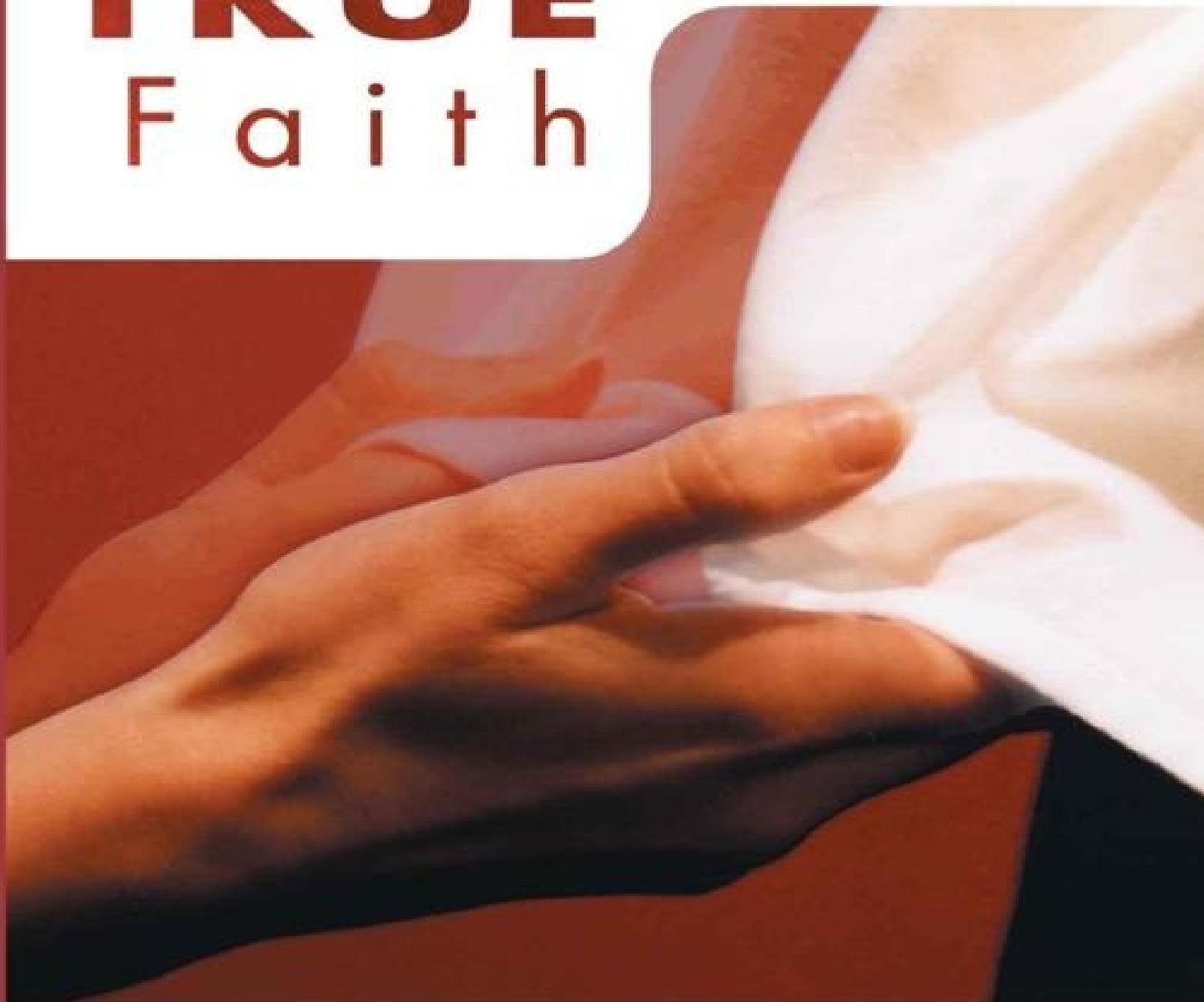


TRUE Faith



Colin Urquhart

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Kingdom Faith Resources
Roffey Place, Old Crawley Road,
HORSHAM West Sussex, RH12 4RU.
Tel: 01293 851543
E-mail: resources@kingdomfaith.com
www.kingdomfaith.com

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Colin Urquhart

Sure and Certain Faith

"Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6) Such a statement should be enough to cause Christians everywhere to long for a life of faith! And yet much misunderstanding and confusion surrounds this word. What does Jesus mean by faith and how can such faith be expressed in our lives today?

Faith is not taking leaps in the dark! It is not vague hope that everything in the future will somehow work out. Put at its simplest: FAITH IS BEING SURE AND CERTAIN.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Heb. 11:1)

The things about which you have true faith are those things about which you are sure and certain! If, as a Christian, you were asked, "Is Jesus Christ Lord?", you would immediately answer: "Yes, I *know* He is Lord." You would not need to hesitate before replying; you know He is Lord. That is true faith.

On the other hand, suppose you were asked if you believed someone would send you a gift of £1 million through the post today, you would probably say, 'I would like to believe that', but you would be far from certain about the matter. You would not know that this was definitely going to happen, unless you had first received some definite assurance that you would receive such a gift.

When people came to Jesus, He often made it clear that their needs were met in response to their faith. Jesus said of the Roman centurion who believed his servant would be healed: *"I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."* (Matt. 8:10) The soldier had a faith greater than that of His own disciples! He believed that Jesus only had to speak a word of command and the healing would take place, such was the authority that flowed through Jesus' ministry.

Then Jesus said to the centurion: Go! It will be done just as you believed it would. And his servant was healed at that very hour. (v13)

Some men brought a paralytic friend for Jesus to heal. They had to lower him through the roof, this being the only way to bring him close to Jesus. *"When Jesus saw their faith ..."* (Mark 2:5) This determination was an expression of genuine faith. Clearly they believed that if only they could bring him within reach of Jesus he would be healed; and he was!

True faith is expressed in both words and actions. Sometimes people say, "I have such great faith", an almost meaningless statement. James points out that: *"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* (James 2:17) So he affirms: *"I will show you my faith by what I do."* (v18)

The Roman centurion spoke faith; the paralytic's friends acted in faith.

The woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years and had spent all her money on doctors said to herself: *"If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."* (Matt. 9:21) Her attitude of faith was not sufficient in itself; she had to act according to what she believed.

When she touched Jesus with her faith He knew power had gone out of Him, even though several others in the crowd were pressing against Him. To the woman He said: *"Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you."* (v22)

The synagogue ruler had come to Jesus to ask Him to come and heal his daughter. As they were on their way to the house, they received news that the girl had died. *"Don't be afraid", Jesus told the ruler, "just believe."* (Mark 5:36) Having begun by expressing faith, Jesus was encouraging him to maintain that walk of faith; to believe what He would do, rather than believe the circumstances. Jesus restored the girl to life.

Blind Bartimaeus shouted at Jesus to have mercy on him, and refused to be silenced by others around him. He demonstrated that faith is expressed in determination. *"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you."* (Mark 10:52)

From such incidents, it is clear that Jesus recognised the need of faith if people were to receive from God. This is also apparent in His teaching:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matt. 17:20)

A seed held in the hand will produce nothing. Once it is sown it will produce results, no matter how small it is. Jesus said: "*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.*" (Matt. 21:22) Such is the power of faith in God!

Unbelief

If faith can lead to the release of God's power, then the absence of faith will restrict what Jesus can do in our lives. This is also clearly seen in the gospel accounts.

When the disciples were afraid of being drowned in the storm, Jesus said: "*Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40) Fear denotes an absence of faith or trust in the Lord. If we trust Him, we have nothing to fear, for **He does not fail those who put their trust in Him.**

On another occasion the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water. He had been teaching them the principle that by faith they could do the same things as He did. So when Jesus told Peter to come to Him, he began to walk on the water too. Then he became more conscious of his circumstances, took his eyes off Jesus, and so began to sink.

Immediately Jesus reached out to his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31)

Doubt causes us to sink under the circumstances - faith enables us to rise above them. Of course, Jesus does not want us to sink, so even when we cry out to Him in desperation, He is ready to rescue us.

When the disciples were discussing their lack of food, Jesus said: "*You of little faith.*" He then reminded them of the miracles of provision He had already performed in feeding the multitude. When we do not expect the supernatural activity of God, we forget who He is and what He is able to do! When the nine disciples who had not been on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus failed to heal a demon-possessed boy, they were perplexed as to why they had been unable to deliver him. "*Because you have so little faith*", (Matt. 17:20) Jesus told them.

So a lack of faith can prevent us from exercising authority over the power of the enemy, even though Jesus has given disciples such authority.

When He came to His own hometown Jesus was upset by the people's lack of faith. As a result, *"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."* (Mark 6:5)

Even though He had appeared in His risen body to some of His followers, Jesus had to rebuke the eleven, for *"their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen."* (Mark 16:14)

From all the evidence in the gospels, it is clear that Jesus wanted His disciples to have a living, active faith that produced dynamic results by releasing God's supernatural power into their circumstances. The absence of such faith disappointed Him greatly.

Faith Brings Results

Jesus had come to bring people to a personal faith in Him through both what He said and did:

Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. (John 8:30) Many in the crowd put their faith in him. (John 7:31) Many of the Jews who...had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. (John 11:45)

He wanted them to understand that great power is made available to anyone who expresses such faith:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I go to the Father. (John 14:12)

Notice that He says this about "anyone who has faith in me". This is not a statement reserved only for the original disciples!

The Acts of the Apostles describes the way the early Church put these words into practice, doing in the name of Jesus the same things He had done. When Peter and John healed the cripple at the temple gate, it produced a great stir in Jerusalem. They had to explain to the crowd:

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:16)

By faith the disciples were doing in the name of Jesus (on His behalf) the same things as He had done in His ministry.

Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, was selected to serve by waiting on tables. However, no matter the context, **faith will produce results.** Consequently, Stephen "*did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.*" (Acts 6:8)

Barnabas is described as *"a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith."* As a result *"a great number of people were brought to the Lord."* (Acts 11:24) Faith enables fruitfulness in the gospel.

Jesus does not focus on an academic or mind-centred approach to faith. **He wants to see a living, dynamic, active, powerful faith expressed by His followers, a faith that produces visible results** through what they say and the way in which they pray and act. Such faith is to be expressed individually by each believer, and corporately by the church. You can have such a faith!

Faith in Jesus

Jesus Himself is to be the focus of faith; the things He said and did. People came to *Him* and put their faith in Him. His concern was not only to see people healed and set free, but to receive salvation and the gift of God's Kingdom that He had come to make available to man:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

He explained further:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (v18)

Such is the power of faith – and unbelief!

All are under the just judgment of God because of their sins, until they are saved from the condemnation they deserve by putting their faith in what Jesus has said and done. So He teaches:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)

To reject Jesus is to remain in spiritual death and under the condemnation brought by guilt. **Faith in Him leads, not only to forgiveness, but to receiving eternal life, God's life, the fullness of life. He explained:**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

The devil is the thief who wants to destroy lives, stealing people's freedom, joy and even their health. He wants them to reject Jesus and the salvation He offers.

By contrast, even though He could have come to judge men for their sins, Jesus made it clear that He had come to save us from the condemnation we deserve. More than that, He came to give us the life and power of God's heavenly Kingdom now. He began His ministry with this proclamation:

The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! (Mark 1:15)

To receive this Kingdom a person has to be *born again*; he passes from death to life by receiving God's forgiveness and putting his faith in Jesus. His or her life without Jesus dies. The new believer then begins a new life at one with their Lord and Saviour:

I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. (John 3:3)

To become a child of God, *you must be born again*, to receive a new birth through God's Holy Spirit coming to live in you. For such a wonderful thing to be possible is indeed good news – the Gospel!

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13)

We see, then, that faith is a relationship with Jesus. It is not a matter of simply believing Him for specific answers to prayer, a healing or a miracle that is needed. Our faith is to be in Him, so that He can then live within us by His Spirit.

Truth is a person: Jesus! Those who believe in Him believe in the Truth. His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, comes to live in them, reminding them of all that Jesus said and did. He guides them into the truth and enables them to live in freedom.

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

Such salvation and freedom are to be found in no-one else. **Only Jesus can enable us to receive the gifts of God's Kingdom power and authority to be given to us in this life. It is only through Him that God's Holy Spirit can come and live in us. We then have in us the same life that was in Jesus, thus enabling us to do the same things as He did!**

I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

By contrast, Jesus warned: *"If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."* (John 8:24) Even among the religious people of His day, many refused to believe that He was God's Son, despite the miracles and healings He performed that confirmed the words He spoke were truly from God. *"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him."* (John 12:37)

This only demonstrates that if a person does not want to believe, he or she can stubbornly refuse to believe, as with the people at Nazareth, and as with many of the Jewish leaders.

It is essential to salvation to believe that Jesus is God's Son, sent by His Father, to be the Saviour of the world. He accomplished the work of salvation by offering His life as a sacrifice for us on the cross.

All mankind has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Sin brings with it condemnation and spiritual death; eternal separation from God. However, God wanted to restore mankind to His glory. He wanted people to manifest His rule and reign on earth and then enjoy the glory of His heavenly Kingdom. Jesus taught us to pray:

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt. 6:10)

The heart of God, then, is not to punish us as we deserve by shutting us out of His glory, and eternally condemning us to live separated from Him. Because sin brings about death, someone had to suffer the punishment we deserve. Sinners dying for other sinners could never satisfy God's justice. No, a sinless offering on behalf of sinners was necessary.

He therefore had to become man Himself, by sending His only Son into the world to bring us the good news that God wanted to open the Kingdom of God to us, both now in this life on earth, and eternally in heaven.

First Jesus had to succeed where all others had failed. Even though He shared the weakness of our humanity and was tempted in every way as we are, He remained sinless. He obeyed His heavenly Father completely and then allowed Himself to suffer the death of a criminal, of the guilty – even though He Himself

was completely innocent. The Sinless was offering His life for sinners, the innocent on behalf of the guilty, the perfect for the imperfect, the Holy for the unholy.

The punishment that brought us peace was laid upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:5-6)

He came and identified with us in our need, that we now can identify with Him in His life and glory!

A New Life

The price for your punishment has been paid. Faith in what He has done for you on the cross means that you can know His grace. **You are forgiven, saved from the judgment, condemnation and punishment you deserved. Saved for God. Now you can live a life that glorifies Him, a life of faith. He died to set you free from your past and make you a new creation, with a new heart and with His Spirit living in you. You can continue to trust in Him and so continue to live in freedom from fear, guilt, condemnation and punishment. You can be thankful for the life, power and authority of the Kingdom God has placed within you; Jesus can rule and reign in your life. You can live in the good of God's eternal life that is now yours.**

All this is truly wonderful and is to be enjoyed by every believer in Jesus Christ. He wants you to live in freedom from all the things that have caused chaos, confusion, hurt and rejection in the past; to see yourself as the new creation He has made you, now you are born of God.

When writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul explains the process of faith within a believer. Faith in what Jesus has said and done has made it possible for a person to be *justified*, made right in the sight of God. This means that the **believer is totally accepted by God, not through anything he or she has done, but because of what Jesus has done on the cross.**

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Rom. 3:22)

This righteousness is a gift from God, a work of His grace. And grace is what God gives freely to those who deserve nothing. So the only way to qualify for grace is to recognise that you deserve nothing! That is easy, isn't it? He gives His everything to those who know they deserve nothing! Paul explains:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (Rom. 6:8)

When Jesus died on the cross, the old person you used to be died with Him. When He was raised from the dead, those who believe in Him were raised with

Him so they can receive and live in the good of His risen life. So Paul gives a brief summary of his personal testimony:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Even though he was an enemy of Jesus at the time of the crucifixion, Paul came to understand that Jesus had taken not only his sins to the cross, but Saul the sinner! His former life was put to death and now Christ lives in him. So the life he now lives is by faith in the One who proved His love for him by dying for him, and who now lives in Him by the presence and power of His Spirit.

These things are true for everyone who has been born again. Every believer can say that he has been crucified with Christ. The person he was no longer lives, but Christ now lives in him. The life he now lives is by faith in Jesus, an ongoing relationship of faith with the One who died and rose again for him.

Believers in Jesus become children of God and co-heirs with Jesus of all that God has to give:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs. (Rom. 8:17)

There is no longer any condemnation for those who belong to Jesus. For Christ not only lives in them, they live in Christ, and there can be no condemnation in Him! As they share with Him in His death, so now they share with Him in His life. **They have been saved from a life without God, for a life to be lived with God, in God even!** John, the apostle, explains:

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. (1 Jn. 4:15)

What a transformation! From a life separated from God through sin and death, to a life lived in Him, at one with Him! And because you now live in Him, His life in all its fullness is available to you!

All this because you put your faith in Jesus!

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"

and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trust in him will never be put to shame." (Rom. 10:8-11)

And so we come back to the truth we saw at the beginning. True faith is expressed in what we say and do!

Speaking Faith

What you believe in your heart, you express in what you say. Jesus said that from the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. And so if you believe that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour, you will speak of Him as such. And you will express your faith by walking in daily dependence and trust in Him. The Spirit God placed within us enables us to have a spirit of faith.

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak. (2 Cor. 4:13)

God spoke creation into being. The word that went forth from His mouth was Jesus; all things were created through Him and for Him. When He became man, Jesus spoke and the dead were raised, the sick were healed, the demonised set free and sinners were forgiven.

It is His Spirit that now lives in you. **With the same spirit of faith you are able to believe and therefore speak.** You can speak to mountains of need and expect them to be moved. You can pray with faith and expect God to answer you. You can overcome the devil by the blood of Jesus and the word of your testimony.

It is important to speak faith if you are going to live by faith. In other words, you cannot claim to live in faith if the things you speak over your life contradict the truth of what God says and deny what He has done in love for you. **You place your life under the words you speak. To speak what disagrees with God's Word is to speak curse over your life. Whenever you agree with Him and speak accordingly, you speak blessing over yourself and your circumstances.**

Faith is expressed in the things said by the believer, but is received by what he hears.

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:17)

The message of the gospel has to be heard to encourage faith within the believer's heart. Paul makes this very clear when he asks the Galatians two

pertinent questions:

*Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?
(Gal. 3:2)*

The question can have only one answer, by believing what was heard through the preaching of the gospel. Faith does not come from legalistic, religious observance!

Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:5)

The Galatians had received the Spirit by responding with faith to the message preached to them. In a similar way God worked miracles among them in the signs that followed the preaching of the Word, because hearing the Word proclaimed inspired faith in their hearts! As he writes, they are in danger of falling back into formal, lifeless, religious practices; and he cannot understand such foolishness. Having tasted the reality of God's life and power released into their lives by faith, why should they want to return to the lifeless, religious conformity they had known previously? It made no sense to him!

To Paul, "***the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.***" (Gal. 5:6) Remember, faith is a relationship with the One who is love! It is trusting in the One who revealed His love by dying for you. There is nothing more He needs to do to prove His love; He has already made the ultimate sacrifice as a demonstration of that love.

Faith is not to be reduced to making a series of statements of truth, yet without a relationship of love with Jesus. Some speak a faith language that seems hard, condemning and certainly does not encourage faith in others. The life of faith is not to be reduced to a series of slogans, even if they are words of scripture. What we say with our lips is to come from our hearts, from the love we have for Jesus.

From the moment of true faith, the Holy Spirit comes to live in the believer to enable him or her to express faith in love!

The Spirit and the Word

The critical work of salvation is a gift of God's grace. He gave you a new life in response to your faith, once the gospel of truth had been revealed to you:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. (Eph. 1:13-14)

The word and the Spirit are to operate together in your life. Jesus Himself made this clear:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. (John 16:13)

Jesus said the Holy Spirit *"will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26) "He will testify about me." (John 15:26) "He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you." (John 16:14)*

The Holy Spirit points you to what Jesus has said and done, to encourage your trust in Him and dependence on Him! The Holy Spirit gives revelation of God's Word, often causing scriptural truths to jump out of the page and into your heart. He enables faith when you are confronted with issues that normally you would not be able to cope with.

Every believer has to distinguish between facts and truth.

Truth, we have seen, is a Person – Jesus. His words are the words of truth; His Spirit the Spirit of truth. Anything that conflicts with what He says and does cannot be the truth, therefore. No matter how much other things may appear to be the truth, they are in reality only facts.

Facts can change; the truth can never change. Truth is eternal because Jesus is eternal. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away. They will even outlast creation as we know it.

People tend to think that what they feel about themselves is the truth about themselves. Emotions are real but can change very rapidly. The truth can never change. Emotions and thoughts about yourself often seem dramatically opposed to the truth, as revealed by God! So the individual Christian has to choose whether to believe what God says (the Truth), or what he feels and thinks about himself.

The believer is living *in Christ Jesus*, where there is no condemnation. Yet he or she may feel condemned, a useless failure. What is he or she to believe? The feelings that change, or the Truth that never changes? To put your faith in your own thoughts and feelings is to trust in yourself – and that is asking for failure! To trust in Jesus is to believe what His Word says about you, even if this contradicts the way you think and feel! It is to see yourself and your circumstances as He sees them!

The negative way you feel about yourself is not the truth. The truth about you as a believer is that you are now in Christ, and He lives in you. Because of all He has done for you, your past sins are forgiven; you are not the failure you used to be, but a new creation in Christ. You are not a rejected person; you are accepted. You are not 'poor you'; for "*in Christ you have been enriched in every way*", (1 Cor. 1:5) and have been "*blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Him*". (Eph. 1:3)

When you put your faith in the truth, your attitudes and feelings towards yourself and your circumstances change. You realise that the Lord is greater than any of your problems or needs; that He has indeed met every need of yours "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus". (Phil. 4:19)

Not only do your thoughts and feelings seem real; so do the circumstances in which you are placed. Yet these are only facts; they are not the truth! Facts, like your thoughts and feelings, can change. **The truth is eternal and can never change!**

This does not mean you deny the reality of the facts, living in false denial of our circumstances. Rather, you make the decision to trust Jesus to change the facts, instead of believing them to be the unchangeable truth. **Facts cannot change the truth, but the truth can change the facts.**

If you have a sickness, that is a fact; there is no point in denying the existence of

the sickness. However, that sickness is not the truth; it is only a fact. It can be changed by the truth "***by the stripes of Jesus we are healed.***" (see Isa. 53:5)

The same principle applies to all the daily circumstances of our lives. No matter what the facts, faith in God can change the situation. This is why Jesus urges us to pray with faith, believing the promises He gives us.

So with the eyes of faith you do not see things as they appear to be now, but as they will be once Jesus has transformed the situation through His grace in response to your prayer of faith. This is the expectant attitude He wants you to have.

Praying With Faith

Jesus clearly teaches us to pray with the expectation that we shall receive whatever we ask of Him. When teaching 'the prayer of faith', Jesus says first, *"Have faith in God"*. (Mark 11:22) Don't believe in the problem, your feelings, yourself, your own ability or even in other people to be the answer to your need. Focus on God Himself. He is your Father. He wants to give to you as His child. He is also Almighty; nothing is impossible for Him.

Then He tells you to speak to the mountain of need and believe in your heart that it will be moved. Expect your prayer to be powerful and effective. When you ask, believe you *have received* the answer; and Jesus promises, *it will be yours*.

Faith does not say you will receive, but that you have received. You see the answer as already accomplished. This is why you are told to pray at all times with thanksgiving; for if you genuinely believe you have received the answer, you will be thankful. Such faith is a matter of the heart. It is not simply saying that you have received if you do not genuinely believe you have!

When Jesus stood before the tomb where Lazarus had been dead for four days, He lifted His eyes to heaven and said, *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* (John 11:41-42)

He could then confidently command Lazarus to come out of the tomb. He was already *sure and certain* of the outcome because He had prayed to His Father with faith. The apostle John writes:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 Jn. 5:14-15)

John heard Jesus give His promises of answered prayer. Of course, he understood that God would not give what was in opposition to His will. Neither can we pray truly in the name of Jesus for what opposes His purpose. However, God has given us the revelation of His will in His Word. We can pray with the

utmost confidence for anything that scripture reveals to be His will for us!

Jesus does not anticipate that prayers in His name will receive negative answers:

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:13-14)

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. (John 15:7)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16)

I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name... Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete (John 16:23-24)

Again, I tell you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. (Matt. 18:19)

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (Matt. 21:22)

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)

These promises, when brought together like this, demonstrate overwhelmingly that God wants to answer our prayers, and we are to expect Him to do precisely that.

However, we need to pay attention to all Jesus says when giving these promises. He is speaking to disciples who have a relationship of faith in Jesus; a walk of trust with Him. So notice these points:

- **The reason Jesus will do whatever we ask in His name is to bring glory to the Father.** He will not do anything that opposes His will.
- **Jesus insists we ask *in His name*.** This is not simply using His name, or adding His name to the end of every prayer in a formal way by repeating

such phrases as, "*through Jesus Christ our Lord*".

If you went into my bank and asked the cashier for £100 from my account he would not give it to you. Even using my name by saying that Colin Urquhart sent you, would be insufficient to be given the money. If, on the other hand, I gave you a signed cheque for £100, the cashier would honour this and hand you the money. The cheque is the guarantee that the request for the money was instigated by me. You are at the bank *in my name*.

You pray in the name of Jesus when the prayer originates with God's Spirit. He shows you what to believe and how to pray in any given situation. Then you pray what Jesus would pray, and believe what He would believe.

- **Faith is responding to God's initiative.** It is not taking the initiative into your own hands by issuing God His orders! No, guided by His Spirit, you believe according to the revelation of His Word. You believe what He tells you to believe!
- **He will do whatever you ask *in His name*.** Why? The inspiration for the prayer begins with Him! By His Spirit He tells you what to pray and by His word what to believe. And He does it! Jesus is, therefore, the Author and the Finisher of your faith.
- **Because faith comes from hearing His words, these words are to have their rightful place in your heart.** You live by revelation of the truth, not putting your trust in your feelings or in the facts.
- **When His words live in you, Jesus promises you can ask for whatever you wish, because you will not ask for anything that contradicts His word and therefore His will.**
- **Jesus chose you to bear lasting fruit for the glory of the Father.** If you are living to obey Him and please Him, He will give you whatever you ask in Jesus' name:

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. (1 Jn. 3:21-22)

John was present when Jesus gave these wonderful prayer promises. He wrote these words about 50 years later, time in which to experience that God was true to His words of promise; but it was necessary to pray within the context of living to obey and please Him. Rebellious, disobedient children are not going to obtain the same results!

- **The Father wants to answer you and He wants your joy to be full.** You enjoy having prayers answered, and this is a further encouragement to your faith.
- **When two agree in faith, the Father will do whatever they ask.** This is not simply an agreement of what to pray, but an agreement in the expectation of what will happen in response to the prayer. When both agree as to what is received, it is done! Both are sure and certain as to what will happen in response to their prayer. Such assurance is the fruit of knowing that God has undertaken and the outcome is certain.
- **So Jesus makes it clear that every prayer of faith will be answered.** He knows when you truly believe you have received the answer. Thinking something will happen is not the same as believing God has done what you ask. *He will do it* is not the same as *It is done!*
- **There needs to be perseverance in our faith.** When Jesus says, "*Ask and you will receive*", His word means literally, "*Go on asking*", "*continue to ask and you will receive*". He taught His disciples to persevere and not give up. Faith is often expressed in persistence and determination.
- **Jesus says that "*everyone who asks receives*".** In other words, God does not have favourites, choosing to answer the prayers of some but not of others. Of course He sometimes waits for you to fulfil the conditions that go with the promises; and this is for our own good. He always has your welfare at heart.

If all this seems daunting, it need not be so. Everything God does for you or gives to you is a work of His mercy and grace. You can never deserve anything, no matter how much you obey Him. Every gift is more than you deserve and is given out of the abundant generosity of His heart.

It is for this reason that you can pray for people who have no genuine faith in

Jesus and see wonderful miracles of His mercy and grace take place. If a person is not a believer, He does not expect the person to believe! He honours the faith of the one praying.

Jesus taught the disciples the *prayer of faith*:

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:22-24)

Once a person is born again, he or she becomes a child of God. Now the ground rules are different, for God expects believers to believe. And **WHEN BELIEVERS BELIEVE, BELIEVERS RECEIVE.**

We are to live as the children of God. Seeking to please Him and believing He will honour our prayers and take care of our needs:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given as well. (Matt. 6:33)

There will be no need to worry or be anxious, the very opposite of faith and trust in Jesus. *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow", (Matt. 6:34)* Jesus says. Live through each day with Jesus – He will give you the faith to trust Him for today and all the circumstances that arise today. Tomorrow He will give you grace for tomorrow. **But you don't need tomorrow's grace today!**

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11)

God wants to give to you because you are His child. He has already made provision for your every need and has given you all the riches of Christ. They are yours to be taken hold of by faith. He does not wait until you deserve anything, for then you would never receive anything! He wants you to believe that He is so gracious that He will give what you need, although you deserve nothing. **He wants you to have faith in His grace.** When we come before His throne in prayer, we approach the throne of grace:

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:16)

Obstacles to Faith

We can see that there are certain obstacles to faith. Although we do not want to dwell on these, we need to recognise them so that we can avoid them.

- **Unbelief**

This is the most obvious obstacle, and is an absence of faith for the particular situation that confronts you. It may be that you have never faced such a problem before or had to trust God in such a situation. It seems at first to be beyond your scope of faith.

This is when you need to be open and honest with God. Don't try to convince Him that you believe, when He knows every thought you have and the desires and intentions of your heart.

Unbelief is sin because it is failure to trust Jesus. So confess your unbelief to Him and ask Him to forgive you – He will! Then ask Him to speak a word of faith into your heart. And He will do that also! When you need faith He will give it to you if you ask Him, no matter what situation confronts you.

- **Sin**

Other forms of sin can hinder prayer and our ability to receive from God.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:8-9)

The answer is simple: confess your sins to the Lord, receive His forgiveness and allow Him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Let Him give you a clean slate.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

- **Unforgiveness**

This is a great hindrance to prayer. Because God is merciful in forgiving you, it is imperative that you are merciful to others whenever they sin against you. God does not want you holding onto any offence. Jesus links the need to forgive others to times of prayer.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. (Mark 11:25)

When teaching the Lord's prayer, Jesus said:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matt. 6:14-15)

Unforgiveness is like a block that prevents the flow of His power into your life and circumstances. Don't wait until you feel like forgiving others. This is a decision of your will; you choose to forgive, in the same way that God chooses to forgive you through His mercy!

- **Disobedience**

This is, of course, another form of sin, but it is not necessarily something done; it can be failure to do what the Lord has told you to do!

Even at the human level, parents do not like to give to their children when they are disobedient. That is one way to spoil a child. He or she will not see the need for obedience if rewarded for disobedience!

Your heavenly Father knows that it is always to your advantage to obey Him. Sometimes answers to prayer seem pending until you are obedient to the Lord!

- **Conflict of wills**

There will be occasions when what you want conflicts with what God wants for you. This may simply be because you want your own way, or simply because you do not understand what is right for you. God is not going to submit to your will; it is for you to submit to His will. And He always wants what is best for you.

At times you may genuinely believe that you are praying according to His

will, but for some reason you are mistaken or deceived. This is an experience all Christians have at times. God does not judge you for this. He lovingly withholds from you what you ask, while He redirects your understanding as to how to pray and what to believe in that particular situation in which you find yourself. He is working for your good in all circumstances.

- **Lack of revelation**

There are occasions when you need to seek revelation from God as to how to pray and what to believe. Because of our pride we think we know what to do, without listening to what the Spirit is saying to us, or to the way in which He wants to guide and direct our prayer.

The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Rom. 8:26-27)

Even when you do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit within you knows exactly what is right! Part of the outworking of your faith is to trust the Holy Spirit who lives in you to pray within you. *"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions." (Eph. 6:18)*

Jesus said: *"Apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)* The person of faith does not try to do anything apart from Him. He wants to include Jesus in all he does, depending on the resources of the Holy Spirit. The believer will even pray at all times in the Spirit!

- **You do not draw near**

In prayer we are to draw near to God. In Jesus, *"and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Eph. 3:12)* The writer to Hebrews says something similar:

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. (Heb. 10:22)

Jesus has made it possible for us to come right into the Holy of holies, the place of His Presence where we are standing before His throne of grace. Of

course it is true that God hears every cry of your heart. But when you draw near to Him in prayer, it is easier to hear what He is saying to you and faith is at its strongest. He is with you always wherever you are; but He wants those times when you are prepared to be with Him where He is!

To do this you come through the gates of thanksgiving into the courts of praise. Thanking God for what He has done encourages your faith. When you praise Him, you focus on who He is and this is an even greater encouragement to faith. Sometimes you need to persist in your praise until you know you are in His Presence; then you will have the assurance that He hears you.

- **You forget His promises**

To have faith in God is to believe what He says, and therefore the promises He gives. He is the God of promise. You need to understand that when He gives a promise, He reveals not only what He intends to do; He speaks of what He sees already accomplished!

He is the Beginning and the Ending. He dwells in eternity and can see the end from the beginning. He knows the future as certainly as He knows the past. So if He says He will do something, He will! No-one will be able to stop Him. He sees His plans and purposes already accomplished and watches over you to see them outworked in your life day by day.

- **Listening to the enemy**

The devil will do whatever you allow him to do to steal your faith. He will try to persuade you to concentrate on yourself, on your fears and feelings rather than fix your eyes on Jesus. He urges you keep looking at the problem so that it seems bigger and bigger and more and more immovable.

Above all, he wants you to talk about your problems, your needs, your fears, your feelings. He wants you to concentrate on the negative and will remind you of past failures, trying to make you feel condemned for the way you have sinned. He tempts you to sin and then makes you feel condemned if you yield to the temptation! He even makes sure Christians feel false condemnation simply because they have been tempted, even though they were successful in resisting the temptation. He is a liar, deceiver and a thief.

He can steal faith if he is allowed to do so, when you do not receive the

word Jesus speaks to you. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. (Matt. 13:19)

To live a life of faith it is necessary to be deeply rooted in the word, to have God's word firmly in your heart. When the seed of God's word falls on rocky soil, the man who hears receives it with joy.

But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (Matt. 13:20-21)

Weeds can grow up to choke the good seed that God sows:

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. (Matt. 13:22)

When the seed falls on good soil, a believing heart, it can produce a hundred-fold! In other words, many others will be blessed through the faith of that person:

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

Essential Principles of Faith

It is essential for us not only to know the word in our heads, but to believe it in our hearts. For then we will be careful not to speak anything that contradicts what God says:

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. (Prov. 4:20-27)

In these few verses we see encapsulated many of the principles of faith we have already outlined.

- **Faith comes from hearing God's Word;** so you need to listen clearly to what He says.
- **These words are to be in your heart,** not only in your Bible. As a person of faith you will be a man or woman of God's word!
- **Faith in these words releases God's life into your life and even produces health for the whole body.** Not just healing, but the health that will enable you to resist sickness. Prevention is better than cure!
- **When God's word lives in your heart, it becomes a wellspring of life,** both for you and for others around you. Jesus says that from deep within those who believe there flow out streams of living water from the Holy Spirit.
- **Refuse to speak what is perverse or corrupt** – anything that disagrees with what God says, as that is a lie fathered by the enemy.
- **Keep your gaze ahead of you – on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.** Do not allow yourself to be distracted or to fix your eyes on the problems or needs that confront you. Jesus is greater than any need you could ever have!
- **You are able to walk with Jesus, in relationship with Him.** Your feet are

firmly on the Rock that will never fail you.

- **Walk in obedience to God's will**, honouring the Father and therefore keeping your feet from evil.

The Rest of Faith

To live by faith is to *rest* in God. This is not being passive; it means that instead of trying to accomplish things in your own strength, you trust in God. Instead of trying to solve your problems by your own wisdom, you depend on Him.

Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. (Heb. 4:11)

When you trust God, you will be at peace. When yoked with Jesus, you allow Him to take the strain.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

The Lord wants you to enter His rest, the place of peace that comes from loving Him, trusting in what He says and acting on the word He gives you. The word of God has to be combined with faith, otherwise it is of no value to you.

...the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest... (Heb. 4:2-3)

Therefore you have no need to worry or be anxious. You do not have to strive to accomplish God's will in your own strength. He will inspire faith in His word and give you the grace to obey what He says.

Paul saw that his apostolic responsibility was to call people "*to the obedience that comes from faith*". (Rom. 1:5) **Faith is not simply consenting to the truth of God's word, it is expressed in obedience to His Word.** You can hardly say that you believe His word, if you do not put it into practice!

You may concentrate on certain truths that encourage your faith, and on promises that direct you to the good things God wants to give and do in your

life. However, you are not to be selective, believing only those things that appeal to you while ignoring the rest. All scripture is written for your learning and God wants you to live by the whole of His counsel, of His revealed truth.

It is not for you to say I believe this, but not that. I accept this, but not that. I will obey this, but not that. Jesus is your Lord, which means He is the authority in your life. You belong to Him because He has paid the redemption price for you with His own blood.

Faith That Overcomes

Trusting in God leads you to the release of His authority and power in your daily life. Jesus does not promise that life will be easy; but He does enable you to overcome the difficulties that confront you. You are always led in God's triumphant procession in Christ!

To triumph and overcome means that there will inevitably be circumstances in which you need to triumph and obstacles and difficulties to overcome. Those who overcome are those who have learned to persevere in faith.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

This is typical of the New Testament's positive attitude to adversity. This is a far cry from those who question God's love for them as soon as they have any kind of difficulty. They often complain about their circumstances instead of trusting God to enable them to overcome.

James said that God gives generously to all, without finding fault. If their prayers are not answered immediately, many Christians become introspective. They search within themselves for some reason and so take their eyes off Jesus, making it impossible to persevere in faith. We have seen that unconfessed sin can be a hindrance to receiving from God – but you do not have to go searching for such sin. If you keep your focus on Jesus, He will show you anything about yourself with which He wants to deal. Some well-meaning but misguided counsellors even help people to be introspective, and so inadvertently undermine faith in Jesus.

You will never find the answers to your need within yourself; only in Jesus! Pray with faith in Him, therefore. James warns that the believer must not doubt when he prays:

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a

wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is double-minded, unstable in all he does. (James 1:6-8)

The double-minded man believes one moment, doubts the next. He appears to pray with faith and then speaks negatively about his circumstances to others. He says he trusts God and then strives to accomplish things in his own strength. He says he is a new creation, yet still lives as a victim of his past! He prays for boldness of faith, yet walks in fear!

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline. (2 Tim. 1:7)

By the Spirit, that self-life, the flesh which cannot please God and in which there is nothing good, has to be kept in its right place. For Jesus said that you can only follow Him if you deny your self-life, not express it, or analyse it, or imagine that it has some key that will enable you to live the new life.

New life can only be lived by faith in Jesus. Therefore you need to keep your eyes fixed on Him! Faith is not only hearing and assenting to what He says in His word; it is putting that word into operation.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22)

For this reason James is adamant that faith without ensuing works is dead. Those who walk in the truth walk in freedom, led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. They see the life of God's word being expressed in their lives and His promises fulfilled. The apostle John wrote:

Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it who overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 Jn. 5:4-5)

It is God's purpose for every born again believer to overcome; he or she can only do this by faith! **It is your faith that gives you the victory over whatever adversity, problem or opposition arises.** Jesus warns that you will have tribulation, for the ways of the world in which you live are in direct contrast to the life of God's Kingdom to which you belong. He tells you to rejoice and to have courage because He has overcome the world.

To trust in Him, therefore, is to have faith in the victory He has already achieved. He leads you in His triumphant procession; it is not His intention that you should live in fear, frustration and failure. He will never leave you, fail you or forsake you.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:9)

These are commands from God, not simply good advice. He is with you always; you can trust Him in every situation and allow Him to lead you through victoriously.

Some Christians do not like such talk of victory, only because they do not live in the victory that God intends for all His children. So do not be deterred by the unbelief that others sometimes demonstrate. The Lord is with *you* so that *you* can trust Him and see His power work in *your* circumstances.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, (Isa. 43:1-3)

As in scripture, so today, opposition to the gospel comes from religious people who do not put their faith and confidence in what God has said and done for us. Do not let this prevent you from living with a vibrant faith, knowing you live in Jesus and He in you. He knows no defeat or fear, no failure or despair. **So trusting in Him will enable you to come through every difficult situation. You will learn that in all things God is present with you, working for your good.**

The life of faith enables you to live victoriously in the real world, with all the pressures and contradictions of modern life, for the truth of the gospel remains constant. The apostle Paul knew what it was to experience appalling opposition, persecution and suffering. (See 2 Cor. 6:4-10, 11:23-28) Yet he always maintained a positive attitude. The believers were "*beaten, not killed; sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*" (2 Cor. 6:9-10)

Jesus taught Paul that, no matter what the situation, "*My grace is sufficient for*

you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". (2 Cor. 12:9) Recognising his own weakness, he depended on the strength of Jesus. So he concluded, "when I am weak, then I am strong". (v10) He could even rejoice in the things that caused him to feel weak. The joy of the Lord was his strength.

A Life of Joy

Paul encouraged the churches to which he wrote, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!*" (Phil. 4:4)

Joy is the barometer of your faith. If you stop rejoicing in the Lord, you effectively stop walking in faith. This is why it is important to keep our focus on Jesus. When we look at Him, we readily appreciate that He is so much greater than any situation of need that faces us. The situation seems to be well within His ability and we realise we have no need to worry!

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

Faith is a relationship with Jesus in which rejoicing, prayer and giving thanks to God become a way of life. And this is God's will for you because He has placed you in Christ Jesus.

When you rejoice and give thanks, God undertakes for you. Often it seems that He does little to change the situation while you resent your problems, feel sorry for yourself or blame others for your predicament. **As soon as you begin to rejoice and give thanks, the power of faith flows through your life.** Instead of dwelling on yourself and your feelings, look to Him with a positive faith attitude.

On many occasions you will not *feel* like rejoicing or giving thanks, or even praying. This is when you have to obey with a sheer act of the will, regardless of your emotions. If you allow your feelings to govern your life, you will not walk by faith. Jesus is your Lord, and He is to govern your life through obedience to Him.

When you feel negative you have to force yourself to rejoice and give thanks. At first this can seem false, totally unreal. The enemy will try to stop you by suggesting that it will be ineffective if you do not feel like rejoicing, hypocritical even. Don't listen to his suggestions. Obey God's word. Rejoice in the Lord always. And always means always! Give thanks in *all* circumstances; that is, *all*

circumstances, for this is His will for you in Christ Jesus!

It will not be long before your feelings begin to become more positive, for whatever you do in your spirit will influence your soul; and your emotions are part of your soul life!

No matter how difficult the situation, God's grace is sufficient for you. John wrote:

From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another (John 1:16)

There is that word all again! Paul also used it when he spoke of God's grace:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Cor. 9:8)

His grace is a universal principle of the way in which God works among the children of His Kingdom. He gives and gives and keep on giving to those who deserve nothing.

Giving and Receiving

However, His children are not only to look to Him with joy and thanksgiving, they are also to reflect His abundant generosity by the way in which they give. Jesus teaches an important spiritual law: **the measure you give determines what you receive. You reap what you sow!**

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Luke 6:38)

These words of Jesus make it clear that God will always give far more back to us than we can ever give to Him; yet He waits for us to give first. We have to sow seed if we want to reap a harvest.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)

Reproduction is as much a principle of God's Kingdom as it is of nature. A giving heart is a good heart and will reap abundance from the Lord. This does not mean you can buy blessing or manipulate God. He simply waits until you give before releasing what He wants to give to you – by grace.

The act of your giving your life to Him became the point at which He gave His life to you. And what grace! You gave a life of sin, failure, frustration, disobedience and rebellion against God. He gave you the fulness of His life, placed His Kingdom within you and came to live in you.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)

Jesus left the glory of heaven, accepted the limitations of His humanity and offered His life as a sacrifice on the cross **so that "you through his poverty**

might become rich". This is grace. This is God's love in action. Because He has been so merciful to you, He wants you to be merciful: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*" (Matt. 5:7) Forgive and you will be forgiven. If you do not judge, you will not be judged. Give and it will be given to you. The same principle is there throughout Jesus' teaching.

So giving also becomes a way of life for the true believer. He gives because he wants to give, to bless God and to bless others. And he learns that this enables him to receive readily from the Lord. **He gives readily and receives readily.**

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion... (2 Cor. 9:11)

The Benefits of Faith

There are many benefits that come from a life of faith. Peter says that **through faith we "are shielded by God's power"**. (1 Pet. 1:5) Faith in Him keeps you protected by Him. He is your Shield, your Fortress.

The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith"*. (1 Pet. 5:9) **As a believer, Jesus has given you authority over all the power of the enemy.** He that is in you (the Holy Spirit) is far greater than he who is in the world (the devil). You resist him, not in your own strength, but by submitting yourself to God, strong in your trust in Him. Then the life of the Holy Spirit within you will enable you to overcome, for the enemy comes up against the One in whom you trust - and flees!

It is through faith that you receive everything you need, not only to overcome the enemy and the things that oppose you, but also to enable you to live the godly life to which God has called you.

Peter tells his readers they have received a faith as precious as that of the apostles. (2 Pet. 1:1) They believe in the same God, have received the same gospel, are part of the same Kingdom and can inherit the same promises as these first believers. He affirms:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

What amazing truths for every believer in Jesus Christ! He has given you everything you need for life and godliness. You have been given His very great and precious promises, along with the New Testament believers. Through these, you are able to participate in the divine nature, in God's own life and power. And you are able to escape the corruption caused by the evil desires of the flesh and the temptations that come from the enemy.

You need to accept personally such truths from scripture. You can affirm that these promises are given to you so that you can live in the good of them. This will not only bless you greatly, because you will be living in the revelation of truth as God intends; it will also enable you to be a more effective witness to others. This will make you a channel of blessing to them. The apostle, John, wrote:

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 John 4)

Through the blood of Jesus Christ the believer is cleansed from his sins and made righteous in God's sight. And *"the righteous will live by faith"*. (Rom. 1:17) Having been brought into a right relationship with God, the believer sustains that relationship through living by faith. It is His purpose that faith in Him lies behind all of the believer's decisions and actions. For *"everything that does not come from faith is sin"*. (Rom. 14:23)

The Old Testament heroes of faith referred to in Hebrews, chapter 11, lived by faith. Although in scripture we read only of some of their exploits, those events came out of a life of faith.

The chapter begins by saying that *"faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"*. (v1) Those men and women were sure and certain of their God. They understood that *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* (v6) It is also significant that *"all these people were still living by faith when they died."* (v13)

They did not simply express faith on specific occasions when they needed something from God; **they lived by faith**. They saw His miracle-working power in their lives; they lived in the supernatural.

Living in the Supernatural

Faith releases the supernatural activity of God into our natural lives. We are people of the new covenant or New Testament. We have the Spirit of God working within us, something that was not possible for those Old Testament characters. They could experience God working with them and for them. We can know God working with us, for us, within us and through us. Jesus explained this difference concerning the Holy Spirit's working to His disciples:

The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:17)

The Holy Spirit came to indwell them at Pentecost after Jesus had returned to heaven. As a result, those same men were able to move in the supernatural power of God as Jesus had done.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43)

This is the quality of life Jesus has made possible for you: to be full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, full of grace, full of power.

You have the same fulness of life they had! All things are possible for you because you believe. By faith in Jesus you will do the same things that He did! He says so!

The whole Christian community is able to live in the supernatural power of God:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Matt. 16:17-18)

They will exercise their authority over evil spiritual forces. They will manifest the supernatural gifts of God's Spirit. They will be protected from harm supernaturally by God. They will perform supernatural acts such as healing the

sick.

This is God's purpose for every believer to live in His supernatural power. It is for this reason that the Lord comes to indwell born again believers with the life of His supernatural Holy Spirit. If He intended only certain individuals to move in such supernatural activity, He would have been very selective, giving His Holy Spirit only to a minority of believers.

Yet this is His gift to *all* true believers in Jesus. His desire is that all should be like Stephen: full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, full of grace and full of power.

What is the point of possessing God's supernatural life and power, and yet choosing to depend on your natural, material resources instead? Religion has the outward appearance, but denies the reality of God's power in the believer. People can appear to be very religious, but God's power is lacking in their lives: the power to overcome sin, **the power to live the new life by faith in Jesus, the power to defeat the evil forces of the devil, the power to see supernatural answers to their prayers and supernatural events when they minister to others in the name of Jesus.**

The righteous will live by faith, and will, therefore, live in the supernatural power of God's Spirit. We are all limited by our natural abilities and resources; but there are no limitations to God's supernatural power and ability! To depend on Him will inevitably lead to the release of His power into our lives.

Faith in Jesus is to enjoy a close relationship with Him. He is your partner in everything, therefore, and you can trust in His power rather than your weakness.

Faith and Love

You sometimes hear people say that their church is not very strong in faith; but that does not matter very much, they imply, because it is a *loving* congregation. They quote Paul's words to justify this position: "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." (1 Cor. 13:2) However, Paul also says:

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

There is no tension between love and faith - the two belong together. To suggest that Paul believes that love is all that matters, and that faith is of no great importance, is to completely misrepresent him and the entire gospel. **It is not faith or love, but faith through love.**

Without love, faith can seem harsh, proud and even condemning of those with little or no faith. **When expressed through love, faith builds others up, encourages them and releases the supernatural power of God.**

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 1:3)

Here are the three things that will endure: faith, hope and love. They are not in competition with one another; they belong together in the lives of believers. Paul makes it clear:

Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. (1 Thess. 1:5)

An alternative translation for *deep conviction* is *great faith*. Paul did not believe he had preached the gospel fully unless he saw God's supernatural power at work, "*by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Holy Spirit*" (see Rom. 15:18-19). In this way "*I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ*". (v19)

The gospel of *"the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power"*. (1 Cor. 4:20) There is much talk among religious Christians, but little power. That does not reflect the faith of the New Testament. We are not to imagine that we will be effective in spreading God's Kingdom here on earth without demonstrations of God's power that confirm the authenticity of what we preach and teach. It is not that we want people to put their faith in miracles, but when people believe God, supernatural events are bound to take place, simply because He is supernatural, Almighty.

Paul urges Philemon: *"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."* (v6) In the next verse, Paul commends him for his love. Faith and love, love and faith. Faith through love! This is God's purpose.

You were saved by faith in God's love; and you are to continue to live by faith in the grace through which He expresses His love.

Paul is stating an important truth to Philemon. The more you speak out your faith and share it with others, the stronger you become in faith. The more you explain what it means to live in Christ Jesus, with all His riches and resources available to you, the more you come to understand *every good thing we have in Christ*. Both love and faith are to be expressed continually and together in the life of the believer.

Only a Seed

It is common to hear Christians say they need more faith. Jesus' disciples said to Him: *"Increase our faith!"* So they must have felt the same way.

The Master's answer is significant, for He makes it clear that it is not the amount of faith you have that matters, but what you do with that faith. You do not need a great amount of faith; but put your faith to work and it will produce significant results. Even a tiny amount of faith in One as great as God will be enough to see any situation resolved – such is the power released through faith in God!

He replied: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. (Luke 17:6)

Jesus explains in one of His parables of the Kingdom that what starts as a seed becomes a tree! That seed of faith can even move mountains and, *"Nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matt. 17:21) However, you will express that faith by speaking with authority to the problems that need to be moved, as well as to the Lord who will move it!

A seed contains life, but has to be sown before that life can develop. Potentially, the faith you have within you can accomplish great and mighty things in God. For this to happen, that faith has to be put to work.

Faith in God is necessary for His purposes to be accomplished. Jesus asks: *"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8) When Jesus returns, this is what He will be seeking – men and women of faith; those who, like Paul, can say:

I fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

It is for this reason that he urges Timothy: *"Fight the good fight of faith"* (1 Tim.

6:12)

Yes, the life of faith often seems like a fight – against the limitations of your human reason, against your negative feelings, against the devil and all his works, against the legalistic attitudes of religious conformity – those who have the language but not the power! It is a fight against sin, sickness and oppression. But it is a fight that leads to victory. For faith in Jesus Christ overcomes! He has already been victorious, and nothing can ever overcome Him, or those who trust in Him!

Further Reading

It is strongly recommended that you read the companion book to *True Faith*, entitled *True Grace*

About your inheritance in Christ:

In Christ Jesus – published by Kingdom Faith

True Life – published by Kingdom Faith, available on Kindle.

About how to pray with faith:

Anything You Ask – published by Hodder & Stoughton

About overcoming difficulties through the truth:

The Truth that sets you Free – published by Hodder & Stoughton

About healing:

God's Plan for your Healing - published by Marshall Pickering

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