

The Faith Files

The Corinthians Letters

September 8, 2001

1. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your **faith** might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (NIV)

- We can put our faith in things other than God. Here men's wisdom is mentioned as a possibility. It is even possible to put our faith in faith instead of in God. I trust my ability to have faith rather than God's ability to provide. Is that possible?
- There are persuasive "salespersons" who can sell us things that convince to buy into what they are saying. If they don't lead us to faith in God, however, they are useless religious hucksters. I have "bought into" great sounding systems that guaranteed God's response, only to find I had bought a "bill of goods" from a skilled salesman.
- We have the potential to make any godly principle a system that we then use to control God. Perhaps that is why Jesus never repeated how He healed, so people would not make healing a system, but rather a divine touch from an intimate God.
- An example of this tendency is found in the Old Testament. Israel took the bronze serpent that God used to heal them of their scorpion bites and made it into an object of worship. They took something good and from God and made it into a system to be worshipped. (see Numbers 21:9 and 2 Kings 18:4)
- Have you replaced God with any of His principles? Have you reduced God to a set of understandable, human procedures that allows you to control God?

2. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (NIV)

- There seems to be a gift of faith that is a one-time, supernatural endowment that enables the believer to trust God for some special event or result.

- This faith comes from the Spirit and is given as a sovereign act of grace. It can't be duplicated or imitated.

3. 1 Corinthians 13:2-13

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a **faith** that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: **faith**, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (NIV)

- If we have faith without love, then we are empty. Faith not expressed to other people through love reduces us to nothing. Faith that doesn't increase our love for God makes us nothing. Faith that doesn't increase our love for others makes us nothing.
- Faith, hope and love are all related. Love is the greatest of the three. Do you know those who are strong in faith but weak in love? Are you?
- We would be well served to remember that we know in part and see things as a poor reflection in the mirror. That would help relieve some of the painful disputes in the body of Christ.

4. 1 Corinthians 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your **faith**. (NIV)

- Faith is useless, if it is not based and focused on the correct thing.
- The resurrection is the only reason we preach and the focus of our faith. If God can raise the dead, He can do anything. By faith, you and I can have resurrection life now. That is the only thing that makes our dying on the cross acceptable, for God brings us into resurrection life after death, even in this life. (see Galatians 2:20).
- Resurrection life allows us to forgive, endure, and exercise our spiritual gifts and purpose now, in the power of God and not the power of self.

- Do you realize that if you believe God raised Jesus from the dead, you can believe anything? The hard part of faith is accomplished when you settle that God raises the dead. What is cancer, debt, or broken relationships when you compare them to raising the dead?
- As a preacher, I must guard against useless preaching that excites people to believe they are in a better place than they really are.

5. 1 Corinthians 15:17

And if Christ has not been raised, your **faith** is futile; you are still in your sins. (NIV)

- The prophets facing Elijah in the great challenge had futile faith. (see 1 Kings 18) They cried out to their “god” but he could not answer. Many people put their faith in dead things, systems and gods. We put our faith in a living God, Jesus, so our faith is active, not because of our faith but because of His life.
- If Jesus has not been raised, we are not set free from our sins. That is a frightening thought. But we can receive ongoing forgiveness because Jesus lives.
- It is critical that we have faith in a living, active God. Otherwise, we put our faith in a God that cannot help or intervene. That would make our faith focus a dead, passive God. He is God of the living and the dead.

6. 1 Corinthians 16:13

Be on your guard; stand firm in the **faith**; be men of courage; be strong. (NIV)

- Why would Paul warn us to be on our guard if there wasn't anything we had to guard against? You post a guard around your home because someone may break in. You don't wait until they have broken in (or shouldn't wait that long) to be on guard.
- Stand firm in the faith denotes that we can be shaky in what we believe.
- Faith also takes courage and strength. Someone said courage is not acting in the absence of fear, but in the midst of it. Is that true? Then having faith courage means acting on your beliefs regardless of the circumstances. What are you afraid of that is hindering your faith? You can't wait for that to disappear before you act; you must act in faith while you are still facing your fears.

7. 2 Corinthians 1:24

Not that we lord it over your **faith**, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by **faith** you stand firm. (NIV)

- No one can or should lord it over your faith, telling you what to believe or not to believe. There are those leaders who want to do so, even for your own good. But they don't have the right to stand over you, but must work with you and your faith.
- It is not by someone else's faith that you stand firm, but by your own faith. Have you surrendered your faith agenda to someone else's? If so, you need to repent!
- A right relationship between leader and led produces joy for the follower. Is there joy in your relationships with those whom you work? If not, what can you do to get your joy back?

8. 2 Corinthians 4:13

It is written: "I **believed**; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of **faith** we also **believe** and therefore speak, (NIV)

- Faith always leads to action, even if it is nothing else than speaking what you believe.
- The early church wrote a list of "I believe's" that is known today as the Apostle's Creed. It is still recited in many churches today. I think you need your own apostle's creed. Make a list of "I believes" right now. What do you believe? In the spirit of faith, you must speak and write them so you can hear and see them.
- I believe the Lord is able to forgive my sins, keep me until the day of His return or my homecoming, provide for my family and business, cause my grandchildren to serve Him, and keep me safe from all diseases. Those are just a few. What are yours?

9. 2 Corinthians 5:7

We live by **faith**, not by sight. (NIV)

- Our senses can be wrong. What we see isn't necessarily reality from God's perspective.
- Go back to our study of Romans 4 and Abraham. He did not let what he saw dampen his faith in God.

10. 2 Corinthians 8:7

But just as you excel in everything-- in **faith**, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us-- see that you also excel in this grace of giving. (NIV)

- I want to excel in faith, but it can be a costly desire. Look what Abraham went through in order to excel in faith. He left everything to come to Canaan, had to leave

that land twice due to drought, rescued his nephew from marauding bands, had to banish his son to Hagar, live childless for a lot of years, and had to purchase a burial plot for Sarah, land that God had told Abraham belonged to him.

- That is why you can't walk by sight or it may look like you've failed or missed God.
- Paul calls giving a "grace" or gift. Are you excelling in the grace of giving? My wife and I just cleaned out our storage area and my office. We are giving stuff away, because we have too much. Is it time for you to go through your "stuff" and give it away? If it is, do it within three days of reading this or you'll forget or lose interest.

11. 2 Corinthians 10:15

Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your **faith** continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, (NIV)

- Our faith should be growing. Paul related his ability to evangelism and plant churches to the Corinthians increasing faith.
- As we learn more about God, our faith should allow God to use us in greater ways. This is not intellectual growth, but faith growth.
- It never requires less faith to serve the Lord today; it takes more faith than it did yesterday.

12. 2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the **faith**; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test? (NIV)

- We should have a regular faith checkup, self-administered. There are times I give money that I needed for something else just to prove that I am in faith. There are times when I do something I don't have time to do, to prove that I am trusting God for my time.
- What faith test can you give yourself today?

13. 1 Corinthians 1:21

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who **believe**. (NIV)

- God is pleased to respond to someone's faith; the world cannot understand this. The world operates by a different system of reality and cannot comprehend faith. We

shouldn't be surprised when people oppose our faith walk; they don't understand it, even those who may be walking with the Lord.

- Preaching is foolishness from the world's point of view because it is not logical. Don't think of preaching in modern terms: some man with a handkerchief, yelling his lungs out, wiping his brow and saying "God-duh" every fourth word. That would not have been the preaching style 2,000 years ago. Instead, preaching refers to the content of the message of a dead and resurrected savior.

14. 1 Corinthians 3:5

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to **believe**-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task. (NIV)

- Paul and Apollos had a purpose that God assigned to them and some came to believe through them.
- God uses His servants to lead us to faith. Is God using you?

15. 1 Corinthians 7:14

For the **unbelieving** husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the **unbelieving** wife has been sanctified through her **believing** husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. (NIV)

- I don't understand this at all, but there seems to be a relational holiness in marriage when an unbelieving spouse consents to live with a believer. This holiness carries over to the children as well.
- Of course, this scenario is created when one of the partners comes to faith after the marriage. Never should a believer join him or herself to an unbeliever. It never works.
- It's important that we maintain our faith, for it may be blessing and covering others close to us.

16. 1 Corinthians 7:15

But if the **unbeliever** leaves, let him do so. A **believing** man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (NIV)

- If the unbelieving partner departs, the believer is free, according to this verse. Faith and unfaith cannot live together unless the unfaith agrees.
- I am always amazed at how the Lord "honors" freewill.

17. 1 Corinthians 9:5

Don't we have the right to take a **believing** wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? (NIV)

- Paul surrendered many of his rights as an apostle to minister to the Gentiles. He had faith, but he also made ministry decisions based on his value system. He often worked as a tent maker to support himself so as not to burden his new Gentile believers with his needs.

18. 1 Corinthians 4:2

Now it is required that those who have been given a **trust** must prove **faithful**. (NIV)

- This is the first time I have included the word “faithful” in The Faith Files. The Greek word translated “faithful” contains the word “pistis,” which is translated faith, so it is appropriate to look at the word in this study.
- When someone is faithful, it means that you can put your faith in them to do what they said or to act with integrity in a consistent manner.
- When someone is faithful, it means that they are “full of faith” to be able to put other’s interests ahead of their own.
- The word “trust” is also an interesting word. Someone is entrusted with something; that means the person must be worthy of faith and trust to carry out the duties that the trust requires.
- Your faithfulness must be proved; it can’t exist in theory or word only. Faith requires the same as I have mentioned many times in The Faith Files.

19. 1 Corinthians 1:9

God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is **faithful**. (NIV)

- God is the source and model of all faithfulness. He is consistent and true to His word.
- Many talk of their “calling,” meaning their purpose in life or ministry. Most biblical references of the word are in the context above: *called* to a relationship with God.

20. 1 Corinthians 4:17

For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is **faithful** in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. (NIV)

- God uses faithful people, not people with potential. That is why the Lord works to make us faithful. He does in part by exposing us to unfaithful people so that we will develop attitudes and habits of faithfulness.
- Part of our faithfulness is rooted in reminders of who we are and what God has done for us. Faithfulness requires a certain way of life, where you put others interests ahead of your own.
- Paul had a body of teaching that he expected his churches to follow. Today there are many such expressions of godly men and women who teach a certain set of values to those under their care. This doesn't make their set of values better than anyone else's. Some leaders become arrogant that their "lifestyle of faith" is superior to that of others.

21. 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is **faithful**; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (NIV)

- Part of God's faithfulness is expressed when He protects us in temptation. Temptation is not sin; giving in to temptation is. God won't protect us from temptation, but He is faithful to deliver us in the temptation if that is what we want. Even Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness; God provided all the help He needed to resist the temptations. If Jesus was tempted, you and I will be, too.
- You can be confident that whatever temptation you are facing, it isn't more than you can bear. God is faithful not to allow that to happen. He is also faithful to provide the escape if you want it.

22. 2 Corinthians 1:18-24

But as surely as God is **faithful**, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your **faith**, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by **faith** you stand firm. (NIV)

- God is faithful to fulfill His promises and we need to be as well. We should be faithful men and women, faithful to our commitments.

- Look at God’s faithfulness in the passage above as it is expressed in:

1. His promises
2. Making us stand firm in Christ
3. Making our leaders stand firm in Christ
4. Anointing us
5. Setting a seal of ownership on us
6. Putting His Spirit in our hearts as a down payment
7. Guaranteeing the future

That is quite a list of faithful deeds, all made available to us through faith in Christ.

- As good as the Holy Spirit is now, it is only a downpayment, literally “hand money,” on what is to come!