LESSON 8 FAITH

Few words are more central to the Christian message than faith. In the first instance, in the matter of salvation, the Holy Spirit works through God's word to awaken in sinners a response of faith to believe in Jesus and be saved. They rest their faith on the reliability of God's word for their salvation and all the salvation benefits Christ has purchased for them with His blood (CP Ro 10:8-17).

Faith implies total reliance upon God and complete obedience to His word (CP Jn 3:16-18). The word *believeth* in V16 means chooses to obey. Thus whoever chooses to obey Christ shall be saved. Those who choose not to obey Christ will be forever lost. It is pointless us saying we love God if we do not keep His word (CP Jn 14:15, 23 with 1Jn 2:3-5). God is the object of our faith (CP He 11:6). This scripture describes the convictions that are part of saving faith. It teaches that firstly we must believe in the existence of God and secondly that He rewards those who diligently seek Him - they can surrender God's promises back to Him for their fulfilment (CP 1Jn 5:14-15). This teaches us that if we ask anything according to what God's word says, He will give it to us. *Will* here means word. We do not have to ask for it on the basis of *if it be thy will Lord*, but *according to thy word Lord*. If we know God's word then we know His will and we will not ask for anything that is not in line with His word. This stresses the importance of God's word always abiding in us. If it is and we are also abiding in Him we will always get what we ask for (CP Jn 15:7-8). God is glorified in His promises being fulfilled in our life.

Faith means abandoning all trust in our own resources and laying hold of all that God promises in Christ (CP Isa 53:4-5; Mt 8:16-17; Ga 3:13-14; Eph 1:3; Php 4:19; 1Pe 2:24). We will study some of these scriptures in more detail shortly. They are such important faith-building scriptures that we need to read and re-read them until they are so settled in our spirit that we know them off by heart and at any given time we can speak them out in faith over any of life's circumstances that threaten our peace. They all prove bodily healing, prosperity and victory over all of life's situations in Christ's atonement on the cross, as well as salvation of our souls. But the important thing we must always remember is that none of God's promises can be appropriated unless the conditions are complied with first. God's whole plan of redemption is framed around the law of sowing and reaping. This is not teaching that if anyone is sick it is a result of sin in their lives, but if there is sin it has to be dealt with first for the sickness to be healed (CP Psa 66:18). We can only take out of the kingdom what we first put into it (CP Isa 53:4-5). *Griefs* and *sorrows* in Verse 4 mean sicknesses and pains. Jesus bore our sicknesses and our pains on the cross so that we would not have to bear them in our earthly life (CP Mt 8:16-17). He died for our sins so that we would not have to die for them (CP Ro 6:23).

In Mt 8:16-17 Matthew asserts that Isaiah's prophesy (Isa 53:4-5) was being fulfilled in the healings Jesus rendered to the sick. This is not teaching that Jesus completely fulfilled Isaiah's prophesy during his ministry on earth and therefore there is no bodily healing in the atonement as many believe. It teaches that by contemporaneously healing the sick and forgiving their sins Jesus was demonstrating that bodily healing is an integral part of His atonement. In 1Pe 2:24 Peter attests to our healing as being an established fact accomplished by the stripes Jesus bore for us (CP Mk 2:1-12; Jn 5:1-14). These scriptures clearly prove what Mt 8:16-17 and 1Pe 2:24 teach but there are many Christians who still do not know this truth and as a result cannot exercise faith to believe for their healing. It stresses once more the necessity of being thoroughly grounded in God's word. The more we are grounded in God's word the more our faith in Him to perform His word builds up (CP Ga 3:13-14). This is yet more proof of what the salvation benefits of the Cross of Christ includes. The curse Christ died and redeemed us from includes every imaginable sickness and disease as well as poverty, loss of peace, desolation of the land, drought, being debt ridden and eternally damned, etc. The curses are all listed in De 28:15-68. There is no need to read them here because we are no longer under the curse but we do need to read them sometime to know just what Christ has delivered us from. It is more important for the purpose of this study that we familiarise ourselves with the blessings God has blessed us with in Christ, to build up our faith. Just as our healing is an established fact in Christ as Peter attests to in 1Pe 2:24 so are all the blessings of God as Paul attests to in Eph 1:3.

Faith is the assurance of God's faithfulness (CP Nu 23:19; De 7:9; Psa 31:19; 89:34; Jer 1:12; Ro 3:3-4; 1Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2Ti 2:13; Tit 1:2; He 10:23). God is not unreliable, fickle or changeable. By His very nature He is faithful and loyal to His promises (CP Mal 3:6; He 13:8). God is faithful in all His ways and if His promises are not being fulfilled in our lives we had best examine ourselves to find out why and make it right with God as quickly as we can (CP 2Cor 13:5). This is not said to condemn us, but if it could not happen it would not be in the Bible. If we know that there is no unconfessed or unrepented sin to hinder God's promises being fulfilled then we just stand in faith and believe for them to come to pass - do not give up on God. Faith receives as fact what is not revealed to the senses (CP 2Cor 5:7; He 11:1 with Mt 17:19-20; 21:22; Mk 9:23; 11:22-24). To be able to operate on this faith level requires that we be totally consecrated to the service of God and completely yielded to the authority of Jesus and His word. Faith is the fruit of our consecration and yieldedness. Acting out our faith is simply taking God at His word and doing it.

Faith is believing in the infallibility of God's word (CP Josh 21:45; 23:14; 1Ki 8:56; Isa 55:10-11; Ro 4:17). God's word binds Him to fulfil what He promises. He exalts His word even above His name (CP Psa 138:2). All we have to do is meet the conditions. Faith is choosing boldly and unswervingly to believe what God has said. We must believe totally in the testimony of scripture, and in so doing we release the creative power of God's word over all the circumstances of life. Faith without works is dead because faith is acting upon what we believe. If we say we believe something but do not act upon it that is dead faith (CP Jas 2:14-26). This does not contradict Paul's teaching that we are justified by faith alone and not by works (CP Ro 4:1-25; Eph 2:8-9). Paul is referring to initial justifying faith whereas James is referring to the faith we demonstrate by our works after salvation. Christianity demands works of believers (CP Mt 5:14-16; 16:27; Eph 2:10; 1Ti 6:17-19; 2Ti 3:16-17; Tit 1:15-16; 2:6-7, 11-14). Christians are not justified by works but because we are justified by faith we do the works. This proves our Christian consecration to God's service. There is no contradiction whatever in Paul's and James' teaching. James simply teaches that merely believing in God is no proof that we are justified by faith because even demons believe in God (Jas 2:19), but they are not justified by faith and going to heaven. Every act of obedience to God's word is an act of faith and works combined to maintain our justification before God. Our works are acts of faith, meaning that they spring from faith or are combined with faith. Faith and works cannot be separated. The works we do flow from our faith (CP Tit 3:8).

Abraham demonstrated his faith by his works. He believed God and he acted on that belief and proved his faith. Had he not obeyed God it would have demonstrated that he had no faith in God or His word (CP Ge 22:1-18). Abraham's faith was made perfect in God's sight by his works - being prepared to sacrifice Isaac as an act of obedience to God. God expects the same of every one of us who say we believe in Him and His word. If we do not act out what we say we believe then we are in fact repudiating God's word (CP Jas 1:22-25). This teaching together with Jas 2:14-26, is directed to those in the Church who profess faith in Christ and His blood atonement believing that is all that is necessary for salvation. These scriptures clearly highlight the error in that thinking. James teaches that faith such as that is dead and it will produce neither salvation nor anything else that is good (CP Jas 2:14). The answer to the question here of course is no. The only faith that saves is that which is demonstrated by works as Jas 1:22 teaches.

This is a very important teaching for the Church and carries with it a grim warning we must all heed. It is futile proclaiming faith if our actions mirror unbelief. We are only deluding ourselves if we believe we please God yet are not walking in faith and trusting implicitly in His word (CP Ro 14:23; He 3:12, 19; He 4:1-2, 11; He 11:6). If it were not possible for Christians to come short of spending eternity with Jesus there would be no need for the exhortation, "Let us therefore fear... " in He 4:1. It is spoken in the light of the possibility that some of us will fall short of everlasting life. Neither would there be any need for the comparison to be made between the Israelites and the Christians regarding the gospel in He 4:2. If there is no possibility of Christians forfeiting their salvation such warnings as these are vain, but scriptures clearly teach that God has obligated Himself only to bless those with faith as He 11:6 and Jas 1:25 teaches us (CP Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; 119:9, 15-16, 48, 78, 148; 143:5). These scriptures impress upon us the need to thoroughly immerse ourselves in God's word. The more we do the more revelation we receive of the integrity of the word and the security of God's promises (CP Ro 10:17). The more we hear the word the more our faith builds up. The Holy Spirit quickens to us scriptures as faith building revelations and we understand better what the scriptures are teaching us (CP Josh 21:45; 23:14; 1Ki 8:56; 2Cor 1:19-20). We learn from these scriptures that not only has not one of God's promises ever failed throughout all the ages but that they are still valid for today to be appropriated by all who are in Christ Jesus. 2Cor 1:19-20 teaches us that there is not one promise of God that is no to a Christian. Every promise is yes - just waiting to be appropriated by faith by all who meet the conditions. This is a revelation of the integrity of God's word and the security of His promises but it will only ever become a reality to those who act upon it because of their faith in God to perform His word. Faith can only come by being completely surrendered to God and open to being taught by the word like King David in the Psalms we just read.

Faith acts on God's word. We have all been given a measure of faith (CP Ro 12:3). It only remains for us to exercise that faith by acting upon what we say we believe of God's word. Remember, the works that combine with our faith to maintain our justification before God are simply acts of faith which are required of all believers. What we receive from God will only be what we claim of His promises by faith. Christians should never sit under any teaching that could repress or undermine in any way their faith in the power of God's word to fulfil itself. These teachers invariably use Job and Paul to make their point. They teach that because God would not heal Job or Paul then we cannot always expect healing either. That teaching is not correct but it has been perpetuated by teachers in the Church and it has caused many Christians to abandon the very promises of God that are meant to give them faith to believe that it is God's will to heal them.

We are all familiar with the book of Job, but just to summarise it, Job did not know that it was the devil afflicting him. He thought it was God, and because he did not have a complete revelation of God he made two statements about God at the onset of his

trials that have been taught, and accepted by many Christians as being God's word, yet they are both incorrect (CP Job 1:13-22; 2:7-10). Now compare these statements with the revelation of God James had (CP Jas 1:17). Job's statements are also used by some to teach that this is how God chastens His children, but that is not how He chastens us at all (CP 1Cor 11:31-32). This is how we are chastened by God: by judging ourselves and being convicted of sin in our lives, and confessing it before God. Chastening means correction. It does not mean that we are afflicted with boils, or forfeit all our possessions, or have all our family die, like Job. Chastening refers to the activity directed toward the moral and spiritual nurture and training of a child, to influence conscious will and action. It means to instruct, to educate, to correct. There is a vast difference between the true meaning of the word and what we have been led to believe it means, which has utterly undermined countless numbers of Christian's faith to believe implicitly in God's word. Job really highlights the New Testament truth that believers undergoing persecution and fiery trials must remain steadfast in faith (CP Jas 1:2-4; 1Pe 5:8-10). Job's steadfastness and patience enabled God's purpose to prevail over Satan. That is the main teaching in the book of Job (CP Jas 5:10-11).

Now, concerning Paul. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, which has been taught was some form of sickness or disease he suffered from, yet the Bible clearly teaches that it was not sickness at all (CP 2Cor 12:1-10). Paul's thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan - a demon, sent to buffet him - to cause extreme hardships to befall him lest he be overcome with pride because of what he had seen and heard in heaven. Paul did not suffer from sickness at all. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that Paul was ever sick. Paul knew the power of God in him - we only have to read Acts 28 to know that sickness in any form would have no power over Paul (CP Ac 28:1-10). Paul did not pray to God to be healed of sickness. He prayed that the demon would be removed from him, but of course God would not remove it because He had instigated its presence in the first place, which is what 2Cor 12:8 clearly teaches. How could Paul labour more abundantly than the false teachers he had to contend with in the Church at Corinth if he was always sick, as we have been led to believe (CP 2Cor 11:22-23). Paul's thorn did not hinder the faith of Publius and the others who got healed on the Island of Melita (or Malta) in Acts 28, so why should we let it hinder our faith for healing today.

Healing is not only about restoring health to the one who is sick. It is also a sign to awaken others to a consciousness of the presence and the power of God, and to raise their faith in Jesus. Over 5,000 got saved as a result of one man being healed in the Bible - the crippled beggar at the Gate Beautiful (CP Ac 3:1 - 4:4). Every believer in Christ is empowered to do what Peter and John did here and it is incumbent upon us to manifest that power if God is to be glorified by our works in the earth as Jesus commands (CP Mt 5:14-16). Jesus placed great importance upon the works that He did because they glorified God (CP Jn 9:1-7). Jesus made the point that regardless of the origin of his blindness, God would be glorified in the man's healing. The disciples erroneously thought, as a lot of people still do, that the blindness was from God but as Jesus shows here God is not glorified in sickness - He is glorified in health. In the broad sense, sin was responsible for the man's blindness but it was not personal sin or the sin of his parents - it was the sin of Adam which brought with it all manner of sickness into the world.

There is not one teaching anywhere in the Bible that God is glorified in sickness yet there are many Christians who believe that He is. This represses their faith for healing. We are obliged to ask them the question that if God is glorified in sickness why did Jesus go around healing every one who was sick? Twenty-three times in the New Testament we are told that He healed all who were sick. We need to know these scriptures to satisfy ourselves that Jesus did heal all of them, and we can do likewise if we will but exercise our faith (CP Mt 4:23-24; 8:14-18; 9:35; 11:5; 12:15; 14:14, 35-36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Mk 1:32-35, 39; 3:10; 6:5, 56; Lu 4:40; 5:15, 17; 6:17-19; 7:21-23; 9:11; 17:17; Ac 10:38). We learn from Ac 10:38 that all sickness is of the devil. Could God ever be glorified in any of the devil's works? If God is glorified in sickness then when Jesus went around and healed all who were sick He was disobeying God, yet Jesus said that He was only doing the work God had told him to do (CP Jn 5:19-20, 36). Now, if we believe that Job and Paul both prayed for healing and were refused by God then this means that faith does not come by the word of God alone as scriptures teach but that it comes by praying until a special revelation comes to us that it is God's will to heal us. This is a false teaching. It is the exact opposite to what Ro 10:17 and numerous other scriptures teach us.

Let us go back to the book of Acts for a few moments to where the crippled beggar got healed at the Gate Beautiful to see what it teaches about acting out our faith (CP Ac 3:1-16). We find that, contrary to popular opinion, there is no suggestion whatsoever here that this beggar believed in Jesus, that he even knew Jesus for that matter, or that he had faith for his healing. As a matter of fact Peter and John did not even preach the gospel to him. Peter simply spoke the desired end result over the man's situation in life and God did it. Peter's faith was never in himself to do it - it was in God, and this is how it should be with us too. Do not think of failure because the outcome does not depend on us. It depends on God. Yet we struggle with faith as though it depends on us. Many Christians do not act out their faith because of their fear of failure, yet if they would but speak God's word over the situation in faith they would have the same result Peter had at the Gate Beautiful and David had with Goliath (CP 1Sam 17:37, 45-51).

Let us go back to Jas 2 (CP Jas 2:14-26). The seriousness of what James teaches about faith and works here is lost on a great many Christians because they do not fully comprehend it. Yet they profess faith in God and the atoning work of Christ. But if we say we believe in God yet do not act out His word, the Bible says we are liars (CP Jn 14:15 with 1Jn 2:4). We all like to think we have faith, but if it is only an imitation of the true heartfelt faith the Lord desires of us it will not get us to heaven, as is made very clear in Jas 1:22-25 and 2:17-26. Faith is not only the way to life (CP Eph 2:8). It is also the way of life for the Christian (CP Ro 1:17). At our conversion to Christ we are placed by God into a life of faith which we must continuously be exercising from then on (CP Eph 2:10; Tit 2:11-14; Jas 2:26). There is no question that we have faith. It was wrought in us by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ for our salvation in the first place (Ro 10:8-17). Also, we have been given a measure of faith for our Christian walk (CP Ro 12:3). What we have to address here is how to act out that faith in our walk as God would have us do. We rested our faith on the reliability of God's word for our salvation - why can we not accept it the same way after we are saved?

The gospel of Jesus is a very simple teaching if we will just accept it at face value. It is not a hard word to obey - it is us who have made it hard (CP Lu 5:1-6). This is a beautiful teaching on how faith works. Because Jesus said it, Peter did it. Simple is it not? Peter simply obeyed what Jesus said to do. Notwithstanding that he had already tried and failed in his own flesh, Peter acted on the Lord's word and it worked, and it will work for us too if we will only act upon it like Peter did. Peter surrendered the Lord's word back to him to fulfil it and He did (CP V5). Peter said "...nevertheless - (notwithstanding what my sense knowledge tells me) - at your word Lord, I will let down the net." In that simple act of obedience Peter was acknowledging Christ's dominion and authority over all things, even the fish and the sea (CP Psa 8). Cannot we also acknowledge Christ like this and simply obey His word like Peter did? If we can rest our faith on the reliability of God's word for our salvation can we not believe Him for all the other benefits salvation includes? Salvation is an all-inclusive package. Its Greek root *Soteria* also means health, healing, welfare, prosperity and victory as well as deliverance from sin and its spiritual consequences, and this is confirmed right throughout scripture (Psa 103:1-6, 10-12; 107:1-43; Isa 53:4-5; 54:14-17; Mt 8:16-17; Ga 3:13-14; 1Pe 2:24). There are many more scriptures of course but these will suffice as most of them already are a part of this study (CP Psa 103:1-6, 10-12; 107:1-7).

Let us see now what some of the works are that God has ordained us to do. First and foremost, we are to believe on Jesus - that means we are to believe in Him and His word implicitly (CP Jn 6:28-29). Second, we have to be totally surrendered to Jesus and consecrated to the service of God (CP Mt 7:21-27). Works are also confessing God's word over our circumstances in life, which includes our daily confession (CP Mk 11:22-24). Works are all our acts of faith whereby God is glorified (CP Mt 5:14-16). Our works confirm our love for God and for each other (CP Jas 2:15-17 with 1Jn 3:16-19). Preaching the gospel, casting out demons, healing the sick are also works of faith in obedience to God's word (CP Mk 16:15-18). Jesus said here in V17 "These signs shall follow them that believe." He did not say "These signs shall only follow the Church leader, the preacher or anyone else in public ministry", but the ordinary, everyday, tall, short, fat, thin, old, young, male, female, black, white, Jew, Gentile believer. They might become Church leaders and preachers, etc, eventually, but they are ordinary believers in the first instance and they are the ones Jesus promised that signs would follow. Whoever fits the description of any of the above believers will have signs following them if they will but act out their faith. Remember, we do not do these works in our own power. It is God's responsibility to fulfil His word once we speak it out in faith (CP Mk 16:19-20). We only have to take God's word at face value and do it like Peter did to see the fruit it will produce in our life. The more we do it, the more fruit it will produce.

Believers cannot afford to be satisfied just to be saved. God has delivered us from sin and its effects upon us in order that we might enjoy the way of life He has designed for us (CP Col 1:9-14). But it must be a life of continuously exercising our faith. God wants us to reign as kings with Him in this life. We are not meant to be sick or defeated by our circumstances. There is no glory for God in that as we have seen throughout this study (CP Ro 5:17). Good health, healing, prosperity and victory for the Christian is for now or all the scriptures we have been studying here are meaningless (CP Isa 54:17; Ga 3:26-29). This is irrefutable proof that the abundant life Jesus promises us in Jn 10:10 is for this life, not the next as so many would have us believe. If we truly believe in the finished work of the cross we can never settle for less than the best God has provided for us in His perfect plan of salvation through the precious blood of Jesus. The sad thing is that the great majority of Christians are still standing at the foot of the cross waiting for Christ to be taken down. Their consciousness is fixed on the Christ who died, not on the Christ who lives - who is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. They have not yet accepted all the salvation benefits He has purchased for us with His blood. They do not understand that the empty cross represents our victory in Christ now. It is ours to possess and enjoy, and reveal to the glory of God in this life, not in the hereafter.