

Why Faith Doesn't Operate in Your Life!

The issue of faith is usually a complicated one in most peoples' minds. Many claim to believe, but then they wonder and question and doubt when circumstances don't turn out as they expected. Even though we may have a genuine belief in God, there are specific reasons why the gift of faith may not be in operation in our lives.

by Jim Rector

The Scriptures describe the people of God as a people of faith. Faith is listed as both a gift of the Spirit (**I Cor. 12:9**) and a fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**). Why then do so many true believers have problems when it comes to faith actually operating in their lives?

I believe that there are specific reasons why this condition can, and often is, present. It does not necessarily stem from a lack of belief in the existence of God or even in the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for sin. These basic aspects of faith are usually in place in the average believer's life. No, the reasons go beyond the

foundational building blocks of faith into the finer details where we tend not to focus. Let's address some of the more important items.

INABILITY TO BELIEVE

Let's start with the

inability to believe something that God has said or promised. Please remember that belief in God and Christ is not at issue in this discussion. This first reason refers to things other than the basic concept of God as Creator and Christ as Savior.

Experience has taught me that many of us, indeed at times perhaps all of us, reach a certain point in our journey of faith where moving on begins to make us feel uncomfortable. We sometime calls these stopping point spiritual plateaus. The reason for our feeling discomfort is often because to move on from where we are will require of us an exercise and stretching of faith that we have not heretofore had to face--and this set of circumstances causes us to fear and wonder and doubt, and thus our forward progress tends to slow down and eventually stop altogether.

So often we do not look at faith as a journey, but as a state or condition. Once we assume we have the state or condition, we tend to stop going forward. But that is not the way it works. God continually is beckoning us to step out into strange, different, uncharted territory in our lives. He consistently wants to challenge us in the aspect of faith.

What causes a believer to stop moving forward in the area of faith? One of the most significant factors is wrong teaching. It is sad that ministers and church leaders do not seek to strengthen the faith

of the flock. I believe that the reason for this is simply a desire to not lose control by those who have power. This is a lamentable situation that is present throughout the Body of Christ today.

I once listened to a well-known Sabbatarian *evangelist* drone on for 90 minutes, attempting to show that God doesn't heal today. He approached his audience very subtly, and carefully put little roadblocks and detour signs in their minds. When the session was over, I was aghast at the overwhelming reaction of the listeners. Almost every one of them had completely flip-flopped in their belief with respect to this subject. In other words, in 90 minutes, a clever *minister* had caused virtually an entire audience of believers to lose faith in something that God has promised to fulfil. This is how quickly and easily one's faith can be destroyed.

Now all these people still believed in the existence of God and His Son, but they had taken one giant step backward in their system of belief relative to what that God could do. In an almost systematic way, many ecclesiastical leaders have chipped away at the faith of church members, literally leading them away from truly believing the clear statements and promises of God in the Bible.

Hand-in-hand with wrong teaching as a tool for tearing down the faith of others is the issue of diluting the Scriptures--of

weakening the force and effect of certain hard passages, passages that test and try a person's faith. Here's an example of what I mean: a *minister* is preaching and comes to the following verse:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Phil. 4:18).

Now, instead of this hypothetical minister actually encouraging his audience to believe the fullness of Paul's statement, he either overlooks the significance of it altogether, or, if pressed, plays it down, leaving the distinct impression that the apostle really didn't mean what he said--that he actually didn't intend one to take his statement at face value.

Why do this? Because if someone is actually able to believe what Paul wrote in this instance, his personal spiritual life might well take off like a rocket, and where would that leave the poor minister? He would have to face a member of his congregation that literally believed he could do all things through Christ in him. Wow! Think about it! Someone actually believing what the Bible has to say, and whose life suddenly becomes spiritually empowered. I know very few *ministers* who could or would ever want to handle such a situation. It would just cause too much disruption. It just might turn the apple cart upside down or rock the boat, and, well, we sure wouldn't want something that drastic to occur! So, the hard Scriptures are usually ignored or

watered down or summarily and conveniently explained away, and the listeners take it all in and calmly follow the lead of the one they perceive to be in charge.

There are other reasons that could be factors in whether or not one is able to believe God under certain circumstances. If you are made to feel undeserved guilt or have a sense of defeatism in your life, it can wreak havoc in your spiritual life. No one knows this better than Satan the devil, and he is the master at grieving God's people with a load of **GUILT AND SHAME** over their past and even current life.

Constantly carrying the burden of guilt and shame will defeat you spiritually about as certainly as anything you could imagine. It dishonors God and the Messiah, who have actually taken away that guilt and bore that shame, and it puts its victim squarely in the hands of the enemy, who will stop at nothing to convince that person that they aren't worthy of God's blessings, that their course is hopeless, that they are not going to make it after all. When an individual is in such a state of mind, he is consumed with himself, shuts Christ out of his life, and causes it to be virtually impossible for faith to be in full operation.

On the other hand, another sure, yet contrasting, contribution to one's inability to believe what God has said is **SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS!** The person

afflicted with this foul spiritual malady is truly in a class of his own. Puffed up with his own importance, utterly full of himself, overflowing with self-assurance, reeking with self-centeredness, this individual doesn't really feel the need to believe what is challenging and difficult. His arrogance blinds him into erroneously assuming that his relationship with God is right on target, and how dare anyone even intimate that faith is not really operating in his life!

Finally, **DISTRACTIONS** can be someone's undoing when it comes to fully believing all that God has said and promised. Things that distract us and take our minds off spiritual matters, that tend to keep getting in the way, tying up our time, sapping our energy, all play a part in keeping us from living empowered, faith-filled lives on a day-to-day basis.

I suppose that to some, the subject of distractions may seem almost too simplistic, but I have discovered that many believers not only allow themselves to become distracted, but actually desire to be in such a state. Why? Because they realize that the more distracted they are, the less likely they will have to deal with the heavier issues of God's Word, the less challenge they will have to cope with. So, in essence, they literally use things that distract them for the very purpose of having an excuse for not focusing on the hard questions and situations with which believers are confronted. This, in turn, causes

them to live lives that are spiritually mediocre, operating not by real faith at all, but merely by sight.

BELIEVING THE WRONG THING!

The second point I wish to cover with you when it comes to the operation of faith has to do with believing the wrong thing. In other words, not discerning the truth on a matter. Paul wrote:

“Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH” (II Tim. 2:15).

The writer of Hebrews teaches us that **“strong meat belongs to them are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to DISCERN both good and evil” (Heb. 4:14).** And the apostle Paul adds the following:

“Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may PROVE what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

The inability or unwillingness to rightly divide the word of truth or to discern right from wrong or to prove what God's will is, all work against the operation of faith in the life of a

believer. People with this problem are those that may be careful not to run away from a difficult challenge or hard Scripture, but who simply are unable to understand what they are facing, and thus unable to come to terms with it, whatever form it may take in their lives.

Someone in this particular situation is easily misled, not only in not discerning the truth of a matter, but in accepting something that is indeed untrue or inaccurate or inapplicable. So they tend to go through life blissfully self-deceived, simply because they are unwilling to apply themselves to the proper study of the Word so that they will gain the wisdom and know-how of right discernment.

If you believe the wrong thing, it doesn't matter how much God has provided for your spiritual well-being, you will not be able to receive it. Many people greatly misunderstand the principle of believing and receiving from God. Believing does not automatically mean that you receive. Many people are believers, but they don't receive. We will address this problem momentarily.

This is really a very important matter for all of us to consider. Believing the wrong thing can certainly come from faulty teaching, but it is also strongly indicative of a spiritually weak individual, someone who is not applying himself as he should to the Word, and thus is easily led to the wrong answer or conclusion

on a matter.

Wisdom and discernment are characteristics that can be imparted by the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that if we lack them, we should go to God directly and ask for them. God has made us an ironclad promise that He will answer such a request. Taking this condition seriously and dealing with it before God in a forthright manner will go a long way in opening the door to a fuller operation of faith in the lives of believers. I urge all of us to give consideration to this point.

FAILURE TO ACT ON OUR BELIEF

This third reason why faith may not operate fully in our lives as it is intended has to do with our failure to **ACT** on our belief. Faith is something that has substance. It is not some religious-sounding term, some ethereal concept. Faith is a power that must be understood, embraced, and actively utilized by the believer.

There are several things that tend to hinder us from acting on our faith. First of all, I must say that once again wrong or faulty teaching can be one of the main reasons behind this failure. Unless there are true Godly teachers who are willing to instruct and

encourage the brethren to become active in their faith, who seek to impart confidence in the Word and in the Spirit of God to act in an individual and personal way with each believer, there will always be a large segment of God's people who live weak, mediocre, unempowered lives. When the leader is clearly walking by sight rather than faith, it is a sure bet that many of the members will follow suit.

Aside from this reason, however, there are others that each of us must consider and take to heart. Certainly one condition that virtually always stops us dead in our tracks is the desire for **COMFORT!** It is almost impossible to state strongly enough how much this state of being is desired by God's people. They simply do not want to be bothered or challenged or moved from where they are. If something does come along and somehow unsticks them, they automatically and immediately run for cover, seeking yet another haven where they will be safe, secure, and insulated from the direct hands of God getting a hold on their lives.

The desire to be free is good as far as it goes, but free from what? The freedom that God grants is not the right to be free from Him and the challenges, confrontations, requirements, and difficulties of this life and calling. In fact, Godly liberty brings with it incumbent responsibility upon each of us. Wanting a problem-free life, while it may appeal to the

flesh, should not be our objective in the Spirit. Virtually all of God's true servants of the past had hard lives, tested and tried lives, lives that were literally put on the line for the work and will of God. Do we, for one moment, think that we are better than our fathers; that we are so special as to be delivered from the often arduous and even downright unpleasant responsibilities that come our way in God's service?

The state of smooth-sailing, of coasting, of spiritual cruise control, of one day blending into another in a form of calm, casual existence is not what God wants for His people, especially in the world of danger and deception in which we live today! God is looking a few good men and women! God is searching for soldiers, for fighters, for a bold, courageous, faithful people who can and will do exploits in His service!

He hates the fact that so many of His people will do virtually anything to insure that their personal lives are as comfortable as possible, while His work for them goes undone! By far the biggest culprit in this whole easy-religion situation are the corporate church organizations who, knowing what the people really want, go out of their way to provide a safe, comfortable little pasture in which the members can lazily amble, be sheltered from the storm, be fed pabulum, and basically become spiritual vegetables!

God condemns this life of

spiritual luxury and ease. He knows that it turns His people into marshmallows, into doormats, into weaklings that will not and indeed cannot act on the faith they have been given. Notice His alarming words through the prophet Amos:

“Woe to them that are AT EASE in Zion (Church), who trust in the mountain of Samaria (organizational hierarchy)...You that put far away the evil day (lull God's people to sleep by refusing to preach the strong truth), and cause the seat of violence to come near; that LIE upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches (the easy good life), and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall...that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive” (Amos 6:1-7).

Brethren, please take these words to heart. Don't waste your time trying to find the easy way out. Don't be averse to having God rock your boat. Satan the devil will use this almost insatiable desire on the part of we humans to seek comfort and safety above all other concerns against us. If we continue to succumb to these innate carnal drives, we will never receive the deeper and greater spiritual things of God, and consequently we will continue on with the passive, fruitless, unempowered spiritual lives we have been leading for years and

years! Is this what we really want? Is this what we are willing to settle for at this most crucial time in our lives?

If you desire to have the power of faith operating in your life, you emphatically must resist and reject the human tendency to look for the easy way out, to be lured into safe havens with the promise that others will take care of you, to be lulled into a spiritual hypnotic trance! You absolutely must insist and demand that this sort of approach become a thing of the past in your life. You must drop the covering, the safety blanket if you will, that men have provided, and walk out naked before the Living God, shouting, **“HERE AM I”!**

Remember that if faith is not operating in every area of your life, one of the main reasons may be your failure to act, to step out, to sense the move of God’s Spirit and move with it. If you perceive that this is indeed an issue in your life, take it to God right now. Don’t let another moment pass before you go to Him and pour out your heart on this matter, determine to turn around and go the other way, and implore God to give you the strength within to walk this journey of faith! Nothing is more desperately needed among God’s people any more than for such a powerful transformation and spiritual revolution to occur.

James once wrote: **“What does it profit, my brethren,**

though a man say he have faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?...Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone” (James. 2:14, 17).

Everything you believe may be absolutely true, but you will only leave the place where you are by acting on what you believe. That is why the Bible teaches us to **be doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).**

SIN IN YOUR LIFE

No discussion of this subject would be complete without clearly recognizing and admitting that sin and unrighteousness can easily be a very significant factor in our inability to fully walk by faith. After all, we are told that sin literally cuts us off from God(**Isa. 59:1-15**).

Unrepentant sin is like a cancer that eats away at us inside. It festers and weakens our resolve. It causes us to not be able to believe God for all that He can do in our lives. It destroys our confidence to come before Him boldly and to fully expect and anticipate that He will act in our favor.

The apostle John put it best when he said:

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall ASSURE our hearts

before Him. For if our heart CONDEMN us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart CONDEMN US NOT, then we have CONFIDENCE toward God. And WHATSOEVER we ask, we RECEIVE of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (I Jn. 3:18-22).

Beside overt transgressions, sometimes sin can be hidden in one’s life, so that the believer is totally unaware of the problem. Realizing that this can be the case, we all ought to be diligent in examining ourselves before God. Human beings do not like to do this, however, and the likelihood is that they won’t get around to actually and honestly doing it. Those of us who have been set free and are desirous of moving on with our God and His Son are going to have to focus on hidden sin in our minds and hearts. Remember David’s famous words, when he said:

“Search me, O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:23-24).

This passage contains some of the soundest advice in all the Scriptures for us today. If faith is not operating in your life the way you want it to or in the way you know it ought, ask God to shine His bright light into your

heart and search in every closet, attic, crevice, or cranny and root any hidden sin out once and for all. Then and only then can you approach Him in full confidence and have Christ's faith working in you on a moment-by-moment basis. Then your life can be regenerated in the Spirit, and the door will be open for you step out by faith into new areas of obedience and service. Then your life will begin to bear real fruit.

GOD'S PREPARATION

Now we come to one of the most overlooked reasons why we often don't receive what we believe for. Let's suppose that you are indeed a person of true faith. You have overcome the inability to believe God. You are not guilty of believing the wrong thing about any given matter. You are willing to act or step out on your faith, but you still do not receive. What gives? What could possibly be wrong?

One of the most profound truths that God's people need to learn is that between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment thereof, there is often a waiting period--a time span of variable length during which nothing positive seems to be happening. A time, in fact, where circumstances appear to be going backward rather than forward, almost as though God hadn't even heard or paid attention to your request or to your situation. Are any of you familiar

with this occurring in your lives? If you are like most of us, I strongly imagine that you know where I'm coming from.

Why does God seem at times to wait so long? Why does this have to be a factor in the principle of believing and receiving? It would be so much easier, simpler, and more pleasant if God would just give us what we ask for precisely when we wanted it or intervened on our behalf immediately. We just hate to wait, and so often this attitude leads us to loosen our hold on the profession of faith we have made. After all, it looks like God isn't going to do anything anyway, so we may well weaken our resolve or try to solve the situation by our own devices.

Brethren, this is probably the most crucial time for believers, that period after we have discerned the will of God, and prayed fervently in full expectation for the answer. This time is so very significant, because God has a great purpose for it. In many cases, even though we may fully believe, we still have to be **PREPARED TO RECEIVE!**

All we have to do to prove the truth of this point is consider just a few of the outstanding examples from the Scriptures. How quickly did God set His hand to perform what He had promised to Noah? A few minutes, like most of us would demand? An hour or a day or even a year? No, He waited and He waited and He waited--for at least 120 years He tarried, while

poor Noah had to keep on keeping the faith! Do you think you could be faithful to God for a 120 years before receiving His promise to you? Frankly, most of us would begin doubting before the first day was out!

Abraham and Sarah were promised a seed through whom the whole world would be blessed, but once again God saw fit to wait and wait and wait. Finally, it reached the point that neither Abraham nor Sarah were even physically able to bear children. Then and only then, some 25 years after the promise was made, did God suddenly decide to act on their behalf and fulfil His promise.

We could cite case after case of this sort of thing occurring over and over again. It was true with Joseph, Job, Moses, and David. Many of the prophets gave their messages of warning and then died before ever seeing God fulfil the word they had spoken.

In God economy, waiting is an integral part of the preparation process. Just because God promises something, and just because we believe it, does not automatically mean that we are ready to receive it. And if we do not take this potent factor into consideration, we will almost surely begin to doubt and allow our profession of faith to slip away. And when that happens, we are already out of relationship with God to receive anything anyway.

God speaks to us in this

matter with the following instruction:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us HOLD FAST OUR PROFESSION” (Heb. 4:14).

Many believers only associate such a statement with their personal belief in God or about Christ, but it involves much more than that. It covers every confession or profession of faith that we ever make in our spiritual lives. It means that when we come before God and make a petition, we must make certain that we hold fast that profession of faith after we have prayed. Being forewarned is being forearmed. Remember this great principle of believing and receiving. We must not only ask in faith, but we must also hold fast our profession of faith should we be tested in a period of waiting. Once again, we are taught from the book of Hebrews on this subject:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us HOLD FAST THE PROFESSION OF OUR FAITH without wavering, for He is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:22-23).

With these facts in mind, like weapons in our arsenal, we can confidently and boldly approach God on any matter of

concern, and present all our petitions to Him in the full assurance that, in His infinite wisdom and careful timing, He will always perform what He has promised.

While we are on this issue of time and the process of waiting for God to prepare us to receive, we might also consider the fact that faith itself is like a seed that is planted within us by the Holy Spirit. Anything that is planted is intended to grow, and growth always takes time and patience.

Many of God’s people commonly feel that they need more faith, but the reality is that they need what faith they have to grow and bear fruit. There will, therefore, be instances when God may delay an answer, because our faith still needs to grow some more before we are ready to operate on the higher level for which we are believing. So, please take all these factors into consideration, and ask God to grant you the patience to let Him work in your life as He sees fit. We must also exercise such longsuffering toward each other as well, always remembering that we individually are a work of God **IN PROGRESS**. Let us, therefore, resolve to allow each other the room to grown, and the time for God to work in our lives.

Always remember that we have an enemy who is vigilant, and who is seeking every opportunity to snatch away what God has given us. It is a fight, and one of his greatest weapons is to try and confuse and

discourage us, especially when things seem to be turning out differently than we had hoped or are taking longer to be fulfilled than we had anticipated. We must stay the course once we have made a commitment of faith before God. He who has promised is faithful to perform, but things must always be on His terms.

HARDNESS OF HEART

This particular point is not one is well understood by many in the Church, yet it can be a significant factor in faith not operating in one’s life. We know this because of some very specific examples from the Scriptures. It is the story of Christ’s feeding the five thousand, and is recorded in Mark 6.

“And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things. And when the day was far spent, His disciples came unto Him and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy for themselves bread, for they have nothing to eat” (Mark 6:34-36).

I know the story is almost too familiar, isn’t it? But, please bear with me just for a moment.

The scene is set in array before the disciples. They are about to be tested, but they are blissfully unaware of it. Notice now how Christ responded to the situation they have brought to His attention:

“He answered and said unto them, YOU GIVE THEM TO EAT” (v. 37a).

Wow! This was surely an unexpected challenge with which the Messiah countered. The companion account of this event, recorded in John 6, tells us that He purposely made this statement in order to **PROVE** the disciples! And true to their nature, notice where their focus really was:

“And they said unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?” (V. 137b).

In other words, the disciples, instead of either trusting the Messiah to show forth the power of God, or of actually moving forward themselves in that power and doing precisely what Christ had told them to do and feed the people, they chose to pull out their pocketbooks and try to solve the dilemma according to their own devices.

Christ, of course, as we all well know, fed the 5000 from only a few fish and several loaves of bread. It’s the story after the story, however, that is really telling.

Once the miracle had occurred, the Messiah, it is said in

Mark 6, constrained His disciples to cast out upon the Sea of Galilee. He, however, did not go with them, but rather went up into a mountain to pray.

At some point during the fourth watch of the night, a tempest arose, and the disciples found themselves in a dangerous situation, rowing with all their might to keep the boat from capsizing. While they were in the midst of their toil, what should they see but a figure coming toward them walking upon the water!

Now let’s read the rest of the account from the gospel of Mark:

“And He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night He comes unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw Him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. And immediately He talked with them, and said unto them, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And He went up unto them in the ship, and the wind ceased; and they were sore AMAZED in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they CONSIDERED NOT the miracle of the loaves: for their HEART WAS HARDENED” (Mark 6:48-52).

This is really a tremendous episode for all of us today. Here

were the disciples, who had been eyewitnesses to a powerful miracle only a few hours earlier, now amazed, troubled, and afraid upon seeing Christ walking toward them on the water. And the Scriptures state that, because their **HEARTS WERE HARDENED**, they did not remember to consider the great miracle they had seen. The lesson here is that if you or I are amazed at the fact that God can and will do whatever He will, we have hardened our hearts toward Him.

A little later another event occurred that sheds additional light on the lesson of this story. It is recorded in Mark 8:

“In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and said unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; for many of them came from far” (Mark 8:1-3).

Here was a set of circumstances almost identical to the previous situation--a large group of hungry followers. Now, you would think that the disciples would have known precisely what to do and how to approach the problem they faced. After all, had they not just witnessed how Christ handled the feeding of the five thousand, and then learned the lesson of that event when He came walking to them on the water?

Well, not really. Instead of immediately allowing their faith to operate in the matter, and responding positively toward the situation, realizing the power of God that was available to them, the first thing that proceeded out of their mouths were the following words:

“And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness” (Mark 8:4).

Why didn't they remember? How could all of this incredible experience be lost on them? The answer has to do with focus. Whatever you put your attention on determines the condition of your heart. It is not nearly a matter of how much we know, but what we think on that controls whether our heart is hard or soft toward God.

How many of us have had God do something wonderful in our lives, and declared that we will never doubt God again; and then something bad happens, and we are completely thrown for a loop? That is hardness of heart, and it is a major factor in the operation of faith in our lives.

To complete this our discussion on this point, let's read the rest of the story that follows this second miraculous feeding:

“Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than

one loaf. And He (Christ) charged them, saying, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, He said unto them, Why reason you, because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Have you your HEARTS YET HARDENED? Having eyes, see you not?, and ears, hear you not?, and DO YOU KNOW REMEMBER? When I broke the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took you up? They said unto Him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took you up? And they said, Seven. And He said unto them, How is that you do not understand” (Mark 8:14-21).

Hardness of heart is not always or necessarily outright rebellion against God. It is often relating more easily to the natural realm than to the supernatural. Once again, hardness of heart is not so much a matter of not knowing the truth, but rather not focusing on it and perceiving it in a way that will actually produce real spiritual change in our lives. When this condition is present, we can even see miracles performed, and still not be able to step out and act on faith when we are challenged.

It is imperative that we be careful of where our focus really is, of what we do and do not put

emphasis on in our lives. Abraham, in contrast to the disciples, was a great man because of what he *did not consider*, what he did not put his attention on. Speaking of Abraham and his family in Hebrews 11, we read:

“And truly, if they had been MINDFUL of that country from when they had come out, they might have had opportunity to have returned” (Heb. 11:15).

This is a powerful statement for us today, because it tells us the secret of Abraham's strength. He could easily have focused his attention on the place from which God called him, and, had he done so, the Bible states that he might well have found a reason or excuse to have turned back. But the patriarch's emphasis was on God. His eye was on the city built without human hands. His focus was squarely upon where God was leading and moving. So, brethren, must it be with each of us.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT!

The apostle Paul told Timothy:

“But you, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto you are also called,

and have professed a good profession before many witnesses” (I Tim. 6:11-12).

Let us never forget that we are engaged in a war, with many battles yet left to fight. We must view ourselves as soldiers, as people of action, as victors and more than conquerors through our Lord and Savior.

Fighting is not easy. You can get hurt in a fight. You could get bloody and carry permanent scars from such an encounter. Paul told the people of his day that he carried about in his own body the suffering and scars of his service to God. I submit to you, brethren, that we can expect no less in our lives.

Most of us do not yet really know the battleground of faith, because we have been sheltered from it for so long, but that is in the process of changing. We are ultimately going to learn what it truly means to walk by faith and not by sight. We are going to grow in faith to the point that even the hardest and most challenging aspects of God’s Word are going to come to life in our lives. We are approaching the time when we can read **Matthew 21:21-22**), and genuinely believe it and receive it:

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, if you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say unto this mountain,

Be you removed, and be you cast into the sea, it shall be done. And ALL THINGS whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, BELIEVING, you shall RECEIVE.”

Remember that faith must become a way of life for God’s people. The word *way* implies movement, decision, determination, action, direction. Living faith is not passive in nature. It is always stepping out, reaching out, taking hold, holding fast, moving on. When you think *faith* think *active*.

Faith is a journey and takes you places--places you probably never even envisioned or imagined--sometimes places you never wanted to go. But as surely as we seek to walk in the footsteps of Christ, we must not only walk *as* He walked, but also *where* He walked.

The walk of faith is not easy, nor was it ever intended to be. The power to believe and turn that belief into positive action and discernable spiritual fruit in one’s life has been made available to each of God’s children. The way of faith, however, is oft-times fraught with difficulties, uncertainties, and obstacles. It is in this very area of one’s spiritual life that the enemy seeks to do his most diabolical work, for he knows that without faith it is impossible to please God.

The life of faith takes time and patience and endurance and is truly a learning experience all along the way. I urge you not to make the assumption that faith is truly the operative principle in your life, but

rather examine yourselves before God in this critical matter.

I strongly perceive that God is drawing out a people for His great name, and that the period of upheaval and change that is currently transpiring is all a part of that special calling and purpose. My hope and prayer is that as many of God’s people as possible pick up on this movement of the Holy Spirit. Today, there is a window of opportunity for those who will wake up and catch the vision of what God is doing and where He is going. For those who respond, the future will not be an easy one. You can expect more challenges, more difficulties, more sacrifice, but, for those who stay the course, who hold fast the profession of their faith, there will come the precious fruit of faith and a walk of life that will be empowered and pleasing to God.