

## The Faith Files

### John's Letters, Jude and Revelation

November 3, 2001

#### 1. 1 John 5:3-4

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our **faith**.

- Faith takes you to a whole new world and gives you victory. Are you victorious over depression? Sin? Poverty? Wrong thinking? How can your faith help you be victorious **today**?
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Corinthians 2:14). We are always in a victory march, but victory only comes after battle.
- This verse represents an interesting progression: love, obedience, overcoming, victory, faith. We see once again that faith and love are not far removed from one another. Where you have the one, the other is close by. That keeps faith from being doctrinal and makes it practical. Do you have doctrinal or practical faith?
- The very fact that we are overcomers means that there is something standing in our way that we must overcome. Victory doesn't mean lack of obstacles, but the ability to get over them. Faith is the means by which we can overcome them.

#### 2. Jude 1:3

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the **faith** that was once for all entrusted to the saints. (NIV)

- In the first passage above, we saw that our faith helps us overcome. Here we read that we must contend for the faith. In no way, shape or form is faith a passive exercise. It is always active and very often contending with something.
- Faith takes you to where the obstacles are, not to where they aren't.
- Faith is also an entrustment. God gives us faith and we must work to make it all that it can be and to make it do all that it can do. Where faith is concerned, it can be said that the ball is in our court, once and for all.
- Jude wrote to urge us to contend for the faith. Why would he urge us to contend unless there was some tendency in us that would not want to contend? It is something we must consciously decide to do.

#### 3. Jude 1:20

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy **faith** and pray in the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

- God doesn't build up your faith. **You** must build up your faith, or "your most holy faith."

- Something that is holy is set apart for special use. As we have noted in earlier Faith File installments, you can have faith in government, the economy, faith that the bridge you are driving over won't collapse, or in another person. But faith in God is in a separate category altogether. Faith in God is holy.
- Or does this mean that you are **in** the faith, sort of like **in** the water, and while you are **in** the faith, you are to build yourself up spiritually? Interesting thought.

#### 4. Revelation 2:12-13

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live-- where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your **faith** in me, even in the days of Antipas, my **faithful** witness, who was put to death in your city-- where Satan lives. (NIV)

- The church at Pergamum had endured persecution, martyrdom and Satan's presence, yet had not renounced faith. What have I faced that can compare to that? Nothing even close!
- When you have faith, God knows where you live! He is ever mindful of your condition and never forgets what you have done in faith. I like to say that God has a big book and a sharp pencil and He writes everything down. He never forgets.
- And God rewards the good we do, if not now, then in the life to come.
- It would seem that some in Pergamum or somewhere did renounce their faith in the saving power of Jesus. So that must be possible, although not as easy to do as some fear. Where do you go when you renounce faith in Jesus?
- How would you like to live where Satan has his throne? Can you imagine the spiritual warfare in that city? Yet God had a people to witness to His name in that evil place. The Holy Spirit builds the church even in the midst of difficult conditions.
- Antipas, whoever he was, was a faithful witness. He maintained his faith and lost his life. Yet in losing it, he found it. Lord, may I be as faithful in my generation as Antipas was in his. Amen.

#### 5. Revelation 2:18-19

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and **faith**, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. (NIV)

- Here we see again that God is watching and knows what we do for Him.
- Here again we see love and faith existing together. The Lord also commends them for doing more than they had done at first. God expects more than holiness. He expects holy action!
- In number four above, God had a sharp tongue like a two-edged sword. Here he has eyes like fire and feet like bronze. What graphic metaphors. What God says, happens. What He sees, He sees clearly and cleanses any impurity. What He sets out to do, He does. God is strong and powerful. We can put our faith in Him.

## 6. I John 3:23-24

And this is his command: to **believe** in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (NIV)

- Love and faith are pictured here again walking hand-in-hand.
- Faith is a command. We are commanded to have faith in the name of Jesus. We can use that name and it has power, not to get us a new car as some have trivialized faith, but to save us and to help us lead a life of love.
- If you obey His command to believe, then you live in Him and He lives in you. The God of the universe lives inside of me! Praise the Lord! How do we know He lives in us? He gave us the Spirit.
- Follow this progression: faith, love one another, we live in Him, He lives in us, the Spirit is given. It really does start with faith.
- The Spirit is the down payment on the good things yet to come. We know God lives in us because of the Spirit. The God of the universe dwells in you and me. That means that He is more comfortable with my humanity at times than I am. But thank God He loves me not from afar, but from within.

## 7. I John 4:1-3

Dear friends, do not **believe** every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (NIV)

- There are spirits who are vying for your faith. I have read a few books recently that had been influenced by Eastern philosophy. There is a spirit behind those books that is competing for my faith. I have rejected their overtures. They make no sense at all when I compare them to the Spirit.
- The Bible can seem so complicated. As I have worked on this study, I wished many times to be a better scholar and know more Greek to study the original words. But the Bible was not written for scholars; it was written for men and women like you and me, who were not that sophisticated but could grasp the concept of faith.
- The way to know if anything or anyone is of God is to find out where they stand on the question of who Jesus is. That is the great dividing line for all mankind. If anything or anyone denies that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, they are a false spirit, period. No matter how much good they have to say, they are not of or from God. No matter how many flattering things they have to say about Jesus. If they cannot acknowledge that He is God and came in the incarnate flesh, then they are to be rejected as falsehood.
- Any spirit not acknowledging Jesus as Lord is a spirit of antichrist; it is “against Christ.” That isn’t complicated. The spirit of Islam, no matter how moral its teachings, is a spirit of antichrist. The spirit of Buddhism, with all its attractive doctrines of happiness and apparent holiness, is a spirit of antichrist.
- If someone is presenting some teaching or doctrine to you, just ask them where they stand on Jesus. That will separate the sheep from the goats, so to speak. They may reply that Jesus is the Son of God, but ask them what that means.

## 8. I John 5:10

Anyone who **believes** in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not **believe** God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not **believed** the testimony God has given about his Son. (NIV)

- Jesus is the great dividing point of history. Even our years are measured before and after Christ. Either you believe God's testimony about Jesus or you don't. There is no middle ground. Everyone must take a stand.
- If anyone denies faith in Christ, they make God a liar and reject His testimony about Jesus. That is serious. If someone says that Jesus was a prophet and a good man, they speak the truth but they make God a liar, for Jesus is much more than that.
- I believe even though I have not seen Him, because I know that God is true. God would not lie about Jesus.
- In reading other philosophies and religious systems, I am never quite sure what they are saying. There is always a spirit of confusion around them. Not so with Jesus. The claims are clear and easy to understand. You either accept them in faith or reject them. They cannot be debated or changed. Even a child can respond.

## 9. I John 5:13

I write these things to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (NIV)

- God wants us to be sure of our eternal life—a quality of life so good—nothing can ever bring it to an end.
- John wrote them and he is still writing us in the power of the Spirit so that we can know like they knew. Our faith qualifies us to know the things of God. There is no other qualifier to obtain such knowledge.

## 10. Jude 1:5

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not **believe**. (NIV)

- Lack of faith destroys. Faith delivers. It's as simple as that.
- I need to be reminded of the mighty acts God did yesterday so I can be encouraged today.
- God delivered the people from Egypt, yet later destroyed those same people. Faith is not a one-time thing; it is ongoing. I have often said that we need more faith today than yesterday. Take my children for example. Little people, little problems. Big people, big problems. At one time I needed diaper faith. Now I need university tuition faith.
- I need more faith and cannot live on my faith of ten years ago. We started out with salvation faith; now we need faith to work out our salvation. Faith is not a one-time insurance policy we buy to avoid hell. It is a lifestyle.
- Is your faith growing? If not, what can you do to stimulate and massage it?

## 11. Revelation 21:8

But the cowardly, the **unbelieving**, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (NIV)

- I can understand murderers, the immoral and idolaters being put in the lake of fire, but I didn't consider those without faith in that category. The cowardly are assigned to that lake as well! Perhaps they were afraid to do something to offend God, so they did nothing at all. That isn't holiness or righteousness, just fear of getting caught and punished.
- Faithlessness is a serious sin against God. It merits eternal separation from God, for without faith, it is impossible to please or serve God. So we can say that lack of faith separates you from God. Is that a fair statement?

## 12. 1 John 1:9-10

If we confess our sins, he is **faithful** and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (NIV)

- God is faithful to forgive our sins and purify us, but first we must do something to trigger His faithfulness—we must confess our sins. We must agree with God that what we have done warrants His judgment and then ask Him to have mercy. Confession means agreeing with God.
- We can put our faith in God to forgive our sins, no matter what we've done, if we confess those sins. I think the Catholics have an advantage in this area, for they have created a culture where sin confession is acceptable and expected. Non-Catholics do not have this same heritage of confession, therefore I think they are less likely to do this on a regular basis.
- Do you have any sins to confess to God? Then do so and have faith that He hears, forgives, and purifies.

## 13. 3 John 1:5

Dear friend, you are **faithful** in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. (NIV)

- I wish I better understood this word "faithful." Here is what *Vine's Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* has to say about this word **faithful**, which is **pistos**. I include for three reasons: 1) it may help you understand the word; 2) it will expose you to the potentially confusing world of Biblical reference works; 3) this is a good Bible study reference book to have in your library.

### FAITHFUL, FAITHFULLY, FAITHLESS

1. **pistos** ^4103^, a verbal adjective, akin to peitho (see FAITH), is used in two senses, (a) passive, "faithful, to be trusted, reliable," said of God, e. g., <1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18> (KJV, "true"); <2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23; 11:11; 1 Pet. 4:19; **1 John 1:9**>; of Christ, e. g., <2 Thes. 3:3; Heb. 2:17; 3:2; **Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11**>; of the words of God, e. g., <Acts 13:34>, "sure"; <1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1> (KJV, "true"); <4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 1:9; 3:8; **Rev. 21:5; 22:6**>; of servants of the Lord, <Matt. 24:45; 25:21,23; Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 4:2, 17; 7:25; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7,9; 1 Tim. 1:12; 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:12; **3 John 5; Rev. 2:13; 17:14**>; of believers, <Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2>; (b) active, signifying "believing, trusting, relying," e. g., <Acts 16:1> (feminine); <2 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 3:9> seems best taken in this respect, as the context lays stress upon

Abraham's "faith" in God, rather than upon his "faithfulness." In <John 20:27> the context requires the active sense, as the Lord is reproaching Thomas for his want of "faith." See No. 2.

With regard to believers, they are spoken of sometimes in the active sense, sometimes in the passive, i. e., sometimes as believers, sometimes as "faithful." See Lightfoot on Galatians, p. 155.

**Note: In <3 John 5> the RV has "thou doest a faithful work," for KJV, "thou doest faithfully." The lit. rendering is "thou doest (poieo) a faithful thing, whatsoever thou workest (ergazo)." That would not do as a translation. To do a "faithful" work is to do what is worthy of a "faithful" man. The KJV gives a meaning but is not exact as a translation. Westcott suggests "thou makest sure (piston) whatsoever thou workest" (i. e., it will not lose its reward). The change between poieo, "to do," and ergazo, "to work," must be maintained. Cf. <Matt. 26:10> (ergazo and ergon).**

- Sometimes we are "full of faith" and that is active faith toward God.
- Sometimes we are considered faithful; that is passive. We are not doing anything, but others, including God, consider us faithful and reliable. Confused? Me, too!

#### **14. Revelation 1:4-6**

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the **faithful** witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen. (NIV)

- John was writing to the seven churches on behalf of Jesus, the faithful witness. This would seem to be a passive faithfulness—Jesus could be relied upon to speak only what the Father told Him to speak and say it how the Father wanted Him to say it. (see John 12:49).
- I have often found that when I go through something or learn something, it is not long after that I come across someone who needs to know what I just learned. I must tell them and be a faithful witness.
- The Greek word for *witness* is the same word from which we get our word *martyr*. We give our lives be faithful witnesses to the truth if necessary.

#### **15. Revelation 2:10**

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be **faithful**, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (NIV)

- Jesus warned that suffering was coming. John did not tell them to rebuke the coming suffering, nor did he tell them that their faith could help them avoid the trouble. He told them to be faithful even unto death. That is not the message that many faith teachers put forth.
- Remember, the word test here is not in the sense of an exam, but more in the sense of a proof that the faith they have is real. Metal was tested by fire to prove its purity; our faith will be tested in the same way. This kind of test isn't to trick you; it is to show to principalities and people the reality of what God has done in your life.

#### **16. Revelation 3:14**

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the **faithful** and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. (NIV)

- As the Bible concludes, Jesus is referred to on several occasions as the **Faithful One**. After all is said and done, after all is written and read, the best summary of Jesus is contained in one word: **FAITHFUL**.
- I would think that Jesus was faithful in both an active and passive sense. He was full of faith toward God and He Himself was reliable and true, One who could be counted on to do what was right and just.
- If Jesus is known as faithful, it would be good for us to be known for that as well.
- The Faithful One spoke to the churches in Revelation and He speaks to the churches today. You can put your faith in the words of the Faithful One. What is He saying to you? To Your Church?

### **17. Revelation 14:12**

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain **faithful** to Jesus. (NIV)

- Some try to use faith to avoid those situations that require patient endurance. If you had faith, they would say, then this problem would not be occurring. But faith for the early church wasn't a way out of tribulation, but a way through tribulation.
- One way to understand the book of Revelation is to understand what it meant to the people to whom John was writing. These people were under extreme pressure and persecution and could not use their faith for personal gain.

### **18. Revelation 17:14**

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-- and with him will be his called, chosen and **faithful** followers." (NIV)

- Here Jesus' followers are just like Him: FAITHFUL. Jesus has made us more than conquerors! Hallelujah. We read earlier that our faith gives us the victory over those who would war against us.
- We are not delivered **from** the war, but made victorious **in** the war. There is a big difference. What fight are you involved in right now? For your family, job, finances? Whatever it is, you are victorious not in your own strength, but in Jesus. (see Romans 8:31-39).
- Hebrews 11:34 states that some were made strong in battle. That is not how I want to get strength! I want strength **before** I go to battle, but God gives me strength **in** the battle. That means that the strength I want is found where I need it most, but not before I get there.

### **19. Revelation 19:11**

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called **Faithful** and True. With justice he judges and makes war. (NIV)

- Wow, an open heaven! That is the dream of all who serve the Lord: to see heaven open and to know what is going on from a heavenly perspective. Paul wrote that we are seated in heavenly places. (see Ephesians 1:20).
- Imagine what that image meant to the early church: Jesus on a white horse. Usually only the general or leader rode that kind of horse. It signified power and authority. If Revelation were written to the modern church, I wonder if Jesus would be riding on a tank!

- I want One who is Faithful and True judging and making war. When Satan makes war, it is to kill and destroy. When Jesus makes war, it is to bring justice. Is it strange to think that Jesus makes war? He does, but we can take comfort that He does it out of faithfulness and truth.