

The Faith Files

The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians

September 15, 2001

1. Galatians 1:23

They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the **faith** he once tried to destroy." (NIV)

- "The faith" seems to be a set way of life or body of teaching that has order and substance to it. We are not free to believe anything we want or choose, but we have "the faith" that can either be followed, fought against, or ignored, but never altered.
- Again we see action and faith together: Paul was preaching faith—that's doing something. I am gratified at how many newsletters, teachings and ministries have come out of these **Faith Files**. Now what you are prepared to do with "the" faith that you have.
- No one is beyond the reach of God's grace. Here was a man—Saul—who was turned from a persecutor to an advocated. "The faith" is a powerful force that has the power to transform people. Choose someone who seems to be beyond the touch of grace and have faith for them. If God apprehended Saul, He can apprehend anyone. The report of Saul's conversion was an encouragement to many people and should be to us as well.

2. Galatians 2:15-21

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith** in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our **faith** in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by **faith** in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (NIV)

- It is still hard not to put our trust in some kind of "law" that enables us to earn God's favor. There is nothing we can do that can enhance our standing with God, because faith is the only way to please Him (see Hebrews 11:6).

- The law is good, but I am a dead man in Christ and therefore the law has no hold or jurisdiction over me. Christ now lives in me and my life now is guided by faith.
- Jesus taught that faith goes beyond the law. Before the commandments were written on stone, now they are on the tablets of my heart. Once they were outside me, now they are inside me. Once I could not commit adultery, now I cannot even look at a woman with lust. Under the law, I could not murder. Now I cannot speak ill of my brother.
- This standard is so impossible to maintain, that I must die and surrender to someone living in me who can carry out this law of love and faith. The law was impossible to fulfill perfectly, yet now a more difficult standard has been set. I surrender! Help, Jesus! Come live in me through your Spirit so I can live a life that pleases God.
- What does this mean, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"? It looks like me, sounds like me, has my memory and learned skills. How can it no longer be me?

3. Galatians 3:8-14

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by **faith**, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have **faith** are blessed along with Abraham, the man of **faith**. All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by **faith**." The law is not based on **faith**; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by **faith** we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (NIV)

- Abraham heard the gospel, so the good news must be the message of faith in Christ.
- All nations have been blessed through Abraham and will continue to be blessed through those of faith.
- If you and I revert to a life of law, we are under a curse, because no one can fulfill the letter of any law perfectly. That should provide adequate incentive to live a life of faith.
- So Christ became a curse for us; when He was put to death, the curse died with Him, if anyone rejects law and accepts the faith terms of Christ. Thanks be to God!
- What love! Christ became cursed of God for me; I cannot reject faith. It is an insult to God.

- I can have the same blessing that Abraham received. What is that blessing? To live a life of faith! That is a *great* blessing because that sets me free from the law, which is good, but impossible to fulfill in such a way that it brings me in right standing with God.

4. Galatians 3:22-27

But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through **faith** in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who **believe**. Before this **faith** came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until **faith** should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by **faith**. Now that **faith** has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through **faith** in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (NIV)

- The world is a prisoner to sin. There is only one way out of that prison and this is through faith.
- Before faith, men and women were held prisoner to law. Faith is the key that opens the door. Are you free or are you a prisoner of law? Be careful not to answer too quickly. Wherever you are not free to trust God, you are a prisoner. Are you a prisoner to your job, family or tribal traditions, church traditions, your own weaknesses, or financial lack? If you are, you can be set free by only one thing—faith!

5. Galatians 5:5-6

But by **faith** we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is **faith** expressing itself through love. (NIV)

- The “only” thing that counts with God is faith in action motivated by love. :Love for who? God or one another? The world or the church? It doesn’t distinguish between any of those.
- Outward signs of the flesh (or lack of signs) don’t mean anything, only faith. That statement must have irritated the Jews, even the believers. They had to feel that circumcision gave them some inside track to God.
- What a statement for an orthodox Jewish Pharisee to make! God had worked in his understanding and perspective so deeply that he was looking past circumcision (“it has no value”) and the other Jewish traditions to faith. We cannot underestimate how significant this was! What a change grace and faith had brought into Paul’s understanding.

- No wonder so many Jews hated Paul. Even among believing Jews, he was avoided and spoken against. His message of Galatians 3 and here in Galatians 5 must have been heinous to any Jew raised in a “law-abiding” home.
- We cannot underestimate the radical work that God did in Saul’s life to make him the Apostle Paul. Paul had a total change of perspective that focused first on the law and then on faith. Faith is a radical departure from any other lifestyle.
- Our righteousness is *only* obtained by faith through the Spirit.

6. **Ephesians 1:15**

For this reason, ever since I heard about your **faith** in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, (NIV)

- Here faith and love are connected once again. Faith seems vertical and love seems horizontal.
- It seems that some are motivated by faith and they can become unloving. But faith must exist in the context of love or it will have the wrong focus. Faith alone makes self the focus, faith in love makes others the focus.
- The Ephesians’ faith was famous. People talked about it and it became a source of encouragement and praise among other believers. This seems like good “gossip.” We should also be engaged in positive reports of what others are doing right, not what they are doing wrong.

7. **Ephesians 2:8**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through **faith**-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (NIV)

- Grace and faith also go hand in hand. Our faith activates God’s salvation, yet His grace activates our faith. It all begins and ends in God. He is the author and finisher of faith (see Hebrews 12:1).
- Faith is a gift of God, but we must receive it and choose to walk by its “rules.”

8. **Ephesians 3:12**

In him and through **faith** in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (NIV)

- I remember someone saying that when we fail, that is not the time to run from God but run to Him. That is real confidence. There is no condemnation before God for

anyone who approaches in faith, not in their own abilities, but in the saving grace of God.

- How can we run from someone that we are already “in.” Can a fish run from the water? Why would it want to? That is where it lives and exists. When fish do “run” from the water, we consider it a freak of nature. For us to depart from Christ and faith is a freak action that is self-destructive and makes no sense.
- We are free, but only to do whatever it is that God tells us to do. We can trust in Him fully that He will not fail or desert us. We can be confident He will do what He says He will do. That is freedom from trying to figure everything out, freedom from our own limitations and freedom from the fear of failure. Are you free?

9. Ephesians 3:16-21

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through **faith**. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (NIV)

- Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, not through correct actions on our part.
- This is a great prayer that I have included. You may download my list of biblical prayers from my website, www.purposequest.com under the Papers Category of the Articles Section. If you are ever at a loss for what to pray, pray these prayers.
- Christ dwells in my heart because I trust Him to do so. It is by faith that the God of the universe lives in me.
- This passage talks of power. This power is through the Holy Spirit. It also talks of God being able to do more than we can ask or imagine, but only and only if we have power working in us. If I am reading this correctly, this power comes by faith and through the Holy Spirit. This power is working in us where Christ lives, so is Christ the source of the power? I think He is; but the Spirit makes it happen and our faith activates the whole process. Is that confusing?

10. Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one **faith**, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (NIV)

- This is a list of seven one's. Seven is the perfect number.
- There is one faith. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be denominations or varying interpretations of difficult issues. It does mean that there is only one way to God, through "the" faith in Jesus Christ. We can disagree on everything else, but that unites us all.

11. Ephesians 4:11-13

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the **faith** and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)

- If we need these five ministries until we all reach the unity of faith, then we will need them until the Lord returns.
- Unity of faith is a destination. We are all going somewhere in our faith walk, a place of increased knowledge of who the Lord is and how He works, a destination that brings us into the fullness of Christ. It never takes less faith to serve the Lord, but more faith than ever before. Our leaders must equip us for this growth process.
- The nature of this "five-fold" ministry is to build God's people for service, not to build ministry kingdoms.

12. Ephesians 6:16

In addition to all this, take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (NIV)

- Faith serves as protection from the evil one. Flaming arrows not only damage where they land, but they spread damage through the flames. It is critical that you not allow the evil one's arrows to land, for in time they will spread their destructive fire to other parts of your walk.
- We are commanded to *take up* the shield, but it is our decision.
- This faith shield doesn't only protect from, but extinguishes, the flaming arrows. I want to put out the fire!
- Faith not only has an active, but also a protective, role in our lives. In a sense, faith is our missile shield.

13. Ephesians 6:23

Peace to the brothers, and love with **faith** from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

- Here love and faith are mentioned in one sentence again. Not faith and doctrine, not faith and gifts, not faith and giving, but faith and love.
- A new element is added: peace. This love, faith and peace are all from God our Father. Do you have peace? If not, then you must check your faith and love levels, like when a car is low on oil or fuel.

14. Galatians 3:5-6

Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you **believe** what you heard? Consider Abraham: "He **believed** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (NIV)

- Abraham is again mentioned as he was in Romans. We are told that his righteousness came from faith. A study of faith is not possible without studying Abraham's life. You say you don't know what to read or study in the Bible? Study Abraham!
- Paul is making a logical argument here. If we first receive the Spirit and God moves in our life through faith, why would that process change as we mature? If faith "worked" then and brought us in touch with God's greatness love and mercy, why would anything but faith "work" now?
- Let's consider Abraham. He heard God and believed what He heard. We don't know if Abraham was even seeking to hear, but He heard. What have you heard? Do you believe God? If so, what are you doing about it? Abraham did a lot with his faith.
- Go to Hebrews 11:8-19. Make a list of all the things that Abraham did with his faith. Can you see how those things became the expression of his righteousness? But the source of his righteousness was his faith, not his works.
- Why does the Bible repeat the phrases "the just shall live by faith" and "it was credited to him as righteousness"? It seems like the Holy Spirit is making two important points and doesn't want us to miss them. That means they must be easy to miss.

15. Ephesians 1:18-19

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who **believe**. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from

the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (NIV)

- Here is another great prayer. If you don't know what to pray for someone, pray this prayer! If God does these things in our lives, we will be a blessed people.
- Our eyes must be opened to see the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and His great power that is available for us who believe. In past studies, we have looked at how many times God opened someone's eyes to see something that was in front of them all along. By way of review, how many examples of someone having an "eye-opening" experience can you think of from God's word?
- What power is available to us? The same power that raised Christ from the dead! Hallelujah. The same power that raise a dead man back to life resides in you and me.
- What power is available to us? The same power that raised Christ to heavenly places where He is today! Hallelujah.
- May God open our eyes to see the hope, the inheritance, and the power that all come from faith.
- Don't tell God what you can't do. If God wants you to do it, you can do it in the resurrection and ascension power of Jesus. There is no greater power.

16. Galatians 3:2

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by **believing** what you heard? (NIV)

- Paul reiterates this question to drive the point home: We didn't and don't receive anything from God except by faith. That isn't how it is when we come to Christ, but it is a way of life!
- Do you notice how often Paul asked questions to those he was writing to? And he didn't always provide the answers. They were to provide their own answers. That is why I have been asking so many questions without answers in The Faith Files.
- Why do you think Paul did this?

17. Galatians 6:10

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of **believers**. (NIV)

- Faith unites those who use it into a family unit.
- We are to prioritize our good deed, focusing first on the household of faith.
- God wants to use us to answer the faith of believers. Are you listening today for how God can use you to bless someone? Very often, I think, God has to use unbelievers to bless someone because believers are slow to respond or not listening. Do you agree?
- Can you commit to present yourself to God every day this week to do good to someone on God's blessing list?

18. Ephesians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the **faithful** in Christ Jesus: (NIV)

- I can be a faithful employee, father, volunteer, or church member. But that doesn't earn me a special place with God. Being faithfully punctual or honest doesn't earn me a special place in the sight of God. Only the faithful *in* Christ Jesus are pleasing to God.
- The saints are literally the holy ones. The holy ones are those who are set apart for God, not spotless in behavior. The saints, the holy ones, become the faithful, because they are full of faith toward God. Does that make sense?
- Paul didn't write to the whole city, that wasn't his concern or domain. He wrote to the faithful ones in Ephesus.

19. Ephesians 6:21

Tychicus, the dear brother and **faithful** servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. (NIV)

- Tychicus was in faithful *in* the Lord. If I am in Christ, then I have a way of life, *the* faith it is called, to which I can and must adhere. But my life is hidden in Him and it is in that environment that I function.
- My faithfulness requires obedience, not doctrinal purity.
- A faithful servant reports everything that the master requires. I must be careful not to tell people what I want them to hear but what God wants them to hear.