wrong, but that Kip did not live them himself.'

"... The ICOC, known informally as the Boston Movement, has grown from fewer than 100 people at its founding in 1979 to 185,000 members in 430 churches and 170 countries. The ICOC has recruited intensely among college students, but more than 20 colleges or universities have barred the group from campus.

In 1994 the mainline Churches of Christ officially severed ties with the ICOC" (Christianity Today [March 2003], 26-27).

### "Violent" Communion?

"Three gay activists were refused Communion during a Washington meeting of U.S. Catholic bishops last November. They later refused to leave the bishops' hotel until they received Communion. Though they were convicted of unlawful entry, Judge Mildred M. Edwards declined to sentence them, and apologized on behalf of the Church. 'Tremendous violence was done to you . . . when the body of Christ was denied to you,' she said, 'As a member of your church, I ask you to forgive the church.' Sound like an absurd mixing of church and state? Consider this: 'At the end of sentencing,' The Washington Post reported, 'Edwards offered the activists the words priests use at the end of a Catholic Mass: "Go in peace"' (Christianity Today [April 2003], 23).

### Human Cloning

"The U.S. House in late February voted 241-155 in favor of the Human Cloning Prohibition Act of 2003, a complete ban on human cloning. Earlier the House voted 231-174 against a bipartisan measure that would prohibit human cloning for reproduction but allow it for research. Under the House bill, the government could punish violators with up to a \$1 million fine and 10 years in prison. Earlier this year, senators introduced legislation in competing bills. One Senate bill bans all cloning. The other permits research cloning. The Senate has not yet voted on either bill. The Bush administration supports a complete ban on human cloning. The Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, Prison Fellowship, Focus on the Family, and other groups are endorsing an ANTI-CLONING document called 'The Sanctity of Life in a Brave New World: A Manifesto on Biotechnology and Human Dignity'" (Christianity Today [April 2003], 27).

## Baker's Bible Atlas

by Charles F. Pfeiffer

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