

4/21/20

We are entering a time when faith is more important than ever, and also a time when the enemy's tactics to remove that faith are more subtle and effective than ever.

Knowing what faith is and being able to exercise it is becoming a spiritual survival issue.

First, faith is not striving to have faith – striving to believe. In spite of the heresy of the hyper-charismatics, faith is not faith in faith.

Listen to these comments by Eric Sauer,

“In 2 Tim. 1:12 Paul said, ‘I know Him Whom I have believed’. Here in the original language of the New Testament the word ‘faith’ is joined to the dative case of the person trusted; ‘I know Who He is to Whom I have given my confidence’ (placed my trust). Christ is not only the goal and the sphere, not only the supporting basis of our faith, but He is the Person to Whom our faith refers and in Whom it centers.”

This issue is not how weak or strong we feel our faith is – the issue is knowing the One we are placing that faith in.

The more we know Him as He actually is, the easier faith is. It's the natural response to becoming convinced of the trustworthiness of the object of that faith.

As Ian Thomas puts it (and I'm paraphrasing), ‘when we are conscious of our faith, it may be very well be superficial faith. More likely its simply us striving to believe something we barely believe. When we are exercising true faith, we are rarely aware that that's what's even happening.

For example, every time we sit in a chair, we are exercising faith in that chair but we never think about that. It's not the strength of our faith that makes sitting down so effective, it's the strength of the chair. Since we trust chairs, sitting down is not a strenuous exercise of faith but a natural thing to do because we simply know we'll be held up – chairs are good at that. If when we sat down, someone near to us said, ‘what amazing faith he has!’ we'd think they were crazy. It wasn't our faith that made this work; it was the strength of the chair.

Satan wants us to focus on our faith; the Holy Spirit wants us to focus on Christ.

The enemy paints a false picture of the Lord to undermine our faith; the Holy Spirit wants us to learn who Christ really is and the absolute security of our relationship with Him - based on truths like, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you” and “nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So, where does faith come from? How can our faith grow over time? Faith doesn't come by trying really hard to believe, “faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

The Word of God doesn't present our faith to us, it presents Christ to us, so we can respond to what we learn. As we see in Heb. 10:23,

Let us hold unswervingly to the confidence we profess, *for He who promised is faithful.*

Here's one author's take on this verse:

"The whole thing is an inexplicable, bewildering confusion, a tangle from our standpoint or the standpoint of man; but God is, God is faithful. That is what He Himself says He is. Thus, without questioning God we go on believing God. We have even to believe God to the point of putting over onto Him the responsibility for failures, for mistakes, in so far as we have really and honestly put our lives at His disposal. We have to make over to the Lord's account things which may have been mistakes or failures, and trust Him with these and go on."

We have all made huge life-decisions that were mistakes – we have all failed in a thousand ways. But that's not the issue – the issue is 'can we trust God with these things and go on?'

Abraham is often called the father of faith because he didn't hesitate to take Isaac to the mountain to offer him as a sacrifice as God told him to do. So, let me give you a hypothetical conversation Abraham may have been having with Satan and with himself during all this.

First, we know from Hebrews 11:19 that Abraham was reasoning that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Why? Why was Abraham thinking considering resurrection for his son? Because God had already made it clear to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations and that this would come through Isaac.

Abraham believed that promise.

And after decades of watching God in action, seeing who God was and what He was like, Abraham knew that God didn't lie – that He was trustworthy.

So, if Isaac died; God would have to raise him back up.

In Abraham's mind, it wasn't his own faith that was the issue, it was God's integrity.

Satan no doubt tried the "Has God really said?" line on him, but Abraham simply threw everything back on God as the One Who's reputation was at stake if Isaac died and stayed dead.

Again, the issue for us is not how awesome our faith is (or isn't); it's who that faith is placed in.

This is why it's so crucial that our knowledge of the Lord is clear, thorough and accurate. If Satan can obscure our understanding of God, or limit it through superficial teaching of the Word, he can destroy our faith.

This combination of infancy-teaching that characterizes our generation, coupled in many cases with false teaching, is laying a foundation for susceptibility to deception and for a weak faith in God under stress.

It causes the Church to become those who Paul, in Eph. 4:14 says should;

. . . No longer be infants, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

T. Austin Sparks has some input on this that I'd like to share. He's commenting on Luke 24:45 which says,

(Jesus) opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

“As we contemplate the state of things in the world today, we are very deeply impressed with the prevailing malady of spiritual blindness. It is the root malady of the time. We should not be far wrong if we said that most, if not all, of the troubles from which the world is suffering, are traceable to that root, namely, blindness. The masses are blind; there is no doubt about that. In a day which is allegedly a day of unequaled enlightenment, the masses are blind. But in a very large measure, the same is true of the Lord’s people. Speaking quite generally, Christians are today very blind.

Spiritual Life is not only a miracle in its inception; it is a continuous miracle in this matter right on to the last. We do not say or suggest or hint that you may have anything extra to the Word of God, but we do claim that there is a vast amount in the Word of God that we have never seen, which we could see. Surely everybody agrees with that: and it is just that – to see, and the more you see, really see, the more overwhelmed you feel about the whole thing, because you know that you have come to the borders of the land of far distances, lying far beyond a short lifetime’s power of experience. I pray the Lord will make us all to be of those who have eyes opened.”

And as St. Jerome put it,

“Ignorance of Holy Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

Ok, I want to switch gears for a few minutes.

I’m going to read a couple of passages to set the stage for where we are going. And after each passage, I’m going to give you a brief quote from authors who address their meaning:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, SO THAT or WITH THE GOAL OF in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-7)

“The throne of God will be on the new earth. Thereby earth will become heaven, for where the throne of God is, there is heaven. Then in this renewed, transfigured world, in the ages to come, God will show to His perfected saints the unsearchable riches of His grace in His kindness toward us. Out of His infinite inexhaustible fulness He will cause to stream for the, one glory after another, in an endless, inconceivable sequence of God-filled ages. . . our gaze, our wonder at this, loses the details in the ocean of the eternal.”

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom. 8:28-29)

“May I just ask a simple question? Can we say with truth of heart that we are really concerned to be in God’s purpose; to be found in that purpose? It is a practical matter – deciding whether we want what He wants. Are we prepared to commit to the Lord in relation to exchanging our life for His? As the Lord’s people, are we ready to just pause and face that? To be part of a race conformed to the image of Christ – taken away from what we were, to become what He is?”

Over the past couple of weeks, I have had several requests to talk about the preparation we can undertake in a personal way as we approach the end of this age and our entrance into eternity.

What, specifically, has the Lord planned for us in this last generation of the church age, beyond what Christians have always done over the last 2000 years?

There have been general guidelines, principles and exhortations to the followers of Christ since Pentecost. But there are also unique characteristics of *each* generation since then, such as for example;

In the 16th century, the recovery of justification by faith (nearly lost during the dark ages of Catholic domination of Christendom) and then –

. . . in the beginning of the 19th century, the recovery of the pre-tribulation, pre-millennial return of Christ, the mystery of the body of Christ and dispensationalism.

This is the generation of massively increased deception of both the world and the church.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1)

Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim. 3:13)

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1)

Lord, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of this age . . . take heed that no one deceive you (Matt. 24:3-4)

That’s just four of many passages showing that deception in our generation will be off the charts and will come in a million forms ranging from shallow teaching of the basics designed to dumb us down to a growing number of false doctrines and movements designed to draw us away from sound teaching.

That would be the first thing needing to be listed as unique to our time in history.

We need to become very serious students of the Bible because now, more than ever, our spiritual life and protection from deception depends on it.

Here’s the second thing.

We are in the final generation – we’re actually at the end of that generation – and what God told Daniel to seal up until the time of the end regarding last days eschatology, the Holy Spirit has been *unsealing* progressively since the regathering of Israel to her land in the middle of the 20th century.

Those with ears to hear what the Spirit is now saying to the churches, will be doubling down on their study of end time prophetic events and truths the Lord desires to open to us.

Here are a couple familiar passages that give us historical illustrations of this principle during the age of Israel and the patriarchs:

Gen. 18:17; The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? (the rescue of Lot and the destruction of Sodom)

1 Chron. 12:32; Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do. (the transfer of the kingdom from Saul to David)

This has always been God's modus operandi throughout the history of His people. Not all have listened; not all have been open to Him, but for those who were – He has always been faithful to proclaim and prepare them for what He intends to do and when He intends to do it.

We are seeing the same thing now.

In nearly every country on the planet, many of God's people are waking up to what this generation is about and to what the Lord is showing us to do; what our priorities should be.

A recent survey done by LifeWay of pastors in our country shows that 92% of them won't teach eschatology (which comprises more than 1/3 of the Bible) because they are afraid of offending someone and losing people in their churches.

That coupled with the fact that many pastors don't believe we *are* in the final generation – because their ears are closed to God.

But those who have their faces set toward the future are thrilled to learn where we are in history and they have their eyes and hearts set on heaven, not earth; on things above, not on things below; on the coming of the Lord, not on Sunday morning American Christendom.

And don't forget the passages in Luke 10 and John 12 that talk about Mary and Martha (sisters of Lazarus).

Martha genuinely loved the Lord, but she didn't have ears to hear; Mary also loved the Lord and *did* have ears to hear.

Outwardly, Martha seemed much more committed, much busier serving the Lord than Mary – but Mary was listening and Martha wasn't.

God is *always* speaking to us – always seeking to bring us into perfect alignment with both His eternal purpose for His people as well as the unique purpose He has for each generation.

The Lord wants us to be prepared, not only for world events (we've already talked at length about those), but spiritually – prepared in our understanding, so that we are like Abraham and the sons of Issachar.

So, we've looked at the need for faith through a greater knowledge of the Lord Himself; we've looked at the ramping up of deception and we've looked at the need to know our time in history, in God's purpose; to study prophesy diligently and thoroughly.

All of these things and more are so that we can know and communicate to those we care about.

We need to be able to say that God has told us what He is going to do and we now know what His people are to do in response.

Now, here's something to think about, because of the work of the enemy to steal our rest in Christ – to move our eyes away from the things which are above; the place of spiritual safety and protection.

The following is what I see when I look at the battle for the hearts and minds of humanity (including the Church):

Level 1: 95% disinformation with 5% accuracy thrown in to give the illusion of credibility (mainstream media; Hollywood and the music industry)

Level 2: Slightly increased accuracy over Level 1, but still focused almost exclusively on surface issues – never gets to the man behind the curtain (Fox News, Breitbart, Gateway, etc.)

Level 3: Six trillion poorly documented, conspiracy-based, sensationalized YouTube videos.

Level 4: Well documented and mostly accurate YouTube videos on a wide variety of topics, some of which are conspiracies, but are theories offered by men and women who have done their homework

Level 5: The unseen world of the real rulers of this planet – principalities and powers in the heavenlies. Like John tell us in 1 Jn. 5:19;

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Level 6: Biblical knowledge on the person and agenda of the creature who rules the rulers – Lucifer.

Level 7: The sovereign Lord of all creation, the Son of God, and growing knowledge on His Person and purpose. The One Who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11)

We can examine all these areas, we can 'fact check' the ones we're skeptical about, but we need to spend the vast majority of our time in 7.

There are a decreasing number of places we can find the truth, even in the Christian world.

Besides the scriptural promises for our generation of false doctrine, the famine of in-depth teaching and the complete elimination of some of the most important parts of the Bible, we are also in danger of believing sources of information about current events that are not based on reality, but on presupposition and theory.

If ever there was time in history when we need to do due diligence to literally everything in our lives, this is that time.

To begin to wrap up, I'm going to drop back to an issue we looked at earlier regarding our need to see God has He is so we can live in Christ with the freedom and security that is our inheritance in Him.

I want to share something I came across that could be misunderstood because it seems almost too 'grace-oriented'. Part of us will wonder if it's too good to be true – but if we understand what the author is saying, it can be extremely encouraging and faith-building. It's comments the speaker made in a message he gave on Phil. 4:19;

My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

"God has assumed the responsibility of a Father, and has taken up those responsibilities to meet them in and through His Son. The enlargement of that in Christian utterance is found in Philippians 4:19. This means Christ recognized, Christ known, God in Christ, and that on the ground of our utter separation unto Him. But note: it is God's gift. He says that it was not Moses that gave the manna in the wilderness, but His Father. Then it is not the result of man's labors, it is the issue of God's grace. Are you laboring for spiritual growth? How we have striven and strained to increase our spiritual measure and our spiritual stature. What a burden we have taken upon us in relation to the maintenance of our own spiritual life! We have almost assumed the whole responsibility for our spiritual life, and made it as though it depended upon our labors in prayer, our labors in the Word of God, our labors in the Lord's service, our effort, our stress.

"No one will think that we have made little of prayer or the Word. No one will think that we have said you must have no care whatever for your spiritual life, but there is such a difference between assuming responsibility for ourselves and recognizing that God has assumed that responsibility. And because God has assumed the responsibility we should cooperate with God. There is all the difference between trying to work for our justification, and working because we are justified; between trying to work for our perfection, and working because our perfection is secured in Christ. The difference is not merely technical, it is practical, and of immense value. Sometimes it is necessary for the Lord to say to us: "Look here, you are making far too much of your own praying, far too much of your own business in the Scriptures, you are unconsciously coming to think that everything depends upon how much and how fervently you pray." And then you go out and talk to other people about your prayer life as a kind of setting up against their own. You do not mean it, but the implication is that this is what accounts for your growth, and it is going to count for other people's growth. *That must not be a cause but a result.* 'The cause, the secret, the spring of everything is Myself, and sometimes you will just have to cease straining, and rest back in Me, in loving trust. Learn to do that a little more, and then you will pray better, and I shall be able to do something more!'"

So, once again, we have to see the God of Joshua, the God who flooded the world and destroyed the Canaanite civilization, and Jesus of Calvary as exactly the same divine Person. There are, and always will be, mysteries in the nature and character of God we may never fully understand.

As Isaiah puts it in Isa. 55:8, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”

The Messiah ended His ministry by being executed by Rome – how much sense did that make to anyone alive at that time?

Joseph had no idea why he was in prison after God told him he was destined to be a ruler in Egypt.

You may have no idea why you’re going through what you’re going through. It’s confusing; it may seem to violate everything you know about the way things are supposed to work, even Biblically

Paul was well acquainted with this. A disciple’s life is incredible but always mysterious. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:8;

We are pressed against on every side, but not crushed; we are confused, but we don’t give up, we are knocked down, but not knocked out.

And as this author writes,

To come into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus is to come, sooner or later, to the impasse of the incomprehensible, and we just have to say: “Lord, you are beyond me! Lord, I cannot comprehend”. That, of course, on the one side, means problems, for it puts us into a difficult position in that we can’t always understand Him. But, on the other side, we would not have it otherwise; we would not have a 'little' Christ whom we could comprehend and altogether understand with our little minds. No, He is beyond us altogether, and what you and I, as His people, are destined to come to if we go on with Him, is just this: that He is always reaching farther and farther beyond us, and drawing us out beyond ourselves, beyond our resources of mind and will and making us know that we have got to go on. We can’t just stand still; we have to go on by faith alone.

But no matter how difficult or puzzling things get, for the church, for us, regardless of how He may have presented Himself to others in different ages of world history, for us He revealed Himself as “Father” – loving us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His Son so we could live with Him forever.

This is the final and fullest revelation of God and it is given to the church.

In John 16:25-27 we read this:

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you.

For many of us growing spiritually, which seems to take forever, is moving from conditional to unconditional faith. No strings attached; trusting our Father in heaven whether anything makes sense to us or not – trusting Him simply because of Who He is.