

Faith Overcomes The World

Faith in Christ

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There is a worldly mindset and outlook with which we are all afflicted by nature. As long as we allow ourselves to be governed by it, the holiness of God is against us, and we are opposed to it. However, what makes us Christian, according to the apostle John, is that the whole situation is transformed. Christians are those who overcome the world. We have overcome it already, in a sense, and are overcoming it.

It is no surprise that there is a conflict. People who have no sense of conflict in their lives are obviously just not Christians; they are asleep spiritually and dead in sin. The moment we become alive spiritually, we are aware of these forces and powers and are immediately aware of the conflict that exists in the world. Thus, our every waking moment is one of resistance against that with which the world bombards us. Those who do not realize that they are living in a world that is hostile to everything related to the truth just do not understand the conflict.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

This is a very familiar scripture to all of us, and we need to know this as Christians. How do we fight and conquer such a world? There is something special in a Christian that makes us able to conquer this wicked world in which we live.

I John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

It sounds so simple the way John puts it there. He defines this conquering faith as the belief—the conviction—that Jesus is the Son of God. The apostle John mentions two main things here: The first is that we conquer the world because of what has happened to us, because of what is true of us as Christians. The second is that we do so because of what our faith in Christ enables us to do.

The first principle is that, as Christians, we are those who overcome. There is a sense in which we have already overcome, and we are still overcoming. There are certain things that are true of us as Christians. Something has happened to us, and it is because of this that we can overcome Satan, the world, and our own human nature.

We overcome the world because we are born of God; we have faith; and we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That is what the apostle John tells us. We overcome the world because we have a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Being born of God means that we have a new disposition, a new outlook. It is not the world that accounts for our failure: it is we, in our lack of faith.

Picture two men walking down the street. One is a member of God's Church, born of God; and the other is a worldly man. Physically, there is little or no difference. They are living in exactly the same world, the same environment, with the same sin surrounding them, and the same temptations. However, there is such a substantial difference between the two spiritually. The difference is in the men and not in the world. This is why when a person moves away to start a new life, he takes his same miserable problems with him and eventually becomes as unhappy with his new situation as with what he left behind.

What we want to do, then, is to look at the world as Christ looks at it. That is part of being born of God. We have become, as Peter puts it, "partakers of the divine nature."

II Peter 1:4 By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Because we have received the character of God Himself, we now look at things more often from God's perspective than from the human viewpoint.

Faithfulness describes the character of a person who will die for his commitment to Christ. It goes without saying that it is also descriptive of the character of Christ, the faithful Witness, and of God the Father, who always acts faithfully toward His people.

I Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I Thessalonians 5:24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

II Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

We see the source of that faithfulness is in Jesus Christ and God the Father. Just as love begins with God so also does faith. God is faithful to us first. God shows His faithfulness in keeping His covenant with those who submit to His will and in forgiving the sins of those who genuinely repent. His Word is eternally reliable and true.

The second principle John states in I John 5:4 is that because of what has happened to me as a Christian, I am able to exercise faith and to live by faith. The first principle, remember, is "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world," and then the second principle, "this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."

In a sense, this new relationship with God as His spiritual children gives us this power of faith and enables us to exercise faith and to live by it. Living by it requires works. The world we are fighting is very powerful, much more powerful than any one of us. The world conquers and enslaves everyone who is born into it. All we have to do is read about the lives of the faithful in the Old Testament, the patriarchs, the few righteous kings, and the prophets. Initially, they were all conquered by the world; they all failed. Paul said, "There is none righteous, no, not one," because the whole world is guilty

before God. These, through faith and through the works of faith, were able to work with God to conquer the world.

Therefore, if we are to conquer and overcome the world, we need something that will enable us to do so. We must have something that raises us to a higher level, a higher realm, than that of the world. We need a power and strength far greater than that with which we are born or that we develop ourselves. We are given a faith, an outlook and understanding, a vision.

Christ Himself questioned whether there would be faith in this last generation. Luke recorded Christ's words in Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" This is what we are faced with. We are faced with asking ourselves, here in this end-time generation, if there is faith in us, if Christ is in us. This is a very sobering question. God clearly states that His people must live by faith and that without faith it is impossible to please Him. However, dynamic, living faith is a rare commodity in this world. How, then, can we have faith?

The truth is that the kind of faith that God desires us to have cannot just be worked up. The world's mainstream Christianity thinks that they can work up their own faith. Paul told the Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And, this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

God must give us the kind of faith that really works—the kind of faith required for salvation. We must want to have this faith, though. This faith is required to receive God's wonderful blessings including encouragement, protection, peace of mind, and healing. How does God give us this faith? Paul told the Roman brethren how we receive true, godly faith.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Right there, we see that it requires work. It requires Bible study, prayer, listening to sermons on the Sabbath, and applying what is given to us. That is active faith.

First, we must believe what God says. We must trust Him. Remember, "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

This is a major problem for all of us in this materialistic world. We can be so easily distracted, and it makes it difficult to really believe God.

All true Christians have an earnest desire to live by faith, but there has been such an explosion of materialistic knowledge on every imaginable subject that we find our minds constantly cluttered day and night. The Internet is the best example of how knowledge shall increase. Just type in any word or subject that you can imagine, and you will get multiple hits on your search. Sometimes you will get pages and pages of information on any one subject.

A downside to this, with regard to faith, is that we find ourselves impulsively asking why and how to almost every statement or promise God makes in the Bible. These can be faith-killing questions. The skeptical questions go something like this:

- Why does God let good people suffer and die while evil people often live well and prosper? (We can come up with generic answers to that, but we cannot answer things specifically in every individual case.)
- How can the people of the United States be Manasseh, a tribe of Israel, when there are so many of the black and yellow races living here?
- How could God have flooded the whole earth? It must have been a regional flood.

You see the justifications that people come up with when they do not have faith in what God's inspired, written Word says is true.

Should we just blindly accept and believe? Absolutely not! Faith cannot be expressed that way.

James 2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Faith has to be demonstrated by action. Faith must be active, dynamic, and living. The key is the statement made in Romans 10:17. Faith can come only through the preaching of Jesus Christ. Faith is spiritual and has nothing to do with the physical or the material world.

There is an eroding effect that human reasoning can have on faith. God knows that we, at this time, simply cannot understand why some things are allowed to happen. He does not always tell us why, but we still must learn to believe and trust Him. He also knows we cannot understand how some things are accomplished by His Holy Spirit. Those are spiritual matters; and since we are still physical, our knowledge is limited. Wondering to excess about why God allowed something or exactly how God did something can cause us to lose faith because we are looking in the wrong direction and asking the wrong questions.

John the Baptist's imprisonment and his reaction to it is a good example of having to trust and believe without understanding why. Even John the Baptist became confused and upset. His reactions during this severe trial, as they relate to Christ, are quite similar to attitudes and reactions of many of us undergoing trials today.

John knew who Christ was; John twice called Him "the Lamb of God." However, while in prison, John sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" John knew full well who Christ was and that Christ had the power to free him from prison. Was John wondering why Christ had not freed him? John's basic question could have been the faith-killing question, "Why?" Obviously, he was not asking those questions.

Christ pointed out to John's disciples the works that He had been doing. He pointed to the works of which He knew John was well aware. Then, He concluded with this statement to John's disciples:

Luke 7:23 Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

Jesus was telling John—and the church down through the ages—that God's people may not always understand everything at a certain time. We should not reject God and Christ and we should not lose faith because of it.

John not only remained in prison, but he was beheaded. Why did Christ allow John to die so brutally, when He could have prevented it? The answer is beyond human reasoning. We may have ideas, but we do not have a full explanation from God. In faith, we have to accept that it happened.

A problem that can undermine godly faith is the suffering of trials. Take the vivid example of Job. Job, like John, was sorely afflicted and tried; and he, too, wondered why. It was young Elihu who gave Job some answers. These answers were available to John, as they are available to us today. The problem is that they are not the answers that many of us want.

Job 36:21-22 "Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, for you have chosen this rather than affliction. Behold, God is exalted by His power; who teaches like Him?"

Truly, who but God can teach through affliction? Sometimes the lessons are of necessity severe, even though humans seldom learn from them.

Job 33:13-22 "Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words. For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction. In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, and with strong pain in many of his bones, so that his life abhors bread, and his soul succulent food. His flesh wastes away from sight, and his bones stick out which once were not seen. Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, and his life to the executioners."

We see there what God does allow to happen to man, and we do not have the answers. God uses all of these methods as He works with humanity to bring us to His own state of perfection, to literal sonship in His Family. Of course, God works much more intimately with His church than He does the world. I believe that He does control what is going on in the world and brings men to the point where He wants to have them.

Job 33:29-30 "Behold, God works all these things, twice, in fact, three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the Pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of life."

God allows all of these trials so that we "may be enlightened with the light of life," that our understanding may be opened. That light of life is eventual eternal life. Too often, we lose sight of that tremendous goal, but God never does. He is always there for us. Losing sight of the goal causes us to lose faith.

Underscoring severe trials and losing sight of our goal can erode our faith. We live in an evil world and often have to suffer with this world's society. In the book of John, we find one of Jesus' requests to His Father:

John 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

Psalms 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

We have that guarantee. It may not be right away, but eventually we will be brought out of all of them. We do not have to know how or why or even when. Therefore, when tragedy strikes, do not blame God. Many of our problems occur because we are living in a very evil society and we receive the brunt of much of that. It often seems that people, if they think of God at all, blame Him for every disaster and tragedy of their own lives. Seldom do they thank Him or praise Him for all the good things He does. When we are in a trial we focus on what is wrong rather than all of the blessings that He has given us. Both are necessary; we do have to focus on what is wrong in our lives, but also remember that God is merciful.

Reasoning humanly, those who write insurance policies often refer to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tornadoes as "acts of God." This expresses humanity's view of God, but James expresses how we should think of our Creator:

James 1:16-17 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Our wondering often undermines faith. "God, why did you allow this to happen to me?" John the Baptist probably went to his execution wondering why, but not enough to destroy his faith. Some day he will know why specifically. John must have paid attention to Christ's instruction not to be offended, because Christ said of him, "Among those born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

When Jesus heard of John's execution, He was saddened and wanted to go off by Himself; but a multitude followed Him out into the desert. It was there that Jesus displayed God's power by turning five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food for five thousand men, plus the women and children that were with them. After everyone was fed, twelve baskets of crumbs were collected. Christ's disciples were greatly impressed with Christ's miracle-working power; but they, too, had even more to learn regarding true faith.

A major pitfall in exercising faith is demanding to know how faith works. Faith is spiritual, but the results of faith in our lives are often quite physical and material. For example, the miracle of healing; the preservation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the fiery furnace; and the feeding of the five thousand are physical consequences of faith; but how such miracles are accomplished is spiritual and inexplicable in physical terms. How God accomplishes His purposes becomes so important to some people that, when they find they cannot understand, they simply stop believing God or the biblical account.

For instance, the theory of evolution is humanity's attempt to explain how physical things are the way they are in purely physical terms that humans can understand. Since people think they have found out how life and the physical world "evolved," they no longer have to deal with the question of God and their responsibility to Him.

Conditioning your faith on knowing how God's purposes are accomplished can destroy your faith. This was a major lesson that Christ's apostles learned

when Peter found himself in a situation where the "how" of a great miracle so plagued him and his physical senses that his faith vanished. The incident of Peter walking on water is a case in point.

Matthew 14:22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

This was just after the miracle of feeding the multitude, and it was still early in the evening.

Matthew 14:23-25 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the 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. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

Naturally, they were a little troubled at the sight of Jesus walking on the water. That is, until Jesus talked to them, and His voice settled and calmed them.

Matthew 14:26-27 And 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, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

When Jesus spoke to them, they were reassured and comforted. Why is that? The unnatural situation of Jesus walking on the surface of the water was still there before their eyes. However, they were given a physical reassurance that fit in with their past experience: the familiar voice of Jesus. Although they could not understand how He managed to walk on the water, they were comforted by His familiar voice.

Matthew 14:28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

Peter knew that the feat was possible only if Jesus commanded him to do so. At that moment, Peter had quite a bit of faith, I would say. That is an important point in growing in faith.

At the latter end of his life, the apostle John wrote,

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

We have that assurance, just as Peter had that assurance, from Jesus Christ. Peter asked if it were Christ's will, and on that assurance he had the confidence to step out onto the water.

Matthew 14:29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

Peter actually walked on that water! Now something that Peter had not experienced before had happened, and Peter's faith began to fade and then was gone.

Matthew 14:30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

The disciples had been in the security of the boat all night. Peter had certainly been aware of the wind and churning sea before. Then he stepped onto the water. What had happened to Peter that had terrified him so much? Peter was totally unprepared for how he was held up by faith.

Where was faith supposed to happen to Peter to give his body that feeling of support we human beings think we need to feel? He needed the reassuring sensation of physical support. He needed to feel the physical pressure under the soles of his feet such as he felt when he walked on solid surfaces. There was no feeling of support at all, not even under his arms. He could not feel

the support that a baby feels when his mother picks him up. He could not feel the pulling of his scalp that Absalom felt when his hair got caught in the tree and he hung there. Peter could nowhere feel the sensation of physical support, and that terrified him. Faith was supporting him, and faith is spiritual. Feeling is physical.

Peter's mind, from long experience in the physical environment, knew of no reason why he could be there on the surface of the water. Peter was totally unprepared for how faith would hold him up on the water. He reacted to his physical senses—and began to sink. The same situation happens to each of us when we are going through a trial and we have faith in God and He does not answer us right away, or when we do not see Him answering in the way that we think that He should. Our faith begins to wane because we do not see the physical part holding us up.

The lesson here is that we have to grow in and exercise faith. Although Peter had seen the miracles of Jesus Christ and had faith in the voice of Jesus and Jesus' presence near him, he still had to go through a process of learning faith that does not come all of a sudden. It is not like mainstream Christianity, in which they put something on their bumper that says, "I have faith in Christ," or "Long live the Lord," or whatever the different things say. You cannot just work up faith in an instant. It is something that is developed over time, and it is a gift from God.

Peter's faith in the person of Christ was still firm, though.

Matthew 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

In the firm grip of Christ's hand, Peter made it back into the boat. There was simply no way Jesus could explain to Peter, in terms Peter could have understood, how faith would support him. Peter just had to experience it and grow in faith.

We also must have faith, because without faith it is impossible to please God. Neither can we qualify for God's Kingdom without faith. Like John the Baptist and Peter, we have to learn to believe God without question, through the dynamic faith God will give us as true Christians.

To develop this faith in God, we must know God and have a relationship with Him. We can know God through Bible study, prayer, fellowship with the brethren, listening to sermons by God's ministers, and growing in faith.

The thing that makes us overcome the world and enables us to do so is our relationship with Jesus Christ through His work and what He has accomplished and already finished within us and what He has already finished in the plan of salvation for man.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Faith is a way of life for the righteous, who live by faith. Abraham is the model person of faith. He trusted in God's word, which entailed the covenant and the gospel, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

What really makes it possible to overcome the world is the fact that we are born again. We are vitally and intimately connected to Jesus Christ. Because our relationship to Him enables us to overcome, we can deduce that it is our faith in Christ that makes victory over the world possible.

How does this relationship of ours to Christ and to God the Father work out in practice? How is it that this faith of ours in Jesus Christ—this belief that He is the Son of God and all the consequences that follow from that belief—enables us, in practice, to overcome the world? The answer to this question is so important that it is the secret to successful living; it is the secret of joy in life and the secret to overcoming.

This faith of ours enables us to overcome the world, both directly and indirectly—in other words, in a passive and an active manner. The first part

of faith enables us to have a victory over the world and to overcome it directly——passively. It is the possibility of directly, immediately, and passively relying on the power and the ability of Jesus Christ. "This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." The result of this is that we go to Him and rely on Him. That is a major part of faith.

Proverbs 18 illustrates this wonderfully:

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

Of course, we run to that strong tower through prayer, obedience, submission, and sacrifice.

We can read how the faithful of old were struggling against the world, with its temptations and insinuations, to see that that was the only thing they could do at times.

We see another part of the principle, with respect to the vine and its branches, in John 15:

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

That faith becomes a living faith when we have an active relationship with Jesus Christ. There must be good works involved. The apostle Paul put it in a very positive, memorable way to the members in Philippi.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

He said "**all** things." This is an expression of this first way of obtaining the victory that overcomes the world through faith in Christ. In other words, it means utterly relying on Christ for deliverance and protection. This is the simplicity of faith, but one of the hardest lessons for us to learn.

I am not saying we do not have to attempt to fight sin; of course, we must. The emphasis here is that before we attempt to fight sin we must "live by faith in the Son of God." The possibility that is held up before us is that we can go to Him directly and immediately. It is important for us to know when to do that and to realize that the opportunity is always open and possible for us.

That is the victory that overcomes the world in the passive sense. It is so simple. All we have to do, initially, is totally rely on God the Father and Jesus Christ. When God reveals Himself to us and we come to admit our own weakness and realize His power, we can begin to "live by faith in the Son of God."

The second part of faith is indirect, or what you might call "active." Another way of describing it is as the working out of this faith. Faith without works is a dead faith.

James 2:14-26 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

This statement is so important that it is stated three times.

As we go on through our walk with God in our lives, as we live by every word of God—that is, as we live our lives as Jesus lived His—we should be working out this indirect part of faith. This is the activity of faith, the thinking through, the meditating on, and then rightly acting on the knowledge that God has given us. One of the definitions of wisdom is "the right use of knowledge," and that is what is needed to have that living faith.

People are optimistic about this world, and they are this way because they have never understood the nature of sin. Most people think that life is wonderful and that the world is a fabulous place. They have never seen through its glittering prizes. They get absorbed into the partying and celebrating. Have you noticed how this society is partying and celebrating more events and for longer periods of time? The entertainment industry is a vivid illustration of this partying and celebrating spirit. For decades they have had their celebrations and continue to add to them. They glorify themselves by throwing themselves award ceremonies (the Emmy and Grammy Awards) in which they pat themselves on the back for being such wonderful people. In reality, they are some of the most ignorant, immoral, perverted, self-indulgent people on earth but cannot see it at all.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

They have never seen through the nature of the world, and they are the epitome of foolishness.

Jeremiah 5:21 Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not.

They never see the true nature of the world, because they have willingly been absorbed into it. The power of sin, evil, and Satan is so overwhelming that man failed and Jesus Christ had to come. This is why only a true

Christian can see the true nature of the world and, through faith in Christ, overcome it. Christ came into this world because the world was dominated by sin, and it is only by faith in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God that we begin to understand the nature of the fight in which we are engaged.

Faith enables us to overcome the world because it makes it possible for us to see the nature of the problem. The moment we have faith in Jesus Christ, we begin to understand the nature of the problem. Only the Christian can see through the spiritual cloud that is over this world. Everyone else is dominated by it.

This is very significant, and is of great practical importance for us. For example, we should never become too excited about politics for the reason that we know perfectly well that there is no solution to the ultimate problem of man's politics. People who believe that in a political election it makes a difference which political party wins, and that everything is going to be fundamentally different depending on which party wins either are not Christians or else are very ignorant ones.

Nothing that can happen at an election will touch the problems of this world. The parties are all equally in sin; they are all under the dominion of sin. If someone gets excited, if he believes that one rather than the other is going to make the vital difference, he has never seen the truth about the world. It is a very serious problem not to see the truth about the world. The Christian knows that no human government can solve the problems of mankind. He has a detachment from the world and is able to look at it objectively. He does not put his faith in it because he sees the fate of all those who are dominated by the world.

As we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and look at the inspired written Word of God, we see the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and how He overcame the world. We begin to see that to overcome the world is not only possible but probable for those who are faithful and have Jesus Christ dwelling within them. The Holy Spirit makes that possible.

As we attempt to face the problems of life and to overcome the world, we are aware of our own weaknesses and all those forces that are against us; but our outlook is instantly changed when we look at Christ and see that He has overcome it. Immediately, our faith begins to build.

By faith, we see ourselves belonging to Christ; we are in Christ. As the branch is in the vine, so we are in Christ. We belong, and we are a part of Him as a new creation if we walk according to the Spirit, as He walks.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

That is quite a statement—that there is now no condemnation of those who are in Christ.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

That is, we have become new men and women.

Faith in Christ and being in Christ enable us to see that we can literally draw strength and power from Him and His fullness. This is a resource that can never fail. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." That is not just on a physical plane but also—and especially—on a spiritual plane. These are absolutes; there is literally no limit to the power of Christ. "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Therefore, we can be fearless when we remember this power that is within us.

We are still working out this faith. There are times when we fail because in our foolishness we do not run to this strong tower. We try to fight with our own strength against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. At those times that we fail, it seems to me that the enemy will come and say something like this to us: "You louse, you failed. You have sinned against God. You have failed at

being a Christian. You are faithless." Then we are overwhelmed with a sense of failure and frustration. We feel that we have let God and Christ down. Sometimes we even feel hopeless with a sense of despair and futility. When we think of those things and when we realize that our faith has failed us, it is not always we telling ourselves; it is quite often negative messages being sent by Satan and his demons. However, we do have to look inwardly and search for any areas in which we have a lack of faith.

There is nothing more important to us than to know, at that point, that Jesus is the Son of God. He tells us that though we have sinned, though we have failed, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Deliverance from sins and failure, from a sense of hopelessness that tends to overwhelm us when we feel down, encourages us to overcome sin because the blood of Christ cleanses us; and we are enabled to rise up and go forward, knowing that Christ is supplying that faith and that He is in us. By faith, we know that our victory against the world, Satan, and our own human nature is sure. We have a strong tower of safety and security to run to for peace; but we also have battles to fight and sin to overcome, as well as righteous fruit to produce with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul said that Christ dwelled in him through the Holy Spirit. This indwelling of God's Spirit enables us to be faithful. Christ's faithful mind is imparted to us and becomes part of our mind. If we try to provide the faith to obey God ourselves, we become self-righteous. Our righteousness must come through the faith of Jesus Christ.

Faith enables us to see the ultimate glory and perfection that awaits us. The fight in this world often seems long and endless, and we tend to become tired and weary. There is nothing that so encourages us as to realize that the day is certainly coming when we will be ultimately glorified and perfect, without

spot or wrinkle or blemish. Christ, who has died for us and sustained us, will present us faultless before the presence of the glory of God with great joy. We can look to that time of great joy and be encouraged by it. This has to help and increase our faith. This is a vision by faith of the ultimate glory that awaits us: the coming again of the Son of God.

Philippians 3:21 Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

This is how faith overcomes. We run to Christ in helplessness, but we also work faith out. The true Christian is one who overcomes the world, Satan, human nature, and sin. If we cannot say that we are overcoming, then we had better examine the very foundation of our position once again.

Are any of the heroes and heroines of the Bible without faith? No, because faith in God is a defining virtue of the Christian.

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Chapter 11 of the epistle to the Hebrews asserts that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Hebrews 11 offers a record of heroes and heroines of faith with sterling character, but even the author runs out of time to list them all. The lives of these men and women show that faith is an unshakable belief that God will do everything He has promised to do, even before there is visible evidence to that effect.

In short, "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." It accepts the truths revealed on the testimony of God, not merely on their intrinsic reasonableness.

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good

testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

The ESV is a little clearer on verse one. It says that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It is important to notice that Hebrews 11:1 is no exception to the rule that *faith* normally means "reliance" and "trust." Therefore, verse 1 reads, "Faith is the substance [or, possibly, in the light of recent inquiries into the type of Greek used by New Testament writers, the guarantee] of things hoped for, the evidence [or convincing proof] of things not seen." This is sometimes interpreted as if faith were a power of second sight, a mysterious intuition into the spiritual world, but Hebrews 11 amply shows that the faith illustrated by Abraham, Moses, and Rahab, was reliance upon a God known to be trustworthy. Such reliance enables the believer to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Spurgeon's *Daily Devotional* has an interesting way of summarizing Chapter 11:

Behold the epitaph of all those blessed saints who fell asleep before the coming of our Lord! It matters nothing how else they died, whether of old age, or by violent means; this one point, in which they all agree, is the most worthy of record, "they all died in faith." In faith they lived—it was their comfort, their guide, their motive and support. They did not die resting or upon their own attainments; they made no advance from their first way of acceptance with God, but held to the way of faith to the end. Faith is as precious to die by as to live by.

Dying in faith has distinct reference to the past. They believed the promises that had gone before, and were assured that their sins were blotted out through the mercy of God. Dying in faith has to do

with the present. These saints were confident of their acceptance with God; they enjoyed the beams of His love, and rested in His faithfulness. Dying in faith looks into the future. They fell asleep, affirming that the Messiah would surely come, and that when He would in the last days appear upon the earth, they would rise from their graves to behold Him. To them the pains of death were but the birth-pangs of a better state.

I thought Spurgeon really worded that well.

Even in small doses, genuine faith is powerful. This is not due to the power of the faith itself but to the power of God in whom faith is placed. Jesus tells His disciples that if they have faith the size of a mustard seed, they will be able to move mountains—or at the very least mulberry trees.

Nothing will be impossible for a disciple with mustard-seed-sized faith, though the mustard is the smallest of all seeds.

Faith is like an open door into a relationship with God. It is like a shield that protects us when we are under spiritual attack. Especially in this end time, our spiritual growth is directly proportional to how much our hearts are in the work of God, because being part of and working in the work of God is part of those works with faith.

The principle of doing more than is required applies to all of God's laws. If we are striving to go above and beyond the call of duty to please God in all areas of our Christian life, then if a trial strikes, we need not fear a lack of faith. God will give us the faith of Jesus Christ to cope with temptations and trials. That is God's promise.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

God demands loyalty—loyalty even when death is the price to be paid. At the same time, He promises He will provide a way of escape.

Revelation 2:10 (KJV) Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.

Here He is talking to Smyrna, the persecuted church. They did go through much tribulation, much persecution, and much martyrdom.

We show by our good works that we have living faith. When God tells us by His Word to do something, we show that we believe Him by our actions. We are saved by the life of Christ, not by works. We are given salvation as a free gift from God, but we are rewarded or given our particular responsibility in God's Kingdom according to our works. Jesus Christ inspired John to write in Revelation 22:12, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." Works with faith is very, very important.

Everyone has either good or bad works. We need to be sure that our works are good. Faith along with good works is a living faith, and that is the kind of faith we must have. True faith is far more than a mere profession of belief. It requires righteous action; it requires good works. Faith is the gift of God for forgiveness of the past; it is a key to obedience; and it is the victory that has overcome the world.