

Hartford Bible Students Newsletter

March 2012

Faith Under Fire

"Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."

Mark 9:24

The conflict between faith and doubt is the great reality of the time in which we live. Never before in human history has so much tragedy been witnessed in such vivid display to so many. News events are transmitted via cell phones worldwide as they happen - hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, sickness, murder, terrorism, and every imaginable evil. Even more disheartening are news reports filled with the hypocrisy of those who were supposed to be pillars of the community and faithful shepherds of the church. Their crimes against the innocent have now been exposed and add an even greater burden to the weak in faith. At times like these, doubt can plague even the most earnest Christian.

To bring stability to our faith, we must first understand the root causes of doubt. There are many underlying conditions which undermine faith. We will consider a few of these: 1. a lack of proper Scriptural understanding of prophetic events and the plan of God; 2. an overwhelming personal experience which is very difficult to endure; 3. a sense of helplessness when viewing the broad spectrum of trouble throughout the earth.

Cause #1: Lack of Scriptural Understanding Remedy: A Solid Foundation

For faith to survive the storms of life, we must seek to know God's character, plans and purposes as revealed in His Word. Knowing what God is doing in the earth in preparation for His Kingdom is a critical remedy to dispel our doubts and fears. The Apostle Peter urges: *"Add to your faith, knowledge..."* 2 Peter 1:5

God has provided in His Word an understanding of prophecy at this time so that His children will not be in distress when they see earth-shattering events unfold. However, a misinterpretation of prophecy can cause confusion and unfounded fear. And so, it is important to prove all things by harmonizing the Scriptures. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) But, be aware that in Christian bookstores today there are many books which sensationalize and fictionalize the events of prophecy. In these books, highly symbolic passages are interpreted as literal, and although the Bible does indicate trouble in the earth at this time, the wrong interpretation of Scripture can totally distort the loving character and plans of God.

Thus, it is a good practice to square every doctrine with two pivotal truths: 1. Jesus' ransom for

all to be testified in due time; and 2. The fact that "God is love" and "His compassions fail not." We should test doctrinal interpretations to see if they are in harmony with the loving character of God who has provided for a full and fair opportunity of salvation for all mankind in due time. This is the hope for a world now in crisis, and it should reinforce our faith and put our minds at peace.

Cause #2: Overwhelming personal Trials
Remedy: Knowing Why God Tests Faith

Why do Christians have to endure pain and sorrow? First, it is good to remember that Christians are not exempt from the common troubles of this life. *"Every test that you have experience is the kind that normally comes to people...but at the time that you are put to the test, He will give you the strength to endure it..."* (1 Corinthians 10:13 GNB) True heart sympathy for others can only be gained by going through the hard experiences common to all. Jesus is referred to as a "sympathetic high priest," and like our Master, Christians must be developed through the trials of life to have sympathy for mankind and their sufferings.

Secondly, at the end of their Christian journey, the followers of Christ will be tested upon their faith. Therefore, God-like character must be developed over time by experience, and then tested to be proven worthy of a crown of life. (Revelation 2:10) *"The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ..."* (1 Peter 1:7) For those who seek the reward of living and reigning with Christ in God's Kingdom, they must have a developed, crystallized character which has remained loyal to Him, even under pressure. this is why God permits repeated testings.

This Christian era has been a time to educate and develop a select group of faithful saints taken out from this imperfect and corrupt world - a Bride of God's Son. this Bride class, also known as the body of Christ or the Church, will be willing to submit to the same kind of death as her bridegroom - a sacrificial death (dying daily). *"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection..."* (Romans 6:5)

Cause #3: Helplessness During Global Troubles
Remedy: Understanding the Permission of Evil

To have a stable faith in God, we must be convinced by the Scriptures that He is loving and wise - providing all things for man's eternal welfare. God, whose character is supreme love, would not have permitted evil to reign over His creation without a useful purpose and, ultimately, a grand outcome. 1 John 4:8

To understand why God permits suffering, we must first realize the difference between permitting and causing. God has permitted man to have a temporary experience with evil, but He did not cause the evil. No, Satan, the "god of this world" is the great first cause of all evil in the universe. Our Heavenly Father desires mankind to live in peace, health and happiness, but He now allows Satan to rule for a limited time in order that each individual may learn valuable

lessons, experiencing the results of evil and selfishness.

Therefore, we read, "*This sore travail has God given to man to be exercised therewith.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:13) As an illustration, although parents will try to intervene at times when a child ventures off onto a dangerous path, often in takes the hard lessons of a rebellious life to learn that trust and obedience would have saved much pain and suffering. just as the loving parents were waiting, ready to take back the child with love and open arms, so God is long-suffering with humanity. He knew that Adam and Eve would not comprehend His warning about sin and its dire consequences. Out of love, God formulated a plan whereby Adam's disobedience might provide a valuable, though difficult, lesson for all mankind.

Developing a Deep and Abiding Faith

Yes, a deep and abiding faith in God, which will provide peace in times of trouble, is dependent upon, and proportionate to, the development of our faith. As we grow in knowledge, we grow in faith, and we come to see that our all-loving and all-wise Father is in control. We learn to trust Him, even in difficult times, because we know that He has a good purpose for everything that occurs in our lives. "All things [not just some things] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

Faith is not developed overnight, and God understands when we cry out, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!" The Christian is said to be in a schoolhouse, and every experience, even that which shakes our faith, is an opportunity to learn and grow more into the likeness of our Master and example. A faith which has stood the tests of experience and has come off victorious is very precious in our Father's sight.

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