



FAMOUS LAST WORDS

The idea for this address came from some fictional last words from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." It made me think of how Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb.12:2), and "We know love by this, that He (Christ) laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1John 3:16). So what of Jesus' last words?

Technically, Jesus had three sets of last words:

- At the end of His human life on the cross
- After His resurrection but before His ascension
- Those at the end of the book of Revelation.

However, you could say that Jesus has not had any 'last words' as He is still alive, and because He is now immortal He will never have any last words. Consequently I have decided to make that a future project and now consider many other last words in the Scriptures that are worthy of note. So, instead, we will look at the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy, chapter 4.

Obviously these are not Paul's last spoken words but his last written words to Timothy, whom he dearly loved and frequently refers to as his son. He was in prison in the city of Rome and is supposed to have been 63 years of age at this time. During his first imprisonment in Rome Paul was permitted to live in 'his own hired house.' After he was released from custody, it is supposed that during the period of his release (which was about three years) he revisited some of the churches previously established and also carried the Gospel to *Spain*. It was during this period of freedom that the great persecution arose in Rome under Nero. This persecution commenced shortly after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, and the bitter persecution was still in full swing when, three years later, he was again arrested. This time, as he explains in verses 16-18, it would appear that he had a public trial, possibly before Nero himself; but the fear of the people was so great and quite probably Paul's language so bold that he was abandoned by all his followers, as was Jesus before

Pilate. He tells us, nevertheless, that he had with him the Lord's presence, which strengthened him to such an extent that he spoke the Word with a boldness which permitted the Gospel to be fully known to the Gentiles thereabouts. He evidently was more anxious to make known the 'good tidings' than to save himself from pain and death. Paul's prison was a very uncomfortable place we may be sure, but notwithstanding all this we are struck with the tone of triumph which permeates Paul's writings from there. Did he murmur or complain? No. There was nothing of a depressing nature in those final words of Paul.

It is said of some great men that the characteristic of waning life is disenchantment, a sense of weariness and inevitable disappointment. Elijah had discouraging moments. John the Baptist asked: "Are You the expected one or do we look for someone else?" (Luke 7:20). Paul might have been excused if he had become disconsolate. What visible success had he achieved? He had founded a few churches, the majority of which were already cold to him. He saw his efforts being slowly undermined and a world utterly hostile to the faith of Christ. The very name 'Christian' had now come to be regarded as synonymous with 'criminal'. The opposing forces of Paul's message were united in hostility to the truths he had preached. What had he gained personally? Power? No. At his worst time of need there had not been one friend to stand by his side. He was a lonely prisoner awaiting a criminal's end. What was the sum total of earthly goods that the long labour of his life had brought him? An old cloak, some books and parchments.

And yet, in what spirit did Paul write to Timothy? Did

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he regret his hard life? Did he discourage his young friend by telling him that almost every earthly hope is doomed to failure and that the struggle against human wickedness is a fruitless fight? No. Instead, this last letter was far more a cry of triumph than one of dejection and despair. For Paul, life was ending, the race was run, and the treasure safely guarded, his day's work in the Master's vineyard almost over. He was assured that when it would be totally finished the unspeakable reward would be laid up for him, held in reserve. He was looking forward to the return of his Master, when he would receive the crown of righteousness that fades not away. What else than the power of the Holy Spirit of God could so sustain Paul under these various trials and hardships which he experienced, including this his last imprisonment and his final execution, which possibly followed shortly after the writing of this epistle to Timothy. He was spared from crucifixion by reason of being a Roman citizen, and according to tradition he was beheaded.

Timothy would have received joy and encouragement, even in the midst of his natural sadness, when he read Paul's letter. It was Timothy, not Paul, who was in danger of yielding to anger and timidity and forgetting that the spirit God gave was not one of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. That was why Paul guided and directed Timothy: Bear afflictions with me. Be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ. Be brave. Don't be ashamed. We are weak and may fail if we trust in ourselves. Nevertheless, God's foundation stone stands sure. Be strong and faithful, even unto death. After laying down the foundation of Timothy's established faith, and after thus urging him to abide, or continue, in those things which he had learned, the Apostle Paul proceeds to deliver his dying charge. He sets the matter forth in a most solemn form: 'I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the words; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.' (2Tim.4:1-2)

We may regard this exhortation from Paul as applicable to ourselves. We also stand before God; we also are trusting in His favour for eternal life; we also are adopted into His family, and as sons are hoping to have such experiences as will equip and prepare us for the glorious things the Father has promised to them that love Him. Paul explains that as a minister of the grace of God this declaration of the Gospel may include three features – (1) reproof, (2) rebuke, (3) exhortation. But it is safe to caution all of the Lord's people against a too liberal use of the first two features. In order to reprove properly, the heart should be very full of love and sympathy, otherwise the reproofs and rebukes may be sharp and possibly do more harm than good. Even with the heart full of love it requires a head that is exceedingly well balanced to be able to make use of reproofs and rebukes to good advantage to those who really need them. And

in this God's people are to exhibit a character of patience, longsuffering, brotherly kindness. Another point to be noted is that it is the Word of God that is to be preached and not the word of man. However God may use human agencies in explaining His Word, the distinction between the Word of the Lord and the word of the teacher is to be continually discerned.

Paul now prophetically writes of the great falling away and probably the formation of the papacy: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry," (2Tim.4:3-5) But Paul adds that Timothy should not be discouraged at these things but should continue on in the world, fulfilling his ministry. Timothy would have been encouraged by these words and they would have reminded him of all that Paul had suffered for the Truth and what a great example he was to him. After Christ, Paul has probably been the next greatest example of faith that has encouraged Christians all through the ages.

To fix this heartfelt appeal for faithfulness to the Word of the Lord in Timothy's mind, this conviction of the apostle that he was about to die, is urged as a reason why Timothy should be laborious and faithful in the performance of the duties of his office. Paul refers to himself - that he must now give up the fight, that the end of his life was apparently in sight and the time of his departure from life was at hand: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2Tim.4:6-8). How humble and yet how confident are the closing words of the great Apostle's testimony "*I have fought a good fight*" etc. He did not boast of perfection in his flesh but, on the contrary, disclaimed it saying that he had to constantly keep his body 'under', in subjection to the new mind. He did not boast of how many churches he had established or how many converts he had made and baptized. He did not boast of his knowledge of the Lord's Word, nor of his ability as a speaker, nor of how many epistles he had written, nor of his imprisonments and sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. On the contrary, his boast was simply that he had fought well, fought faithfully, fought to the best of his ability against the sin abounding everywhere and the weaknesses in himself. His boast was not that he had made a faith or that he had expressed the Gospel in the most clear and positive manner which would progress for generations after him to glorify God and to bless His people, but his boast merely was that he had 'kept the faith' – the faith which

God through His Word had inspired, the faith which he had received and was given to all of the Lord's people. He had kept it, he had been faithful to it, he had not bartered it for earthly advantages.

On the strength of these two points, his having kept the Word of the Lord's testimony obediently and his having fought to defend it to the end of his course to the best of his ability, he builds his hope for the crown of rejoicing in the Kingdom with the Redeemer and His faithful Bride at His appearing. What an encouragement is here for each of God's people; to know that it is not by intellectual or physical strength, not by wonderful works, not by anything that we can do or have done for the Lord, His cause and His people, that we are to hope for eternal glory; but simply, like Paul, we are to seek to faithfully use what talents we do possess and what opportunities the Lord provides for us. We are to keep the faith, not denying it under any circumstance. We, too, are to fight the good fight against selfishness in its every guise, especially in ourselves, and to develop in ourselves more and more under the Lord's instruction His spirit, the spirit of love, the Holy Spirit.

And here we must remember that keeping the faith is not merely keeping it in us, but is in the sense of faithfully declaring it; for whoever does not declare the good tidings to others will soon lose the faith himself. Let us press along the line toward the same mark for the same prize of joint-heirship with the Lord. And if when we come to the end of our life we can say, as did the Apostle, that we have fought well all along our course and kept the faith, the Lord will not say to us that we did not do as much as the Apostle Paul or as much as the Lord Jesus, but having done what we could, having been faithful in the few things and in the small talents entrusted to us, we will hear the welcome words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.'

These joys of the Master Paul refers to as 'a crown of righteousness.' The Apostles James and John speak of the same crown and call it 'the crown of life' (Jas.1:12, Rev.2:10), and the Apostle Peter calls it 'the crown of glory'. (1 Peter 5:4) The thought behind each of these expressions is evidently the same, namely, the custom in times past of running races and the giving of a crown to the successful runner at the end of the race. It was not sufficient to only enter a race or start to run, it was required that the race be run faithfully, persevering to the end. And so it is with this race which we are running as followers of Jesus. It is essential, not only that we shall make consecration to the Lord, but that we persevere to the end, and our reward will be 'the crown of life' in the sense that we will get life on the highest plane – immortality. It will be 'a crown of righteousness' in the sense that only those who are approved of God as righteous will thus be rewarded and glorified. Our hope, therefore, is that we may be accepted in the Beloved, that the righteousness of the

Law may be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit, and that the rewards which God has promised to those who love Him and serve Him will be granted to us. 'The crown of glory' is another name for the same grand reward – the glory of the Kingdom, the glory of immortality, the glory of the Father's favour, and the glory of being joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

That is practically Paul's last word. The remainder of the letter is occupied with personal information given in the natural, loose, accidental order of a letter mingled with earnest entreaty to him that he would come at once: 'Make every effort to come to me soon.' Demas, Crescens, Titus are all absent from him. Erastus did not come with him father than *Corinth*. Trophimus was taken ill at Miletus. Luke only is left. Mark is useful to him for service, perhaps because he knew Latin, and therefore Timothy is to pick him up somewhere on the way and bring him. Tychicus is already on the way to Ephesus so that he can take Timothy's place when he arrives. Timothy is to be on his guard against the pronounced hostility of Alexander the coppersmith. Then follows the touching allusion to his first trial and deliverance, spoken about earlier. Greetings are sent to Prisca, Aquila and the house of Onesiphorus. Once more, 'Do your best to come before winter'. If he comes after that time he may be too late. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

Did Paul ever get that cloak and the parchments and the books? Did Timothy ever reach him? No one can say for sure. With the last verse of the second letter to Timothy we have heard Paul's last words: "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." (2Tim.4:22) We have no record of Paul's last trial before the Roman court. We can only suppose, justly so, that Paul preached and defended the Gospel and the faith to the very end. We can only suppose also that he was totally alone at his second trial, even more so than at his first, for tradition does not even supply an answer. There must not have been even one timid secret Christian there who could have passed on a record to fellow Christians. Although Paul wrote the following words of Hebrews, ch.11, about the heroes of faith, I believe that they are equally applicable to him as well, for Paul was truly one of the great heroes of the faith: "*All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*" (Heb.11:13-16)

(DO O6)

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

Today there are a number of views people have about Jesus. You have one extreme view that He is, in fact, God Almighty. Then there are those who believe He was a very wise and intelligent man, a good man, but at the other end of the scale, the other extreme view, that He was a trickster, that He was an imposter. Many non-Christians believe Jesus was, in fact, someone who set out to deceive the multitude. The notion is that people back there in the first century were very ignorant people and He was a very clever man, consequently He took His cleverness and set out to make a name for Himself. But sadly, they say, everything backfired and He failed. That is the other extreme view.

So when you point to the miracles that Jesus performed, well, they have answers to that. He was a magician, they say. He was a trickster, he knew how to make things appear when in fact they were not. Somehow He took the opportunity and acted upon it, others He staged, and consequently succeeded in getting a crowd to follow Him at that time. Many go further and say that His followers tried to continue on with that kind of deception, to continue to try to push the deception that Jesus was somebody more than they think He was. Let us look at some examples.

There are a number of miracles recorded in the Bible. One I would like to discuss, and to bring to your attention the claims they make of these miracles, how they “disprove” these miracles, how they show there is something wrong there. In John 9:1-7 we read of the case of a man who was blind: ¹Now as Jesus passed by he saw a man who was blind from birth,² and his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? ³Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned: but that the works of God should be revealed in him.⁴ I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work,⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. ⁶When he had said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay with his saliva and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. ⁷And said to him, Go, wash yourself in the pool of Siloam (which is translated Sent.) So he went and washed and came back seeing.’

That’s fair enough! But now, where’s the trick. Well, if you read verse 13, ‘They brought him who was formerly blind to the Pharisees.’ So they took this man to the Pharisees and, of course, the Pharisees were disputing that now he was healed perhaps he was not really blind, that the whole thing was a trick,. They even brought his parents and the parents testified that this man was blind, but that was not good enough, so at the end of the day, they threw him out of the synagogue, as verse 34 tells us. They said to him, ³⁴You were completely born in sin and are you teaching us? And they

cast him out.’ They threw him out. But let’s read on: ³⁵Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he had found him, he said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? ³⁶He answered and said, Who is he Lord that I may believe in him? ³⁷And Jesus said, You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you.’ You see, this is where the whole account falls apart because they claim that the blind man has certain abilities that people who see do not have. A blind man can hear sounds that we don’t necessarily hear, so when we speak to a blind man he can recognise in the voice pitch, in the way we sound, what is known as a voiceprint. This voiceprint is a bit like a fingerprint, unique. Everyone of us has a voiceprint, and a blind man can apparently pick even if we can’t. It takes us a long time to recognise a voice but scientists have discovered that this is something that a blind man can pick up straight away. So they say, if this man was really blind, why in verse 36 does he say, Who is he Lord that I may believe in him?

The argument is that if he was really blind he would not have asked this question because he would have recognised his voice when Jesus said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? This is where people who read the Bible without any spiritual discernment can make anything they want out of it. In reality, with spiritual insight, we realize that what the blind man was asking now that he was healed was reassurance as to whether it was in fact the Son of God, the Son of man, the Messiah, that had healed him and not someone else. Not that he didn’t recognise His voiceprint, he obviously did, but he wanted to know, Are you the One? That’s what he was asking for and that’s what Jesus answered to him. Of course, people without spiritual discernment can look at this argument today and make it a proof that Jesus’ miracle here was not really a miracle, because they claim the man was not really blind, much like the Pharisees who were questioning whether he was really blind or the whole thing was staged.

Let’s look at another example. Matthew 14 reads: ²²Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into a boat and go before him to the other side while he sent the multitude away. ²³And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up on a mountain by himself to pray; and when the evening came he was there alone. ²⁴But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. ²⁵In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.²⁶ And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, Be of good cheer; it is I, do not be afraid.’ Twenty-first century modern, intelligent, enlightened critics claim that the storm had actually caused the boat to be tossed about into the middle of the sea, and then

back onto the seashore. In fact, the disciples were so disoriented that when they saw Jesus walking, he wasn't really walking on the water, he was walking on the seashore in shallow water coming towards them. They say, You see, he didn't walk on water, that's what happened. You can read the account that way and say, Yes, I guess the boat was tossed about and make a story out of it, and disprove the miracle this way if you want to. Now how do they explain the Apostle Peter's experience, well I shudder to think but I'm sure there are some explanations about what happened there.

We can look at the feeding of the multitude in John, chapter 6. ¹After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. ²Then a great multitude followed him because they saw his signs which he performed on those who were diseased. ³And Jesus went up on a mountain and there he sat with his disciples. ⁴Now the passover, a feast of the Jews, was here. ⁵And Jesus lifted up his eyes and seeing a great multitude coming towards them he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread that they may eat.' And the account goes on to show that Jesus was then able to perform a miracle with just a handful of loaves of bread and fish and able to feed over five thousand people. The claim, of course, is that Jesus had secretly bought this food beforehand, dug it into a hole in the ground, and that he was in fact taking the food out of the hole and passing it on. You may think this is a joke, but this is what people really say about Jesus' miracles in this day in the 21st century, because others could do that kind of thing if they chose to. But we know otherwise.

It is the same thing with Lazarus' resurrection. The claim is that Lazarus never died and that he was in fact hiding in a cave waiting for a very good actor to come and supposedly resurrect him. That's what they say. With lepers they say there are different types of skin diseases and that the ones Jesus chose to heal were those that were not as fatal and consequently healable. The same thing with fever. You can heal fever today. Paralytics, psychosomatics – they say these miracles are performed today. People can be healed of supposed problems when they are not really problems. They are psychosomatics, people with psychological problems, and with a bit of persuasion you can get these people out of it.

Just one more. In John, chapter 2. ¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: ²Now both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. ³When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. ⁴Jesus said to her, Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. ⁵His mother said to the servants, Whatever he says to you, do it. ⁶Now there were there six water pots of stone according to the purification of the Jews containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. ⁷Jesus said to them, Fill

the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, Draw some out now and take it to the Master of the feast. And they took it. ⁹When the Master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from (but the servant who had drawn the water knew) the Master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said, Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior: but you have kept the good wine until now.' Well, they claim that Jesus drew water out of the pots and that as the disciples were taking the water over to the master of the feast that somewhere along the line they switched glasses and gave him wine which had been stored there beforehand. That's what they claim.

I wonder if this is how the Pharisees looked at Jesus' miracles. There's one scripture in Matthew 12:38-41 which I would like to spend a bit of time and consider. 'Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.' Just think. Jesus had been going around performing signs, doing all these miracles, and on many occasions Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees, religious leaders, were there present and could see Jesus performing His miracles, His signs. Why are they asking Him for a sign? Could it be that perhaps in their minds they thought Jesus was an enemy of Moses? Look what happened to the enemies of Moses back in the days of Pharaoh. When Moses was performing these miracles, Pharaoh could bring his magicians and they could imitate some of his miracles. No doubt those Pharisees may have looked at Jesus as an enemy, a magician, an enemy of Moses, who was there to deceive. So they said to Him, Come on Jesus, give us a **real** sign! We know who you are. Now look at what Jesus said to them. 'But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'

Let's just think about this for a moment. If you are an imposter, a trickster, out to mislead the ignorant people, who would you stay away from? You would obviously stay away from the intelligent so-called brilliant leaders of a particular group, right? Now look at what happened to Jesus. An imposter would never surrender himself to his enemies. An imposter would never let himself be accused of wrongdoing and be condemned to death and be hung on a cross, hung until he died. This is something that Jesus could not have staged. But what did Jesus say? That He would be in the heart of the earth for three days. What does that mean? We are told that on the third day Jesus was resurrected. How could He have staged that? This is not possible. We see that the sign of Jonah is just so conclusive. Yes, they can claim what they want about the miracles that Jesus performed while

He was alive, but what claims can they make about His own resurrection. Some will try and say that He didn't really die, He just fainted. But doesn't the account tell us that He was hung for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning till about three o'clock in the afternoon, and doesn't it say that when they came to break the bones they didn't get to Jesus because He was already dead. Doesn't it say that they took a spear and stabbed Him and blood poured out? Do you think these Pharisees who were out there and wanted to destroy Jesus were just going to overlook that? Just leave Him on the cross and walk away without making sure that He died? They had to make sure, so it was conclusive that Jesus had died.

But you see the sign of Jonah? Three days, and then what? What happened to Jonah on the third day? He came out, didn't he? Jesus came out from the earth, He came back to life. That is the sign of Jonah and that is the sign that is so hard that anyone could perform unless they had God's power upon them. And that's the sign that proved that, in fact, all the other signs that Jesus performed were done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many saw Jesus. In fact, in 1 Cor. 15:6 it says more than five hundred brethren have actually seen Jesus alive after He had died, so there is no doubt in the minds of these people that Jesus was in fact genuine. If they had any doubt that what the Pharisees were saying, what our modern thinkers, smart people, might think of Jesus, the fact that they had seen Him alive after having seen Him dead is conclusive for them that Jesus was, in fact, the One. Maybe there were some scribes or Pharisees included in the five hundred, maybe even Saul of Tarsus who was probably a Pharisee if he was taught by Gamaliel. But the greater fulfillment of that prophecy is yet to happen. In Revelation 1:7, notice what it says: 'Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even they who pierced him.'

So those scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign may not have seen the sign yet, but they will in the future. Then they will have no doubt that Jesus was not only resurrected by God but that He was the One that resurrected **them** in the new order of things for them to be able to recognise and accept Him and believe Him. Today we see the Jewish people becoming a nation and very soon it will recognise that Christ will be fighting for them. They will accept Him and they will believe in due course. That is the power or the sign of Jonah. It had a minor fulfillment back there for the believers and will have a complete fulfillment in the course of a thousand years.

Another thing I would like to look at is that the miracles of Jesus can be classified into two categories, you might say. There are those that required faith on the part of Jesus, and then there are those that required faith also on the part of others. Or you may classify them as those who had no effect on Jesus personally and those that

affected Him personally. Examples of miracles that did not affect Jesus but required faith on His part are feeding the multitude, walking on water, turning water into wine, raising the dead, etc. Jesus had to have faith Himself for those things to happen. Examples of those that affected Jesus personally and required also faith on the part of others was healing of the blind, the sick and demon possessed. The woman who touched Jesus' garment, why was she healed? Was it because Jesus had faith? No, it was **her** faith and the power of the Holy Spirit together that brought about the healing. In order to get the benefit of Jesus' healing, they had to believe. How many times do we hear Jesus say, Do you believe? And then when they say Yes, it happens to them. They also have to have faith just as much as Jesus had to have faith that He could heal.

That second category of miracles, the ones that affected Jesus personally had a tremendous impact on Him. In Isaiah 53:4 we read: 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow, yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.' While Jesus was a perfect man, He was not a superman. He had feelings like us, He had emotions. He took our sicknesses upon Himself, the Bible tells us. He was stricken, He took the sin of the world on Him. This is why when you read through the account of His life to the end of His ministry, the last few days, you get the impression that Jesus was starting to feel the weight of all the sin He was taking upon Himself. He was starting to feel tired and exhausted. To be tired and exhausted is not a sign of imperfection, on the contrary. A perfect man can get tired. There's nothing wrong with that. Jesus was perfect and remained perfect to the end but He had to be tested to the end. It says in Isaiah He had to take our place, He had to take on our diseases, as it were, and He was affected by that. And Satan, of course, tested Him right up until the end so that in His last few hours Jesus was essentially all by Himself. God had taken His Spirit away from Him. He was exhausted and tired. He had to be tested right to the limit, and sure enough He was. Hebrews 5:7 & 8 says: 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death and was heard because of His godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.' He was a perfect man yet He had to learn obedience. Jesus had undertaken all this upon Himself for our benefit, for our sake, and by doing so, right at the end in His last hour when His Father's Spirit was taken away from Him and tested to the full, He gained the victory over Satan.

So, what a friend we have in Jesus and all the things He has done for us. And aren't we happy that He was willing to subject Himself to all the troubles, the heartache and hardship he endured so that He could give Himself as a ransom price. So may we be willing to walk in His footsteps until the end. (FD:05/06)

OUR WALK WITH GOD

In our reflection we look back on the experiences, not only in our own lives but those that have occurred in the world, and how they have affected us. Most of all, we reflect on our walk along the narrow way with our Heavenly Father. We remember fellowship and growth in the truth, and we each evaluate how we have progressed. In anticipation, we look forward to the coming Kingdom wherein all mankind will be blessed. It may not be in the coming year but we always pray 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' We pray for and we wait for this blessing which will come in God's due time. We continue our walk with God as we study on our own. We also have the privilege to study in fellowship with our brethren. Each one of us will strive to make our own calling and election sure, but we also work together to complete the church. The New Year is a time to renew our consecration to do the will of God. Let us strive to be faithful unto death and receive that crown of life which God has promised to the more than overcomers. Let us be strengthened in the truth by our walk with God.

Not so long ago people spent most of their time providing for the necessities of life. They had little time for anything else. But due to modern inventions and the shortening of the work week, people have a lot more time for recreation. With this extra time and the absence of physical labour it has become aware to many of us that we need to exercise our bodies. I would guess that most of us have walked for exercise, or just for pleasure a hike. We have done this some time in our life, I'm sure. But it's been our option, hasn't it, whether we walk or not? What we want to talk about today is about a walk that is not an option. It's not just for pleasure; it's not just for exercise; it is our life as new creatures. It is a picture God has given us to show progression in what He called a narrow and difficult way, but I would like to say it is a narrow but wonderful way! It is a walk where we will never be alone; we will be led by the very Hand of God. Now, it's a long, long walk and we will never finish that walk until the moment we complete our life on earth. And although some of it will be difficult, even perilous, it will bring us more pleasure than any other way we can live our lives.

We know that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other Ancient Worthies walked with God. They continued to walk with Him through the good times and they continued to walk with Him through the bad times. At times the Jewish nation walked with God, but often they stopped walking with Him and turned to walk in the way of false gods. They never seemed to be satisfied with their blessings; they always seemed to want more. There were many times God told them to walk

in His way. An example is in Deut.13:4 – "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him." Now just before this God had warned them about false prophets, that they should not hearken unto them. We know that many times in the Old Testament Scriptures He told them to walk in His instructions, to walk in His commandments, to walk in His statutes, to walk in His ordinances, to walk in His laws. If they had continued to walk with God they would have been richly blessed. Over and over He gave them this opportunity, but over and over they disobeyed. And what did God do? He finally turned to the Gentiles.

Even though Abraham, Isaac and other Ancient Worthies walked with God, they could not inherit the promise of that heavenly calling because Jesus had not given His life as a corresponding price for Father Adam. The Apostles were the first ones to receive the Holy Spirit and to have that supplied to walk in the narrow way. It speaks of this supply in Romans 6: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Those who have received the Holy Spirit and given up their earthly lives, who are dead to the world but alive in Christ, have consecrated their lives to serve their Heavenly Father, to be obedient to His commandments, to be obedient to His statutes, to be obedient to His ordinances and to be obedient to His laws of love. The walk now is through the narrow gate, up the difficult way which leadeth to life - and there will be very few who pass this way.

How are those who have made a commitment able to walk this narrow path? In other words, we have made this commitment, how are we to walk? We are in these earthen vessels, walking literally in the world. We're in the world but, as we know, we're not of the world. Our thoughts, our actions, our walk must be with God and His Son. We must look to His word, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. That is from Psalm 119:105. Before we look at how we should walk, let's look at what it means. We should define it as to move along in ordered steps, to follow a certain course, to walk with or to accompany. The Hebrew and Greek words seem to have the same thought. To tread all around, especially as proof of our ability, to follow as a companion, to keep in step, to conform to virtue or righteousness (I like that!). These seem to describe our Christian walk. We are continually moving on in a narrow way, step by step, and we are passing through this

period of time till we pass beyond the veil. As we are walking we have our companion, we have one another, and we are all led by God and His only begotten Son. We are called upon to prove our ability to conform to that virtue and righteousness. That's a tall order, isn't it? We place our hand in that of our elder Brother and He will lead us, and we will never be alone. If time permits we will look at a few of the ways we are to walk with God. They are:

- Walk by faith
- Walk in the Spirit
- Walk in love
- Walk as Christ walked
- Walk in the truth of God's word
- Walk in the light
- Walk worthy of your calling
- Walk circumspectly

Walk by faith:

What is faith? In the Scriptures it is defined as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen.' (Heb.11:1) Other sources describe it as truth, trust or confidence, especially trust in God; an assurance that what is said is true. You must have complete trust in God and assurance that whatever He writes is true. In the Jewish Age they walked primarily by sight - God led the leaders and the people followed them. We all know Abraham was one who walked by faith, but Abraham's faith rested on God alone. He had that full assurance that God would fulfil His word. Romans 4: ²⁰'He staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.'

Now Hebrews 11 tells us how other Ancient Worthies walked and how they followed God. They completely trusted in Him. Moses chose to walk with God, and he refused to be called the Pharaoh's daughter's son. By faith they conquered kingdoms, they wrought righteousness, they obtained promises, they stopped the mouth of lions. By faith or trust in God the walls of Jericho fell down. By faith or trust in God the people crossed the Red Sea. They had that faith; they had that assurance that God would be with them in their walk, that His word was true. In the next Age, the Millennial Age, the world will walk by sight and that light of knowledge will flood the world. In the next Age the world will have the actuality whereas now they have the promise of God. The eyes and ears of understanding will be opened to all mankind as they see the glory of God. All shall know Him from the least to the greatest. What a difference from the way the world is now! Mankind not only does not have faith in God but they have no faith even in their fellow man because it seems that whenever they put their faith in man they are very disappointed.

The Lord has made faith the condition for all His blessings of the present Age. In the present Age all His followers are required to walk by faith, to have a heart condition of faith in God as that great Teacher, who knows our limitations and has promised to guide us unto all truth. God has promised us divine guidance in understanding the Scriptures. In 2 Cor.5:7 it says: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." On our walk in the narrow way we meet many obstacles, and if we don't care where we're going, if any path will do, then where will it get us? There will be other paths that seem inviting, paths that seem smoother; there will be paths that seem shorter to us, and it is easy to follow our emotions or fleshly desires down those wrong paths. They will never get us where we want to go, will they? We must learn to trust Him where we cannot trace Him, to follow where He leads us, keep our eyes on the path ahead, do not look back on mistakes or wrong paths we have started on, because this walk along the narrow way takes all of our time and it takes all of our energy. There are not going to be any planes or trains to take us there; we must walk hand in hand with our Lord, having that faith that He will lead us in the right direction. His promise in Hebrews 13:5 is "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Paul gives us some good advice in 2nd Thessalonians regarding brethren walking together as they walk with God. As we travel the narrow way together we offer each other encouragement to endure the obstacles put before us because each day God gives us the opportunity and the privilege to serve the brethren. 2 Thess.1, reading from the RSV: ³"We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for another is increasing. Walk by faith."

Walk in the Spirit:

This seems to imply walking in the spirit or mind of Christ. As it says in Philippians 2:5:"To have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." To walk in the spirit of God's law, to walk in the spirit of truth, to have the spirit of God dwelling within us - all of these relate to walking as new creatures - putting away those fleshly appetites, putting away those fleshly preferences, putting away those fleshly desires, because they war against the spirit and the new mind. In proportion as we yield to the desires of the flesh, the new nature will decline. The best way to keep down human ambition and desires is what? It is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us keep filled with the Holy Spirit! If the spirit, if the mind is of the disposition God wills in us, we cannot be in accord with the fallen, fleshly nature because that Spirit of God is powerful. As we become more and more in tune with it and are more and more controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, the new creature will then have control of that old creature. This will enable us to raise ourselves to be more active in our spiritual life in the service of our Lord. Let's look at Galatians 5: ¹⁶"This I say then, Walk in the spirit and

you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” The chapter then goes on listing the works of the flesh from the 19th to the 21st verses. The fruits of the Spirit are then listed – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. All of these lead to the crucifying of the flesh. Gal.5:25 reads: “*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*”

Walk in love:

This is the Spirit of our Father, our Lord, and the spirit of all who are truly His members, who are truly members of that body of Christ. Now God gave His only begotten Son because of His love for all. As the spirit of love was manifested in our Lord’s case, so it should be demonstrated by His followers. Of course, it was also the love for the world that prompted Him to give His life as a ransom for all. Eph.5: “¹Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children: ²And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” And we know that all the fruits of the Spirit are sometimes condensed into the one word ‘love’, which is God’s law of love. We can have all sorts of power and knowledge, even giving our bodies as a sacrifice, but if we have not love we have nothing, because love never ends and is greater than faith and hope. Love never ends!

In the 6th Volume our growth in love is compared to a race course. The race against our flesh, which Br. Russell divided into four quarters. In a way this is true, but in another way each quarter is a part of the whole. You don’t just complete one quarter and forget to go on to the next quarter. You have to complete all four quarters. We need to work on each aspect as we progress in the race for the prize of the high calling. This is a quote, but I’m going to paraphrase what he says: ‘At first we recognise love as the divine requirement, though able to apprehend it only from the standpoint of duty. We feel it a duty to love God as our Creator, and our Lord Jesus also, because He loved us. It’s kind of a duty-love toward our fellows because we know that this is the will of God. As we progress in the next quarter we move nearer to the mark. The love we felt we should have had becomes a love of appreciation as we see more clearly God’s love for us. We begin to love God because we see the grand elements of His character. Our eyes of understanding have been opened. They have been opened wide enough for us to see something of those lengths, breadths, the heights and depths of His wisdom, His justice, His love and His power. We grow as our love for our brethren widens and deepens. More and more we are able to overlook their unwilling imperfections and blemishes. We see in them our desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus; we realize our

Father’s overlooking of our own shortcomings, we see our own blemishes and appreciate our Lord’s grace towards them. This enables us to overlook the imperfections in our brethren so long as we see that they, too, are seeking to run this race course for the same prize. Finally, perfect love towards God, towards our brethren and towards all men.’

This is what we are all to seek earnestly to attain, and do this as quickly as possible. This love, of course, includes even our enemies. Perfect love towards God, towards brethren, toward all men. The race which started with our consecration has to be completed before we can enter the Kingdom. We are expected to reach it in just a moment when we expire in death, but as early as possible in our Christian experience. And as we reach that mark of perfect love, we will require testings. These testings are exercises that will strengthen our character. Our Lord did not have to run to attain the mark but He did need to hold fast to it when He was tested. And so must each of us hold fast to it, with the Lord’s assistance, after we thus attain that. These are going to come to us, temptations will come to us; they suggest that we become impatient with those whom we have learned to love and appreciate, and appreciate their weaknesses. Suggestions will come to us that our generosity towards enemies should have limitations. But blessed are we if we hold firmly to the position to which we have attained, return that perfect love for all to walk in love.

Walk as Christ walked:

It tells us in 1 John 2: “⁶He that saith he abide in Him ought also himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” To ‘abide’ means to stay in a relationship, and we can only follow in the footsteps by walking as new creatures, by walking with that new mind, by walking with that new heart, by *not* walking according to the desires of the flesh. We need to follow that same path, in the same direction, towards the mark, towards that same standard, towards that same goal. Our thoughts and our actions are to show a love for everything good and to avoid everything that is evil. Jesus at all times walked in harmony with the divine word and in complete harmony with the will of God. Whoever walks as Jesus walked does so in harmony with Him, which implies being in harmony with the divine word and in harmony with the will of God, having given up our own will for God’s will. We need not only to know the will of God but to obey it willingly, not being forced but delighting to do the will of God.

Another scripture tells of this walk in a different way but we feel it has the same thought, and that’s Colossians 2: “⁶As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: ⁷Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” This thought seems to refer to being a part of the body of Christ. He

is the Head of the body, as we know, and we are members of that body. This gives a picture of each member of the body being in complete harmony with the Head. Each member has a function, all striving to make that body complete; all working together, walking up that narrow path that leads to glory, honour and immortality. In Romans 12:1 Paul admonishes us to “*present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.*” To do this requires a full, complete consecration. The great test of our Lord Jesus’ loyalty to the Father’s will, those various tests allowed to come upon the church of God, will be tests of obedience. They will be tests of heart loyalty because trials and testings are necessary in our walk in the narrow way. They are evidence that God is working in us. Count it as joy when meeting these trials and testings. Trials and testings are necessary in our walk. To walk as Jesus walked, it is important to receive His message fully in our minds, to appreciate His love in all that He has done for us, so we need to walk as Christ walked.

Walk in the truth of God’s Word:

God’s word is presented to us in the Scriptures. Psalm 86:11 (RSV) reads: “Teach me thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth.” Now the Scriptures clearly outline God’s plan for all mankind but only a few of God’s called-out ones understand that plan that He has; those whose eyes and ears of understanding have been opened. And how have they been opened? They have been opened through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus. I like the thought in the RSV of Ephesians 1:18 (and this is just a part of it): “*The eyes of our hearts have been enlightened to the hope to which he is calling.*” It has such a deep meaning to me that ‘the eyes of our hearts have been enlightened’. We have been taught by God through His word, which is Truth. The word of God is the source of all true knowledge, and the truth is the spirit of the word, the spirit of its meaning, its intention and its heart. We are to be diligent to study, to be grounded, to be built up in our most holy faith. Let us all be students of the Bible, rightly dividing the word of truth as it mentions in 2 Timothy 2:15 “*Rightly dividing the word of truth.*” In the Psalm scripture quoted earlier, it says for the Lord to teach us in His ways so that we may walk in truth. In the third epistle of John who testified to the brethren the truth, he wrote: “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*”

Walk in the light:

We remember in 1 John 1:6, Walk in light, not in darkness. This is also related to truth, to walking in Christ, to walking in the Spirit. We should consider the thought that we cannot walk in darkness and stay on the right path. We have to walk in the light of God’s promises and His instructions. 1 John 1:”⁵This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at

all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Now, the whole world was in darkness due to the fall of Adam until that true light of Jesus came into the world, because Jesus brought the light of God. This light is only seen by His faithful followers. We may walk in the light for we are in the presence of the true light. In the next Age we will help shed forth this light for the blessing of all mankind, to scatter present darkness and to cause that knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole world. We are in that presence of light. Without light it would be hard to walk the narrow path. We couldn’t see who we were travelling with, whether with false teachers or brethren. We couldn’t see the obstacles, we couldn’t see which is the right way to our goal of bringing honour and glory to our Heavenly Father. We couldn’t see if the path is uphill, the path of righteousness, or downhill, the path that leads to destruction. John 11: “⁹If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not because he seeth the light of this world. ¹⁰But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.” So let us walk in the light!

Walk worthy of the calling:

We are told to walk worthy of the vocation to which we are called (Eph.4:1). That profession is to be our main purpose, the one thing that we do. We are called to that divine service to God, to His Son and to the brethren. Why? All for the glory of God. No earthly vocation should be permitted to hinder this service which we have undertaken. Let’s turn to Colossians 1 (RSV): “⁹We have not ceased to pray for you that you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰To lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bringing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” To us, this means to walk in a manner that represents God’s goodness and being an example to others. We are the representatives or vessels of our Lord here on earth, and that’s an awesome responsibility. If faithful, we will be called to glory and immortality. We must prove ourselves worthy to share the throne and glory with our Redeemer. We must be worthy to have the opportunity to share in the joy of bringing the blessings of the Kingdom to the whole world. To me, that’s an awesome thought, and we pray that we may have a part in bringing those blessings to the whole world of mankind, because Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 “*To walk worthy of God who hath called you into his kingdom and his glory.*” Walk worthy of God.

Walk circumspectly:

According to Webster, this means ‘watchfully, very cautious, prudent’. The Greek word in Strong’s means ‘most exactly, diligently, perfectly.’ In our lesson we

have reviewed various ways we can walk with God. To walk circumspectly would seem to mean giving all our attention and care as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We need not only to understand God's word, we need not only to understand His will, but to strive with all our might to do His will. A common term we use is that we should 'walk like we talk' because God will never leave us where His grace cannot sustain us. Ephesians 5: ¹⁵"See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." In the NIV it says "*Be careful how you live, making the most of every opportunity.*" The Living Bible says "*Be careful how you act, making the most of every opportunity you have for doing good.*" It requires that our hearts and our minds be consistently centred upon our Heavenly Father and His Son. All of our thoughts, all of our actions, all of our words reflect what is in our heart and mind.

To recap the ways we walk with God, we walk by faith, complete trust and confidence in God even though we cannot see Him. We walk in the spirit, having that Spirit of God dwelling within us. We walk in love, having the same love for all that was evident in God and in His Son, Jesus. We walk as Christ walked, walking in harmony with the divine word, in harmony with the will of God as Christ did. We walk in the truth. The truth is the spirit of the word, its meaning, its intention, its heart. We walk in light, for we are in the presence of that true Light. We walk worthy of our calling, making our calling and election sure by making the vocation to which we have been called our main purpose. We walk circumspectly, giving all the attention and care we can to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. If we walk with God and follow all the ways He has given us, we will be walking in this life – dead to the world but alive to Christ. No one said it would be easy but the word of God shows that it will be well worth it. We have consecrated our all to the Lord, we have put off the old man and put on the new. Let's turn to Romans 6: ³"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

I would like to read the 23rd Psalm:

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

It is a privilege for us to walk in the narrow but wonderful way. Dear brethren, put your hand in mine, and our hands in God's, and let us walk together up the narrow way so that we may bring honour and glory to our Heavenly Father. (AA:05/06)

OUR MESSAGE

(1 Peter 3:15)

What message ought we to carry to the world? We are commissioned to carry a message, see: Matt 28:19, 20 but how we use our opportunities is a very personal thing and we need to adapt from person to person. We should be ready to give an answer to every person who may enquire of us; to do so a knowledge of God's plan is required. The right spirit to deliver the message is also very essential; love for all should be the motivating influence. Only "new creatures in Christ" will be found with these qualifications; for the love of Christ constraineth these.

We have a powerful message for those who have listening ears and who will give us sufficient time to tell it – including the predictions of the Old Testament and the hope that God's Word builds for the future. We need to make our message comprehensible – it is often required that we condense our message and in doing so it is good if we can build upon what our listener already knows, and thus let a little further light shine through to him. We should endeavour to fill in the background of God's plan so that the interested one will see its overall beauty.

Essentials of doctrine are also important to stress but seed must be sown in season, the time and circumstances must be convenient to the other person, whether or not to us. The chief point of our message should always be to impress that God is good; but we should not press our message beyond what is necessary at the time. In cases of bereavement, quite often a brief assurance of the resurrection may be all that is required. When an explanation is sought for suffering by the Christian in this life, we need to impress the vision of the ages to come, and that present afflictions are fleeting in comparison with our future hope of a glory that will be lasting.

Above all, let us remember at all times that actions speak louder than words.

LOVE ...SURPASSES FAITH

With more than 300 occurrences in the New Testament of the Greek words *pistis* and *pistos* (from which the English word "faith" is translated), it might be assumed that faith is the most important aspect of Christian character development. Added to that is 1 John 5:4 which states that "*faith is the victory that overcomes the world*", and it is those who "overcome" who receive the rewards offered to the church. (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26 etc.)

Additionally, "faith" is comprehensive. It embraces the overall Christian belief and way of life. In Acts 14:27 we read that "*when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*". The "*door of faith*" included the doctrine (or belief) and the associated "*works*". (James 2:17 - 26)

Faith necessary for justification

The Law Covenant was given to Israel "*because of transgressions till the seed should come ... wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*". (Gal. 3:19) "*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified ... But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... even the righteousness of God which is by faith ...*". (Rom. 3:20 - 22) Faith is an essential element in our justification and it is our justification that gives us "*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*". (Rom. 5:1)

The Christian's Armour

Ephesians 6:16 lists faith as the most important item of the Christian's armour - "*Above* (Greek: *epi*) *all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*". In ancient warfare the shield was not a weapon of assault but a means of protection. It didn't matter how robust or masculine the warrior, without a shield he was vulnerable to the weapons of the enemy.

Likewise in the Christian's spiritual warfare. 1 Peter 2:11 tells us that it is the "*fleshly lusts that war against the soul*" - "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*". (1 John 2:15) It could be contended that it was the "lust of the eyes" that caused Eve to contravene God's command - she saw "*that it was pleasant to the eyes*". (Genesis 3:6) Likewise pride may quickly lead to a Christian's downfall, especially those young in the faith - "*not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*". (1 Tim. 3:6) The "shield of faith" is necessary to thwart these weapons of the enemy.

The shield was manoeuvrable. The Christian's shield of faith also needs to be manoeuvrable. It has to defend the body on every side - on doctrine ("*there shall come in the last days scoffers*" - 2 Pet. 3:3); on standards of conduct (when we fail we are challenged whether we are "good enough" to be God's children), and from our associates ("*a man's foes shall be they of his own household*" - Matt. 10:36). The arrows of the scoffers will be repelled by our faith that "*the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness*" (2 Pet. 3:9). Our confidence that we are God's children is protected by our faith that "*the*

spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God", and "*he which has begun a good work*" in us will "*perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*". (Rom. 8:16, Phil. 1:6)

The Power of Faith

Matthew 17:14 - 21 records the incident of Jesus casting out a devil. His disciples had not been able to cast out the demon and Jesus attributed their failure to a lack of faith - "*... because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place and it shall remove*". Similarly Matthew 21:18 - 22 records the incident when Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered immediately. Jesus again told His disciples "*if you have faith and do not doubt, ... you can do what was done to the fig tree ...*".

Stephen was "*a man full of faith*" and the power it gave him enabled him to do "*great wonders and miracles among the people*". His faith enabled him to preach the word of truth fearlessly, such that "*certain of the synagogue... stirred up the people*". His subsequent testimony before the high priest was courageous and led to his martyrdom. (Acts 6:5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1 - 60) Stephen was "*a man full of faith*".

Faith is necessary for our sanctification. It is the means by which God purifies our hearts. (Acts 15:9) It is "*the substance (conviction) of things hoped for*" (Heb. 11:1) It is our hope that "*when he shall appear we shall be like him*", and it is our conviction of this hope that enables us to "*purify ourselves even as He is pure*". (1 John 3:3)

Faith sustains the new creature - "*the just shall live by faith*". (Rom. 1:17) It is essential for our salvation - "*by grace are ye saved through faith ...*". (Eph. 2:8)

Love Surpasses Faith

In spite of the crucial roles that it plays in our spiritual development and survival, the acquisition of faith alone is not the pinnacle of Christian development. Regardless of whether one's faith is a consequence of diligent study of God's word, and the consequent assurance of the reliability of His promises, or whether it is a miraculous gift of God, faith is only the basis for the development of love - "*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ... and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*". (2 Pet. 1:5 - 8)

Consequently how momentous is Paul's statement that "*though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity (love) I am nothing*". (1 Cor. 13:2)

PEOPLES PAPER

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