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THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

By Harold Turner

There are many Bible subjects that have been given a special emphasis in the New Testament. They have been given special emphasis because of their effect on man's relationship with God. One of these subjects is faith. Faith plays a vital role in man's relationship to God. In Heb. 11:6 the Bible states that without faith it is impossible to please God, and in John 8:24 Jesus said that man would die in his sins unless he believed that he was the Christ. Our salvation depends on our faith in Christ and his will. Rom. 5:1 teaches that we are justified by faith, and Gal. 3:26 teaches that we are the children of God by faith in Christ. And after becoming a Christian we are to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), and live by faith (Gal. 2:20). So faith affects our whole relationship with God.

There are, however, many dangers facing our faith. There are many things called faith which do not resemble the Bible teachings of faith. Too, there is the danger of having a faith like those to whom James wrote. James said these had faith, but that it was inactive. He stressed to them, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." (James 2:17.) Saving faith is not just mentally believing in the existence of God and of Christ, but it embraces actively all that they have taught us. The Bible warns us of some who believed in God, but because of a failure to express that faith in obedience, they displeased him. In John 12:42 there were many of the chief rulers who believed in Jesus, but they refused to confess him. James 2:19 tells us that even the devils believe and tremble, but their faith can not save them. Another danger that faith faces is that of believing a lie. Faith in a lie will affect us as strongly as faith in truth. Wasn't Jacob affected as strongly by the lie of his sons, who presented him the bloody coat of Joseph, just as much as if they had told him the truth? Faith must be properly guided as well as expressed in order to save us.

Unless we have the right foundation or basis for our faith, it will not reward us

with a right relationship with God. And since there are several things used as a basis for one's faith, it is important for us to investigate what we believe, and why we believe it. It is possible to have a strong faith in that which comes solely from the wisdom of men. In 1 Cor. 2:5 we are warned, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." After Paul had preached the gospel in Galatia, and established the church there, he departed. Shortly after this, others came to Galatia preaching a different gospel than what Paul had preached. This different gospel demanded circumcision as a condition to salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal. 6:12). By placing their faith in this false teaching, the Galatians fell from grace (Gal. 1:6, 7; 5:4). Their faith had become misguided, and it led them away from Christ. In 2 Thess. 2:9-10 Paul warned of one who

would come working signs and wonders and by so doing would deceive people from a love of the truth that they might be saved. These examples, along with many others, clearly show that our faith must have the right foundation before it will please God. It isn't enough to believe in God, our faith must be properly guided before it can be properly expressed.

Some evidently use as a basis for their faith, their own wisdom. It isn't uncommon to hear people say, "I believe this is all right," or "I believe this is wrong." And if questioned as to why they believe these things, they may express, "Well, I just do." They have no evident reason for such belief. The lesson from Paul's life before his conversion should warn us of the danger of such a faith. In Acts 26:9, Paul said, "I verily thought with myself,

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JESUS INTENDED TO SAVE SOULS

By Ted Mountjoy

When Jesus said, in Matt. 16:18, that he was going to build his church, he had in mind a single, universal church. It was to be his church, and no one else's. It was to be formed on the basis of his teachings, authority, and power, no one else's. Jesus didn't intend to set up a super-ecclesiastical power structure, rather, he intended to save souls. By establishing his church, Jesus intended to save souls. In Luke 19:10 he said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus had no other purpose than to bring people, who were sinful and lost, into the right relationship with God. He didn't come to give men a new ritual of worship, in fact, in the process of saving souls he did away with the rituals of formal worship which were practiced by the people of his time.

The Bible declares, in Acts 2:47, that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The church was

made up of a simple group of people, who came from all walks of life. They were people who had turned from the pagan type of worship, from the highly ritualistic worship, and from the Jewish type of worship. They all in one accord began worshipping the one true and living God through Jesus Christ.

Their worship was very simple in design. Though they met often, they especially came together on the first day of the week in order to break bread and drink the fruit of the vine, which were remainders of the broken body and shed blood of their Savior (Acts 20:7). They also prayed and sang songs of praise to God (Eph. 5:19). And they studied the word of God, and gave of their financial means in order to further the preaching of the gospel into other areas.

They had no great religious figure who stood over them in their worship service,

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JESUS INTENDED TO SAVE SOULS

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and who was especially "ordained" to give blessings to their worship. They were all equal (Gal. 3:28, 29) and the only blessings they needed was the words of their Master, Jesus, in whom all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). They were a simple people; worshipping, praying, strengthening one another, sharing the gospel to save others, and helping those in need. This was the church Jesus established. This was the way the Master intended it to be.

But the apostle Paul warned the early church that "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Tim. 4:3, 4.) No longer would they be satisfied to hear the pure and simple gospel. No longer would they be satisfied to worship in the pure and simple way as Jesus intended. Sooner or later, they would change it and corrupt it. It would cease to be the church of Christ, which was based upon his teachings and commandments. Man's likings, man's desires would turn it into the church of man!

But the good news is that we can restore the pure and simple worship as Jesus intended. We can be restored from the lost and sinful state into the right relationship with God. We can once again be called the saved, the church of Christ. We can restore it all, just as Jesus purposed, intended, and accepts; because we have the pure and simple gospel by which this restoration can be accomplished.

"Life for most of us is a continuous process of getting used to things we hadn't expected."

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

By Ordell Heavin

The most urgent need facing the church today is for scriptural, sound, spiritually strong and fully informed leadership. The highest priority should be given to developing, strengthening and encouraging leaders at all levels — elders, deacons, preachers, teachers and fathers. An institution is not likely to rise above its leadership. An enthusiastic, unselfish leadership will make a great church. Leadership in the church is not only an urgent need, but it is the most demanding role with the most awesome responsibilities of any endeavor on earth. Men in material leadership may make decisions involving the loss or gain of millions of dollars. Men in leading roles of government may determine war or peace. But men in spiritual leadership are dealing with eternal souls and eternal destinies. In Heb. 13:17 the Bible says that "they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." The total wealth of this world and of life itself is not equal to the value of one soul. Jesus indicated this in Matt. 16:26, saying, "For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What would a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Godly men who serve as elders, deacons, preachers and teachers deserve our love, esteem and appreciation. It was with reference to elders that Paul said, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake." (1 Thess. 5:12-13.) The Bible teaches us to "Render therefore to all their dues — honor to whom honor." (Rom. 13:7.)

Leadership is one of the finest and most needed of all human developments, yet is a trait to be learned and developed. Leaders who teach God's word are molding lives into service which prepares souls for eternity. The leader is an artist, and his material is people. The spiritual soundness, strength, progress and growth of the church is in the hands of the leadership. Such a responsible role would naturally require the highest of spiritual qualifications and training. In 1 Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:9-11 a list of qualifications is given showing that God has placed special emphasis on the maturity and ability of those selected for this work.

The duties of the elders are also listed in Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Heb. 13:7, 17, etc. Along with these qualifications and duties is the example set by the elders. Elders should be living examples of Christianity. Their example should express purity, faith, knowledge, attitudes, love, patience, gentleness and active service. The most powerful influence of a spiritual leader is his own personal example. Peter instructed elders to be "ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3.) While no man is flawless or perfect, elders must be above reproach. They must take the lead, set the pace, and be an example of Christianity. A failure in leadership is a very serious problem, and probably one of the weakest points in the church today.

Certainly such an awesome responsibility as is placed upon the elders deserves our prayers and support in every way. They undertake a role that is not just serious, but often disappointing in accomplishing the high goals set for the church. However the rewards for such an undertaking is also high. To elders the apostle Peter wrote, saying, "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:4.) May God help elders never to grow weary in well doing, and members to be helpers rather than problems.

"Gossip is a little insect: it has neither legs nor wings, it is wholly made up of tales, and most of them have strings."

"Few things in this world are more spacious than the room we have for improvement."

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THE ANEMIC CHRISTIAN

By Larry Corbett

*"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."
(1 Cor. 11:30.)*

While there are numerous problems with some members of the church, we must be objective in looking at ourselves for problems of weakness and sickness. One problem indicated by the above Scripture is spiritual anemia.

Anemia literally means a lack of blood. The medical definition is a condition in which the red corpuscles of the blood are reduced in number or are deficient in hemoglobin. It is also a synonym for weakness. A Christian who is spiritually or morally weak is in need of a spiritual physician. In our prayers we should remember the spiritually weak as well as the physically weak.

The congregations of the church spoken of in the New Testament also had weak members. In Rom. 15:1 Paul wrote, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The church at Corinth, as indicated in 1 Cor. 11:30, had weak and sickly members. Also, to the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are

unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." (1 Thess. 5:14.)

The anemic Christian is one with a divided allegiance. He has little or no convictions. Jesus pointed out in Matt. 6:24 that no man can serve two masters: for he would hold to one and despise the other. To become spiritually strong, one must center his life on one major goal and purpose.

Another problem with the anemic Christian is his slow pace. Paul describes this in Gal. 5:7. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth." The Galatians had started the race well, but for lack of spiritual energy they had slowed their running pace.

In Heb. 5:12-14 Paul wrote to Christians whose spiritual energy was so sapped they weren't progressing at all. He said, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belong-

eth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

The anemic Christian has a weak resistance to temptations. He does, however, have a good appetite for television, movies, ball games, card games, magazines etc. He literally "eats them up." But he has no appreciation of visiting the sick, teaching lost souls, attending gospel meetings, and inviting friends to worship with him. He can get involved in the home, at the school, on the job, or for some club. He is busy here and there except for the Lord.

The Lord understands that it takes time to mature as a Christian, but after a time, spiritual weakness is a sin. It is inexcusable. It is wickedness and slothfulness, and it places the Christian once again in a lost condition.

We should all be alert to signs of spiritual anemia in our life. If we find ourselves growing weaker instead of stronger, and if we find that we are not using fully the talents with which God has blessed us, we should immediately repent and return to the Lord with a greater determination for serving Christ than ever before.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

By Harold Turner

In the true sense, to be a Christian is to be Christ-like in our attitudes, values, standards, and character. As Jesus lived before man in the image of his Father, so the Christian is to live before the world the image of Christ. In Phil 2:5 Paul said, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Of himself, Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) And to these same people of Galatia, Paul wrote, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." (Gal. 4:29.) These passages show that the Christian is to let Christ live in his heart in such a way as to change his whole life.

In Col. 3:9, 10 the idea of becoming a Christian is pictured as putting off one way of life and putting on another. The writer states, "Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." In Rom. 6:3-6 Paul pictures this as a putting to death the old man of sin that once controlled our life, a burial of that old man in the likeness of Christ's burial, and then a resurrection to walk in a newness of life. In Col. 2:11-13 the idea of becoming a Christian is pictured as a "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." He then shows that

when we are raised up we are quickened, or made alive, and forgiven of all trespasses. Becoming a Christian involves a putting to death our former way of life, a burial in baptism, and a resurrection to a new way of life; a way of life controlled by Christ.

When we become a Christian, we are then to begin patterning our life after the image of Christ. In 2 Cor. 3:18 Paul pictures the new Christian as standing before a glass in which the image of Christ is seen, and a fashioning of the Christian into that image. The glass that reflects this image is the gospel, which clearly shows in the person of Christ, how the Christian is to live.

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In 1 Peter 2:21, Peter stated that Christ left us an example to follow. When we follow his example, we in turn become, in a small way, an example for Christ to the world. Neither we nor the world can understand Christianity apart from Christ. He is the center and source of this new life. The true Christian has put to death the old self, and has turned his life completely over to Christ. He is now interested in living as Christ wants him to live, to act and think as he is taught by the example of Jesus, and to show as well as tell others how wonderful it is to be a follower of Christ. In 1 Tim. 4:12 the Christian is to be an "example in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity." Doesn't it seem reasonable that the world will be more attracted to the gospel being lived than to a gospel that is just preached with no example. Jesus lived what he taught others. A Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. This involves being an example to show the transforming power of the gospel when it is permitted to grow in the heart.

Is Christ truly the center of your life? Is he the most important thing in your life? Have you determined to have in you that mind which was in Christ? No person can be a Christian in the true sense who is still trying to hold on to the things of this world. Paul said, in Col. 3:1-2, "If ye then be raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Christ came to give us an abundant life; he came to enrichen our life in all things; he came to save us from the destruction of sin, and to guide our feet in the pathway toward eternal life. But we cannot enjoy this abundant life until we put to death the old man dominated by sinful ways, and let Christ become the controlling factor of our life. Are you a Christian? Are you a Christian just in name, or in a living example? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6.) May God help each of us to follow his example, and to be a light that leads others to his saving grace.

"Strengthen the weak, forgive the erring, scatter rays of sunshine, assure every person of your love, then watch for happy results."

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that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Paul really believed this, but why? He reasoned this within himself. This was the only basis for his faith. Jer. 10:23 warns that it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps. His faith must be guided by a greater source than himself.

There are others who claim to have strong faith, but when tested, their faith rests upon some interpretation of the Scriptures. Our world is indoctrinated to the idea that everyone has a right to his own opinions about religion, and that God will approve of whatever opinion they hold. In 2 Peter 1:20-21 Peter wrote, "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." God didn't permit the writers of the Scriptures to write their interpretation of what they thought God wanted man to know. They were to write only what was revealed to them. This revelation was the interpretation of God's will for man. God does not allow man to interpret his word to suit his own desires. In 1 Cor. 1:10 God commands that we all speak the same thing. This can be accomplished only when we do as 1 Peter 4:11 states, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Far too many are trying to teach people what they think God should have said, but didn't know how to say. Faith in such teachings is destructive. Jesus said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9.) These people believed in him, they were worshipping him, but in vain. Why? Their faith and worship was guided by man's teachings rather than God's.

The only sure foundation of our faith is the word of God. The apostle John wrote in John 20:30-31, "These things have I written unto you, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God . . ." In Rom. 10:17 Paul said, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith in any thing other than the word of God will never please God, no matter how sincere one may be. This is, no doubt, why Paul wrote in Gal. 1:8-9, saying, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Unless we preach the same gospel preached by the apostles, we are to be accursed; because the gospel we preach becomes the basis for the faith of others. God does not approve of the many different gospels being preached today. There is but one, and our faith must be rooted in it alone if we are to please God.

Have you ever seriously questioned your faith? We are taught to do this. In 2 Cor. 13:5 Paul said, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves". Do you know the basis for what you believe and practice religiously? Just because the preacher said it is not good enough. Faith is far too serious a matter than to just brush it aside in indifference. Our eternal salvation depends on faith, but not just some religious belief. Our faith must be in what God has said. If we truly believe in God, we will believe what he has said, and if we believe in him and what he has said, we will obey it without question as to why it may be important. Faith is so important, and demands our fullest attention. When faith has been tested and proved, Peter said it is precious, and will be to the praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7).

"It is surprising to discover how much of our good conduct depends upon the watchful eyes of our neighbors."

"There is a vast difference between itching for something and scratching for it."

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