

# Developing Faith



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## Its Resources

Jesus' duties as a human being have been completed. Now He is waiting for us to finish our part of His Covenant with God the Father--have faith in Them partake of Their gifts through the Holy Spirit, and spread this news. If we truly believe this then we will do it.

*"Be doers of the Word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves, for if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer he is a man observing his natural face in a mirror. For, he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But, he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25)*

If we do not *do* then we do not really have absolute confidence that God will act in a certain manner, no matter what we ever say. Therefore, internally we are just like any "kingdom" divided against itself. Consequently, we will see varying degrees of results to our petitions, in accordance with our faith/perseverance or doubt/frustration. Just because we once used the Word, acted on it, and saw good results does not mean, in any way, that we can rely on past victories to bring about future successes. It is just like drinking water: we need it in order to survive and we need it consistently. Remembering a previous drink does not quench a present thirst.

*"All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all!" (Isaiah 53:6)*

*"Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body." (Romans 6:12)*

Becoming hysterical about any crisis does nothing to correct the situation. Rather, it only impedes any remedies. This does not imply at all that God wants us to ignore a predicament. On the contrary, we must indeed acknowledge it, but not allow ourselves to become desperate and grab onto any quasi solution before going to Him first, regardless of any time factors involved. He knows when we need a response right away, and He takes this into account. Accordingly, in those occasions the Holy Spirit will intervene on our behalf immediately once we have asked for help. However, that will be a temporary measure because God much prefers that we increase and activate our faith over His having to step in and perform a miracle.

Which is a long versus a short-term solution to a predicament of starvation? Giving someone a fish, or teaching them how to fish? The first gratifies immediately but the latter, though it may take much longer enables a person to feed themselves. So, which is better? For a temporary fix, a present from God, but for lasting success, the instruction and knowledge. God provides us with both according to our individual needs, attitudes, and faith. Healing is the same; we not only need relief, but also learn patience to endure the process, as well as wisdom how to prevent a reoccurrence.

For answering our summons for assistance God desires our thanks, praise, and continued communication with Him. When the crisis is over He expects that we will continue to study His Word and grow increasingly skillful at handling emergencies. This includes never slaking off and following His counsel for the rest of our lives. God never will pester us to do these things. He just will present the facts and wait. When we respond positively He shows more of Himself and His insight.

*"(Jesus) said, 'The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, and he himself does not know how for the earth yields crop by itself: first the shoot, then the head. After that, the full grain in the head, but when the grain ripens immediately he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.'*  
(Mark 4:26-29)

## **Believing before Seeing**

The Bible maintains that Abraham believed in God's ability to create visible things with His spoken Words way before he saw Him fulfill even a single promise. An important aspect of this in Abraham's life concerned the birth of his having a son with his barren and old wife, Sarah. In the meantime she must have doubted, for she set up a plan for Abraham to have a son with a younger more fertile woman. Sarah never should have tried to "help" God, for that act may have caused her to become pregnant far later than God had intended originally. When we become impatient to receive something and do not wait for His timing we may learn later that we inadvertently caused the repression of what we desired. Nevertheless, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham. It took approximately twenty-five years for the arrangement to come to pass, but it did.

*"... being confident of this very thing: that He Who has begun a good work in you will complete it." (Philippians 1:6b)*

*"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the*

*things which are seen were not made by things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:1, 3)*

In fact, sight actually may be a deterrent to what Jesus called *true* faith. Tangibility may detract from someone's faith in God and His love for us, as well as His ability to prove Himself. When we already have experienced something through our senses we do not have to believe that it can remain as it is, only that it can change.

*"Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.'" (John 20:29)*

We have to have faith to anticipate transformation. With physical or mental healing this is a constant pressure. For example, most of us can see or feel certain predicaments in our physical bodies daily, but we purposefully have to cultivate the confidence that someday, we will not. The Bible explains that when we persist and not succumb to any pressures that arise against us our faith grows and matures. We become stronger as a direct result of our efforts and learn to be more diligent and patient as well. This consequence will flow as naturally as water in a downhill stream,

*"My brethren, count it all joy (or, 'strength'--Nehemiah 8:10) when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But, let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4)*

The above, as well as the following Scripture are two that too many of us try to ignore when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior because we simply do not like them. Thus, we only embrace a kind of "Cafeteria Christianity", going through the Bible deliberately choosing what appeals to us, while disregarding the rest. God's entire message is incomplete without them however. Therefore, what we decide to adopt about Him becomes deceptive, a panacea and not real Spiritual food or medicine. We have discussed where these ideas originate.

Some of us become confident that since we will be with God when we die we have absolutely no use for anything that seems even the slightest bit unappealing. We figure that God has promised, and therefore is obliged, to forgive us if this annoys Him. We could learn it later anyway in Heaven if we really need to, or He will just "zap" it into us. However, some knowledge we only need to get through this existence on earth. In Heaven where there is no sickness we will not require the information to resist these things.

First of all, it is impossible for a non-renewed mind to fathom how we ever can be joyful while being tested by Satan. We endeavor to know and please God better but not in certain areas. We figure that since God is so merciful we somehow will be able to talk Him out of any accountability on our parts to follow anything that we want to disregard. Just as children try to manipulate their parents, we deceive ourselves and think that God loves us so much that He will give in and modify the Scriptures just for us. We are wrong. God will never change His Word, even for His Own Son.

However, Jesus equated joy with strength, and He told His disciples that He was leaving them (and consequently us, too) His Own joy. Therefore, we have access to the same endurance, perseverance, strength, and faith that He developed. We are responsible for searching for more of, as well as receiving and applying it. We have the keys to the

identical Heavenly bank account that Jesus had. The only difference is that He made regular deposits and withdrawals, whereas we let ourselves become lazy and endeavor to just slide through life, always downhill. This does not work.

*"We also glory in tribulation knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope. Now, hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us." (Romans 5:1-5)*

Notice the domino effect that each level generates. When we are in trouble and let God handle it the problem itself actually should create endurance and patience within us, if we allow the progression to happen. Then, that ability to persevere causes personality growth, until we are more mature than before we encountered the dilemma.

*"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to live humbly and I know how to live in prosperity. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)*

The sickness, pressure, or conflict will not defeat us. Rather we will overcome it if we employ the Sword of the Spirit--God's Word. Finally, hope will blossom and we will begin to see ourselves as having already surmounted the test instead of being beaten by it. In "the fullness of time" the answer will come to pass visibly.

*"Ah, Lord God, Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You." (Jeremiah 32:17)*

*"With God, all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26b)*

## **The Importance of a Steadfast Foundation**

Believers nowadays have the same guarantee that Jesus promised his original followers, including physical and mental, as well as spiritual health. If we do not have access to every resource that they did, God would have had to do at least one of these three things; (1) change, (2) lie, or (3) play favorites. However, this last statement is data that is in direct contrast to His Word, and, therefore cannot be true. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection re-connected mankind to the Trinity. Nevertheless, for us to benefit in any way from this we must accept His gifts for ourselves individually, including the re-birth of our spirits. Then, whenever we ask, listen, and imitate Him, we will be able to receive from God the Father.

*"Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also and greater works than these he will do because I go to My Father. And, whatever you ask in My Name that I will do that the Father may be glorified through the Son. If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it." (John 14:12-14)*

Jesus instructed us to built the foundation of our faith in God and His will and abilities based on what we saw in His Son, not about passing observations about ourselves or the world around us. Everything that God made is connected to the Trinity in One Body--the

Church--and when even a single portion of it is weak or suffers the whole eventually is affected by every single defect. As an example of a system being influenced by a negative source, imagine stubbing a toe or having a tiny paper cut on a finger. These are rather insignificant wounds, yet they affect the rest of our bodies. Although they are not nearly as miserable as other injuries, handicaps, or diseases, they induce a chain reaction--a domino effect-- that will cause us to modify our behavior in some way.

*"There should be no schism in the Body, but that the members should have the same care for one another and if one member suffers then all the members suffer with it. Or, if one member is honored all the members rejoice with it. Now, you are the Body of Christ, and members individually."* (I Corinthians 12:25-27)

We may be able to exist on this planet for an extended period of time without having to deal with tragedy; but adversity inevitably will happen. So, we have to be prepared ahead of time to resist and endure it. We cannot afford to be lazy and then just expect to run a marathon of faith tests without previous and steadfast workouts to be able to do so. To try to undo damage is far more difficult than to have prevented it in the first place. In order to demonstrate this, Jesus told a parable of two houses weathering a storm and how each fared. The duration of their construction was equal to the groundwork that had been prepared way before any emergency struck.

*"Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house yet it did not fall, for it was founded on a rock. But, everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rain descended, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on the house and it fell, and great was its fall."* (Matthew 7:24-27)

Imagine that the houses referred to by Jesus were constructed right next to each other. They were built at the same time, equal in size, and made of identical materials. Their two foundations would be the only features differentiating them from each other. That fact would not necessarily be visible, and this sole distinction was the one factor that Jesus said would cause them to fall or remain standing after a "storm". This conception presents even more evidence that what we can see is far less important than the things that we cannot. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware that we be moved to think, speak, or act by God not our senses, meaning, *"walk by faith not by sight."* (II CORINTHIANS 5:7)

According to the Bible, if we choose to build the foundations of our lives on anything other than God the Father and His Son we are constructing groundwork of faith to sustain us through hardship on a lie. With enough pressure it will crumble a bit more every time we really need it for support. Jesus instructed us that He was not foolish enough to do this either for Himself or His Church. It would withstand even the worst predicaments; and, as members of that Church, so can we.

*"On this rock I will build My Church and (even) the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:17)

The Greek word for 'rock', as Jesus used it in this context, is 'petra'--a massive,

immovable boulder. He was referring to God giving information directly through a person's soul and spirit (inner man), not our five physical senses. Jesus told Peter that the Church of God was not limited to temporary constraints--those things that are visible, touchable, hearable, smellable, or tasteable. Rather, God's Kingdom is composed of invisible and eternal substances. In fact, it was that spiritual, not physical perception that Jesus said gave Peter the insight to realize that He indeed was the Christ.

God considers each human being who wants to come to Him as a fully adopted child into His Kingdom and Church, thus being heir to and owning all the rights and privileges of His Firstborn Child.

However, in order to live the way that Jesus was able, we have to grow up, start to learn more about His ways, as well as follow His example far, far more. Jesus told His followers that if they truly loved Him they would obey His commands. The proof of their love was that elementary. They were, and we are, accountable for awakening the gifts that God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, has presented to every person ever born, beginning with our "measure of faith" in Them. Jesus finished His work for mankind. He already lived the perfect example of a life untouched by Satan's kingdom and treachery.

*"God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)*

*"Therefore, I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you." (II Timothy 1:6a)*

*"For, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the sayings of God and you have come to need milk and not solid (Spiritual) food. For, everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness for he is a babe. But, solid food belongs to those who are mature, that is, those who by practice have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14)*

Jesus has deposited the seed of knowledge that we, as equal heirs with Him, ever will require in our Heavenly "bank account" to maintain and build up our treasures. We possess the responsibility for learning how to withdraw from those assets and apply God's wisdom to our own specific needs, including health and healing. And, as we have learned, the Holy Spirit is available to take up residence in our hearts to influence us as much as we will allow.

*"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own for you were bought at a price? Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (I Corinthians 6:19-20)*

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)*

*"Beloved, I pray that you would prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." (3 John 2)*

Here's a good tip on how to start to believe in God's ways over your own: meditate on the verse written below. It should lead you to crave reading others and get to know your Big Brother Whom you either may have denied before, or else not have been aware even existed.

*"Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe all things are possible to him who truly believes.' (Mark 9:23)*

Nevertheless, we never should attempt to do anything when we still perceive in our hearts, minds, and words that we have not built up the groundwork of our faith sufficiently. Trying somehow to impress God by deciding to demonstrate our faith in this way is just stupid. We must acknowledge the great importance of also building up the strength in the necessary physical support, and strive to reach that goal first, even if it is only in our thoughts and prayers. If we are faithful to persevere, the rest will follow naturally. It may take years, but it will happen.

As an example, if we have been confined to a wheelchair and try to stand and walk without the *full* assurance that we are able to yet, we very likely will fall, maybe even get hurt and damage our bodies further. Satan wants to con us into doing this because it will erode our faith in God. How will he try? The same way he did with the Adams and Jesus, by twisting and distorting God's Word. Satan will try to persuade us to act in ways that outwardly seem to line up with God's will, but lack certain insight. Satan will try to exploit our imperfect knowledge of what God truly wants to teach us.

*"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6)*

We have to prepare ourselves enough in advance in *all* areas--physical, mental and emotional, as well as spiritual. We must especially be aware not to try something just because someone is trying to convince us that if God did want it the changes would take place immediately. Likewise, we cannot be provoked if we ever get impatient and do not want to wait for His tempo anymore. As mentioned, He works with a plan that will come into being only in the fullness of time. God never does anything prematurely.

How does the Bible teach us to develop our faith? We must go to the (Written) Word, the images that will enable us to focus our attention on Jesus instead of our own bodies. At least in our hearts and minds we can begin to envision ourselves getting out of the wheelchair, regardless of any "storm". (*Matthew 14:22-33*) Those impressions will intensify the more we concentrate on reaching Him and forget about our present conditions and ourselves.

*"... casting down ... (even) every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (II Corinthians 10:5)*

We have to be aware how time consuming this might be, owing to the fact that Satan will be right there to try and get us to keep reliving the worst pain and agony that we ever suffered, the feelings that scared us the most, or motions that previously caused the most damage. Nevertheless, the Word of God is *far* stronger than he is. It is more than sufficient to nullify even Satan's most cunning attacks, including torturing and killing God's Own Son. It doesn't get worse than that.

## Faith Even to Walk on Water

We can visualize an excellent example of faith versus doubt by studying what happened to the apostle Peter as he walked on water to get to where Jesus already had been walking, and then standing waiting for Peter to come to Him. When Peter focused his full attention on Jesus he felt secure and succeeded. However, when he looked at the things around him, he faltered and started to sink. The circumstances around Peter never changed from what they were already when he chose to get out of the boat in the middle of the sea. The sky was just as dark, the wind just as frenzied, the sea just as stormy, the waves just as high. Two things kept him progressing: (1) his faith in Jesus' ability and care, as well as (2) his absolute attention and trust in Jesus' presence before him.

In like manner, Jesus accomplished exactly what Peter wished to (1) His faith His Father's in ability and care, as well as (2) His absolute attention and trust in his Father's presence before Him. Jesus of Nazareth was not able to walk on top of water because He was God's Son. As demonstrated previously, He likewise had to employ His faith to do so, only unlike Peter (or us) He did it without ever doubting.

Jesus had been strolling on top of the same sea for quite awhile when He caught up with the boat where His disciples were, at least several miles from shore. And, He had been walking over the top of the water under the same rough conditions that they were fighting in a boat. In fact, that was why He was doing what He was; Jesus was not showing off. He was getting near enough to help His friends in the most efficient way possible, and walking, not taking the time to find and borrow another vessel, was His best course of action.

When Jesus got near enough so that the disciples could see Him they thought He was a ghost and were afraid of Him. Peter yelled out a dare to see if the figure was indeed Jesus and He accepted it. Peter not only wanted to make sure Who the body was, he wanted to find out if He was powerful enough to keep him safe out in the storm, too. Peter's rational could have been really foolish if he had been wrong. He was attempting to prove something by *deliberately* putting himself in danger, when it was apparent that Jesus had come to rescue all of them. Plus, if the figure were Satan instead of Jesus, he would have lied (*John 8:44*) and tried to duplicate how Jesus would react, thus making Peter's dare even more dangerous.

*"Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." (II Corinthians 11:14 b*

Fortunately it was Jesus walking on the water so instructed Peter to imitate Him and he would be able to do the same thing that He Himself was doing. Jesus did not have to prove Himself as He did, and we should never try to test His existence similarly. Jesus showed great compassion on Peter by accepting his challenge.

*"Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitude away.... He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there, but the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went toward them, walking on the sea.*

*When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!', and they cried out for fear.*

*But, immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid,' and Peter answered, Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You, on the water.'*

So He said, 'Come,' and when Peter had come down of the boat, he (too) walked on the water to go to Jesus, but when he saw that the wind was boisterous he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'

Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him and said to him, "O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?" and when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

*Then those who were in the boat came and worshipped Him, saying, 'Truly, You are the Son of God!'" (Matthew 14:22-33)*

When Peter looked at the unrelenting situation where he was, instead of where he and Jesus *wanted* him to be, Peter disconnected himself from Jesus momentarily. Just like a plug removed from an electric socket his attachment with success was detached also, and he started to fail. As children of a God Who does not play favorites, whenever any one of us allows any circumstances whatsoever to distract us from God's Word we, too, will allow ourselves to begin to fluctuate in our own lives. It never will it be God's desire for that to happen. By breaking away from His will for even an instant we, like Peter, will begin to falter, at any task. According to the Bible we will continue in this undesirable state, until, and unless, we become re-connected to the Trinity.

Jesus likened this to a branch being cut off of a plant. The stem, not the individual branches, directly is attached to the roots from which the entire organism is fed. This is the source from which it is fed and thrives. If the branches are trimmed away from their nourishment they most assuredly will begin to whither, and eventually die.

*"I am the true vine and My Father the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away and every branch that bears fruit He purges that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abides in the vine, no more can you except you abide in Me. Without Me you can do nothing..... Herein is My Father glorified: that you bear much fruit." (John 15:1-8a)*

*"Every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit nor can an evil tree bring forth good fruit.... By their fruits you shall know them." (Matthew 7:17b-20)*

Peter was one of Jesus' original disciples. Yet, he still was a human being with the frailties that we all possess. Therefore, we should study the story of the fluctuation of his faith closely in order to learn not only about his shortcomings but our own as well. In this story, we are able to observe not only Jesus' behavior but also the reactions of an average human being towards a bad "storm".

Consolidating the entire story we are able to uncover several noteworthy facts: Jesus sent His disciples ahead to Capernum without Him so that He could be alone with His Father and pray in order to renew His Own Spirit for whatever lay ahead. The night was dark (the fourth watch), the wind was great and hostile, and the sea was extremely rough

even for seasoned sailors. The men had rowed three to four miles from shore before Jesus became aware of their predicament. It was not mentioned whether the storm was exclusively at sea, or if it had moved to the shore. Jesus "saw" them straining.

Since they were so far out, it was late at night, and He had no binoculars, God must have shown Him their predicament through the Holy Spirit. It would have been impossible for Jesus' physical eyes to spot them. Jesus stopped praying and went towards them instantly. If His disciples had not called for Jesus, He would have walked near enough to help but passed them by. (*Mark 6:48*) It was their choice to ask for His aid or let Him just be around doing nothing. He did not force *anything* on them no matter how dire their predicament. When they initially spotted (and recognized) Jesus, the men who lived, worked with, and watched Him every single day were afraid of Him. (Go figure.)

Additionally Peter tested Jesus, by saying, "If it is You...." after He already had spoken to the men to assuage their fear. The Scriptures declare that we are not to "test" God. Jesus showed real His compassion by doing as Peter wished. Peter stepped out of the boat into a pre-existing situation that he was quite aware of. Even supposing that the wind and sea had been calm for most of the journey, they indeed were turbulent when Peter left the boat. As a skilled professional fisherman he understood those conditions, as well as the danger into which he chose to put himself. Jesus did not instruct him to do so until challenged. Walking on the water was Peter's idea. Peter, a completely normal and sinful human being like us, actually walked on top of that sea just as Jesus did. Until he looked at the predicament surrounding and touching him and not at Jesus anymore, he was doing fine, even in those exceptional conditions. Plus, Peter only began to flounder as soon as he looked more at his physical surroundings than at Jesus. Immediately after Peter cried out for help Jesus caught him and saved his life, just as He already had been planning to do for them *all* in the boat. Jesus and Peter both had to have walked back to the boat, for three reasons:

- (1) Certainly, Jesus did not leave Peter alone in such dangerous surroundings, especially after He just had saved him from drowning,
- (2) Jesus Himself still had to be walking, and He never would have dragged Peter, and
- (3) Although Jesus may have carried Peter, it is more consistent with other Scriptures for Him to have taught Peter to reject fear and re-activate his faith so that he could continue to walk for himself. And, when the two men got into the boat the wind ceased, the sea calmed, and they were at the other side right away. They all were safe as soon as they let Jesus help them.

What can we learn concerning our own predicaments? Never be afraid--God always is in control. Jesus is present even when it looks as if we are alone and in the midst of a really "storm"—like the one that completely destroyed an entire house. Additionally, not only do we have to ask God for help in our situations, we have to keep learning from His Son's earthly examples and mimic them, too. If Jesus can use *His* faith for the ability actually to walk on water, then by imitating Him just as Peter did so can we, if we ever really need to. Remember that Jesus Himself never did this until it was absolutely necessary. Routinely, He used a boat, the same as anyone else.

Right before Peter actually stepped out of the boat, in the middle of the sea, at night, in deep water, the dialogue among him and the other disciples may have been quite an interesting scene from God's viewpoint. After all, there were twelve of them and only one had the faith even to *try* to reach Jesus. (*1 Samuel 17:22-26*) So, what were the others doing? Either (a) being stupefied by the entire situation, (b) merely considering doing it themselves, or else (3) thinking that Peter's decision was sheer lunacy and even maybe

attempting to dissuade him from following Jesus' command. And, all the while Jesus just stood there in the wind, all wet, waiting patiently.

## Confidence in Jesus' Desire and Ability to Heal

There was an account in the Word of a non-Jew who recognized that Jesus acted and spoke under a greater authority than just Himself even before many of His Own people did. That man was a Roman soldier--a person who did not live according to the Hebrew Law or traditions. Yet, he knew how to delegate or deny permission in a stratified support system wherein every person involved had to be accountable to all of the others. So, he recognized Jesus doing the same.

It did not matter where anyone fit into the order. From the least in rank to the highest every individual was responsible to perform his or her duty. Thus, this soldier acknowledged Jesus' obligation not only to teach about His Father's Kingdom, but also to heal every single person who approached Him in faith to do so. Consequently the mandate would be carried out. There was no doubt in this man's mind that what Jesus commanded would be done. None at all.

*"When Jesus entered Capernaum a centurion came to Him pleading with Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented,' and Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'*

*The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but only speak a word and my servant will be healed. For, I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me and I say to this one, 'Go' and he goes, and to another 'Come' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this' and he does it.'*

*When Jesus heard it He marveled and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel....'*

*Then, Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way, and as you have believed so let it be done for you,' and his servant was healed that same hour." (Matthew 8:5-13)*

Read the account of this incident in Luke 7:2-10 also. In it the centurion sends the Jewish elders to Jesus pleading his case. Since this man was not included under the Law of the Old Covenant he supposedly was not eligible for Jesus' help. As well, the Law would not allow Jesus even to enter the house of a man not covenanted to God. However, Jesus said that He would indeed go to the soldier's house and heal the servant because He knew that He, His Father, and the Holy Spirit were not restricted by the superficial constraints of the rigid conventions of the Law. God only had presented it to them in order to restrain sin, something that Jesus had not committed.

*"What purpose does the Law serve? It was added because of transgressions till the Seed should come to Whom the promise was made.... But before faith came we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed." (Galatians 3:19, 23)*

In the description in Matthew, the word 'came' could mean either that the centurion sought out Jesus through an emissary or that he literally went to see Him. Regardless, the

man possessed great faith in His abilities. The story takes on a broader dimension if the soldier did not pursue Jesus in person because he would have had to believe in what he merely had heard about Him (*Romans 10:17*) without even seeing personally what He could do for anyone else. (*John 20:29*) Although this story takes up merely eight verses in one recounting of Jesus of Nazareth's life, it contains something unique. Instead of a person marveling at Jesus, He marveled at one of us. Usually when Jesus expressed His opinions concerning any person's conceptions of God, He most frequently showed exasperation due to the absence of faith in his/her heart.

Jesus clearly was absolutely thrilled at this officer's faith. Even before He did anything concerning the sick servant, He turned to everyone listening and told the crowd about His reaction, sort of reprimanding them at the same time. They all were Jesus' Own people, while the Roman was a Gentile; and, as stated previously, a person not considered to be included in God's Covenant with humanity so far. Yet, that Roman understood something about Jesus more than His Own people did.

This is one of the few times where Jesus reacted in this surprised, but delighted fashion. Wherever He went people constantly were amazed or astonished at the miracles that He performed. This occasion was a rare account of Him marveling at the total faith of another human being in God. Anyone who considered that Jesus' works were fabulous did not necessarily believe that He was the Son of God, or submit to Him. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of people, He was only like a sideshow--the circus come to town and entertainment about which to gossip.

*"They were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." (Mark 7:37)*

## Faith versus Works

The Bible declares that God considers the *inward* man--our heart--above the outward one. He chose the man Moses to convey His people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in that manner. Moses had had to flee from that country because he did not want to face a murder trial. Even his own people did not respect him after he left. Likewise, neither one of the two first kings of Israel was the obvious selection. God picked one of them from the least prominent family in the least significant of the twelve tribes of Israel. (*1 Samuel 9:21*) Likewise, his successor was the youngest and smallest of his household. (*1 Samuel 16:7-12*)

Human life is so transitory from God's outlook that even over centuries of time the most horrendous deeds that we ever commit are like comparing mere drops of water to an entire ocean. Therefore, no matter what atrocity we ever commit against anyone, including Jesus Himself, God is ready and willing to forgive us completely for every injustice, the instant we honestly repent of it.

Furthermore, according to the Bible God considers motivation as being equal in value to action. Jesus taught that even thinking that another person was somehow inferior to us was sinning not only against him/her but also against God, in Whose image the person was created. We never are to pass judgment on anyone as to his or her acceptability to God, for we never are as appraised of a situation as much as He is. We do not know their thoughts nor the entirety of their circumstances. We merely can infer deductions based on what our own reactions have been that may appear to duplicate the others. We may be very inaccurate in assuming conclusions that very well might be false.

(Have you ever been misjudged? How did it feel?)

Whatever we have done in our own lives or no matter how good we think we are we all have rejected God at least on one occasion. The Bible explains many times that we cannot reach Him by being whatever we individually might consider to be good "enough". The Scriptures explain that that habit of thinking is really foolish and blind. Unless we are able to live just as perfectly as Jesus of Nazareth did we have no hope of ever being obedient to God the Father in every situation.

And, without Jesus' sacrifice to release us from Satan's clutches, what would be the cut-off point of imperfection that still would enable anyone to reach God? Could we ever lie and still get into Heaven? When and what would be acceptable behavior? Could we steal but not murder? How many times and for what reasons? Could we murder in self-defense though? What about killing someone in a war? Would our guilt or innocence depend on which side won? It gets very complicated, for there are no clear-cut off points because there are many cultures, with varying attitudes towards diversified actions. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, as well as only one way to ever reach Him.

*"To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." (Romans 4:4)*

*"If Abraham was justified by works he had something to boast about, but not before God." (Romans 4:2)*

*"A man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, ... for by the works of the Law flesh shall not be justified." (Galatians 2:16)*