

Are You Sure You Believe In God? (Part 3)

Counterfeits of Faith

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In biblical stories of testing, the link between action and character is very close. Action is character, and character is action. When God tested Abraham, by commanding him to offer his son Isaac, Abraham's prompt and decisive obedience demonstrated his character, in which faith was the dominant ingredient.

When, on an earlier occasion, Abraham and Sarah found themselves sojourners in a potentially hostile foreign land, their response of fear that prompted expediency is a manifestation of their flawed character at their moment of choice.

When Jacob arrived at his uncle's home for an extended stay, his ability to establish himself as an adult underwent an extensive test—a test in which Jacob's responses of competitiveness, physical stamina, perseverance, and resilience demonstrated his character.

Because character is determined by responses to tests, we remember many biblical characters especially for their heroism, or humiliation, in isolated moments of specific testing.

In my last two sermons, I dealt with the atheist's total lack of belief in God, and how others in the world may have a human level of faith, or belief that God exists, but today, I am going to focus more on the answer to the question: "Are you sure you believe in God?" as it relates directly to members of God's church. It is, of course, a matter of faith and works.

To help us understand the matter, God has given us a simple example of how Jesus' disciples initially failed this test of faith.

Luke 8:22-25 Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one

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another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

We find here a question that Jesus Christ addressed to the disciples. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" The cause of the spiritual depression that is dealt with, here, is the whole problem and question of the nature of faith. There are a lot of Christians who get into trouble, and are unhappy from time to time, because they do not understand faith.

What makes us Christians is that we are given the gift of faith. We are given it by God, through the Holy Spirit, and we believe in Jesus Christ, and that begins the process of salvation. But that does not mean that we immediately have full understanding of faith.

As God's Spirit motivates our behavior, we take on, little by little, "the fullness of God."

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Although we may be truly Christian, and genuinely being called, and being prepared for the kingdom of God, as the result of this gift of faith, it does not mean we will not later get into trouble in our spiritual experience of trying to live God's way of life.

In a sense, we still have at least a toe in the world. Some still have a foot, or a leg, or even a large part of their body in the world, as they try to come out of it. A great deal of the problem is we that we do not fully understand how to use God's gift of faith.

Faith is simply the belief that God exists and that He will do what He says He will. Faith is not merely wishing, or hoping, or a positive mental attitude, or a temporary surge of emotional enthusiasm, or fear of punishment. It is not fear of a worse alternative, or peer pressure, guilt, intimidation, resignation, self-righteousness, or stubbornness.

But, it is *confidently* knowing that God will do what He says He will do, when He says He

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will do it. Although we tell ourselves day in and day out that we believe this when push comes to shove and the testing starts, our faith is sorely tested.

Real saving faith comes only from God. It is a gift that only He can give, and it in no way comes, in any part or fragment, from our own human nature or attitudes. It is given as a gift, but from there on we have to do certain things about it.

Now this very vivid incident brings out the vital importance of distinguishing between the original gift of faith and the walk of faith, or what you might call the life of faith which comes subsequently. God starts us off in this Christian life, and then we have to walk in it. We walk by faith, not by sight.

Before we continue in this vein, I want to mention a few things about this dramatic incident on the boat. It has a great deal to teach us. It brings us face to face with what is described as a paradox—The seeming contradiction within Jesus Christ Himself, and I emphasize seeming because we know that there is no contradiction within Jesus Christ.

There He was, weary and tired it seems, so tired, in fact, that He fell asleep. This incident is recorded in three Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is very important from the viewpoint of understanding Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Notice how human he is: He is fatigued, He is tired and weary, so much so that He just falls asleep. Although the storm is increasing in intensity, He still goes on sleeping. Here, He is a man in a physical body and flesh, like all the rest of us. He understood fatigue and how hard it is to continue on in that state.

Storms often rose suddenly on the lake called the Sea of Galilee; these fishermen had usually stayed closer to Capernaum and were unprepared for a squall this far from shore. The only place anyone could sleep in a small fishing boat with water pouring in from a storm would be on the elevated stern, where he could use the wooden or leather-covered helmsman's seat, or a pillow kept under that seat, as a cushion for his head.

So, they went to Him and woke Him, and they said in Mark 4:38, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

Then in Mark 4:39, Mark writes, "Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm."

So Mark describes something that the other writers do not; he mentions it as "a great calm."

It is not surprising that the disciples, seeing all this, wondered and fearfully said to each other, as recorded in Mark 4:41, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Here was a Man, with direct access to the power of God, who could command the elements. He could silence the wind, and stop the raging of the sea. He is the Lord of nature and creation.

This leads us to a critical issue. If we do not believe in the unique divine being of Jesus Christ, obviously it is impossible to be a Christian, whatever else we may be. He took on human nature and dwelt among us in the flesh. And still, His disciples asked.

However, that is not the only purpose of this incident. In the separate specific incidents involved here we see other specific lessons of their own. In this case there is a lesson with regard to the disciples, and their condition at this point concerning faith.

We can be thankful for the record of every mistake they ever made, and for every blunder they ever committed, because we can see ourselves in them. We should be very grateful to God that we have these scriptures and that He has not merely given us the gospel and left it at that.

So we find Christ rebuking these men. He reprimands them because of their anxiety, because of their terror, because of their lack of faith. Here they were in the boat with Him, and the storm came up, and immediately they assumed they were in danger and possibly doomed.

They bailed out the water, but the boat was filling up and they could see that in a few moments it was going to sink. They thought that they had done everything they could, but it did not seem to be of any benefit, and in all this, what amazed them was that their Teacher was still sleeping soundly in the stern of the boat. You can just picture the peace and the calm on Jesus' face as he slept there.

So they woke Him up as recorded in Mark 4:

Mark 4:38-40 But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind

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and the sea obey Him!"

It seems like such a contradiction there, on the one hand they have the most powerful individual on earth, and the second most powerful in all of the universe and all of the spiritual realm with them and yet they were so fearful. So they did not, at that point in their conversion, understand who Christ really was.

We should be careful how we view this rebuke. We have to understand what Christ was saying. In the first place, He was rebuking them for being in such an unfaithful state of mind at all.

Matthew records, "O you of little faith?"

Mark records, "How is it that you have no faith?"

And, Luke records, "Where is your faith?"

All three have the same basic meaning.

Here, as elsewhere, Jesus marveled at their unbelief. That is the first spiritual lesson that we should apply to ourselves and to one another. It is wrong for a Christian to be in such an insecure condition. No matter what the circumstances we should not get frantic, we should never be beside ourselves like this, we should never be in a condition where we have lost control of our emotions. That is one of the great battles of human life, getting control of those emotions.

Sadly, some people, even in God's church, are fooled by emotions, fears or wishes that disguise themselves as faith. And this is true even for converted people who may have been in God's church for years. That is why many people lack faith today, because they think that they have it when they do not.

But the real tragedy occurs when these people meet trials that demand real faith, instead of real faith they find only a poor substitute. The substitute quickly crumbles under pressure, and they are left with nothing. Such a person, who finds his false faith crumbling beneath him, quickly learns about his lack of faith the hard way—by experience.

But there is a better way to learn than experience. That way is to recognize how deceitful our human nature is, and to identify the false substitutes for faith before they

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take root and block the growth of real, godly faith. There are substitutes, there are counterfeits for faith.

Here are twelve of the most common human substitutes and counterfeits for faith:

1. **Wishing**—This is simply wanting something to happen. All of us, at one time or another, wish for something. We wish for a new house, or a new car, or even to be healed. And wishing may not necessarily be wrong, as long as our wishing does not degenerate into daydreaming or coveting something that goes against God's truth.

But it is most important that we do not confuse wishing with faith. Wishing is not based on anything reasonable; it is not supported by facts; often it is a wrong desire for something we have not worked for ourselves. So do not be fooled by wishing, and do not think that that is faith when you are just wishing for something.

2. **Hope**—This is an optimistic expectation that we will get the results that we want. Hope is a necessary element of the human experience. Faith is not affected by what is seen or not seen, but hope is. So when a person has hope, and thinks that it is faith, they are deceiving themselves.

Romans 8:24-25 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

As I said, faith is not affected by what is seen or not seen.

An example of a situation that most of us have experienced at one time or another will serve to illustrate the difference between faith and hope. Most people at some time must approach a lender for a loan, maybe for a house or car.

If the person has an optimistic expectation that the lender will grant his wish, then that person has hope.

But faith is more than just an optimistic expectation—faith is believing that God will do what He says He will do, according to His Word. For instance, God has not said that He will not allow you to get turned down for the loan, although He has said that He will never allow the righteous to go without food and shelter.

The point is that faith and hope are different. We should be careful not to confuse the

two.

3. A Positive Attitude—This is the ability to look at the facts and concentrate on a possible positive outcome. It requires a positive attitude to concentrate only on the narrow potential for winning and ignore the overwhelming odds for losing. And it is true that having a positive attitude is a good quality. It is a characteristic that we should all strive to obtain. We should concentrate on good, happy positive things. But a positive attitude is not faith and should not be confused with faith. A person could be a gambler and have a positive attitude that he is going to win, but that gets him nowhere.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Develop a positive outlook on life, but do not confuse it with faith. A positive attitude does not necessarily require faith—but faith does require a positive attitude.

4. Emotional Enthusiasm—A temporary surge of emotional enthusiasm is just that. Certainly the children of Israel must have felt that way when they came out of the land of Egypt with boldness. But the enthusiasm that came from leaving Egypt was not faith. Or, today it may come from hearing an inspiring prayer for healing—but that is not faith. That is the emotional reaction to something like an altar call.

Probably the most striking example of false faith in the New Testament is the incident of Peter's denial. Here was a man who was to become one of the greatest pillars and examples of faith in the church, but he did not start out so well.

Matthew 26:31-35, 74-75 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.'" Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples.

Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus

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who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

We know that Peter learned from that lesson because he became a great leader and pillar in the church.

Emotional enthusiasm is not faith. That night before Jesus was taken away the disciples had a great deal of emotional enthusiasm.

5. Fear of Punishment—It is amazing how some people can be motivated into doing something because they fear the punishment of disobeying. Ancient Israel, after refusing to enter the promised land, had a dramatic change of heart and wanted to charge in after being told they would be punished for not going.

Numbers 14:40 And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!"

We see there the shallow type of repentance, because they were just sorry that they were about to be punished for their lack of obedience.

It would be easier for some to assume that they had, overnight, developed a great surge of real faith, so that they now were ready to put aside their fears of giants or war and, instead, stalk into the land with renewed bravery. But God did not accept their change of mind because He knew it was not genuine. The fact is, that they developed a fear of punishment that would come upon them (that is, wandering forty years in the wilderness) if they did not do what they were told.

Sadly, some people obey God only out of fear of punishment. Fear of punishment should not be confused with faith. It may be a motivation in obeying God, but if we lack faith we should obey anyway and ask God for the faith to trust Him and live His way of life. That is where the Israelites went wrong, when they were fearful of the giants and the war that would ensue when they entered into the promised land.

6. Fear of a Worse Alternative—Some people put off surgical operations, or decide not to seek a doctor's help, not because they have deep faith in God for healing, but because they are afraid of the surgery, or afraid of the doctors. This fear may be a good thing if it causes a person to really think through the consequences of going under the surgeon's knife, but

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this fear should not be confused with faith.

7. Peer Pressure—Often when a person begins attending God's church, he has to ask his boss for the Sabbath off. Sometimes the new convert does it for the wrong reason.

It may not be that he had the faith to trust in God if he were to lose his job over it, but sometimes the new Sabbath-keeper has not really proven that the seventhday is the Sabbath, and does not have the faith to trust God in the first place.

His real motivation for asking for the Sabbath off was fear of what other people in the church would think if he did not keep it. But sadly, not even peer pressure, in the long run, can make a person obey if he does not have the faith to back it up. Eventually, he will compromise and give in because the commitment was never there.

8. Guilt—A person's conscience can be a powerful motivator toward obedience. For example, someone may tithe, not because he has real faith, or not even because he might fear God's punishment, but because he would feel guilty if he did not. The person is not motivated by faith, but by guilt.

Still, tithing because of guilt is better than not tithing at all. We begin to truly understand God's way of life only after we actually follow and experience it.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments...

We could put in there, "who live His way of life."

The person who tithes should not confuse and misdiagnose his guilt as faith. God is not deceived, although the person might be. No wonder some are not as blessed as they could be for tithing. Maybe they are tithing for the wrong reasons, or with the wrong motivation. Only God knows the heart.

9. Intimidation—This is to force into or deter from some action by inducing fear. A slick salesman may be able to talk a person into buying something he does not really need or want. The IRS, for example, extracts huge sums of money out of people through intimidation. Televangelists extract contributions out of their audiences by threatening them with hell fire.

Although it is a good thing, someone who is obeying something God has commanded

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because of being intimidated is not obeying out of faith. Faith requires "sincerity of heart."

Ephesians 6:5-6 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

The heart is mentioned in each one of those scriptures as being very important.

10. Resignation or Hopelessness—Some people have, after trying all of the doctor's methods, approaches and pharmaceuticals, come to God's ministers and asked to be anointed for healing, as James 5:14 instructs:

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

That prayer of faith is not only by the minister himself who has to have faith, but also for the individual being prayed for must have faith that God will answer those prayers.

Sometimes, of course, the person has real faith. Other times, the person comes for anointing, or for advice, because there are no other alternatives left. Out of sheer hopelessness or resignation, a person may seek God's help.

Of course, we should take all of our trials to God. Trials are a tool God Himself uses to draw people to Him. But someone who seeks God, or prays about it, because there is nothing else to do is not always exercising faith. He may be just using human logic and doing what any soldier in a foxhole, under the thunder of blasting shells, would do. The prayer of faith will save the sick, not the prayer of hopelessness.

11. Self-righteousness—People sometimes obey God, pray for healing or other needs or even endure trials not because they have the real faith that God is looking for, but because they have told other people in similar situations that they would not do whatever the other "weak" people had done instead of seeking God.

A person may put on a show of righteousness by toughing it out. But such a show of

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righteousness occasioned merely by self-righteousness is unrighteous in God's eyes.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousness's are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

True faith is always accompanied by humility.

12. Stubbornness—From time to time a person will be confronted by a great trial and will see it through to the end in grand style, keeping a stiff upper lip. We may assume the motivation factor behind his great steadfastness is a deep and abiding faith in God. And, it may be.

But sometimes it is just plain old human stubbornness. Stubbornness is unreasonable or perverse obstinacy. In contrast, steadfastness may help a person or group of people hold on and endure in times of stress or trial. But neither steadfastness nor stubbornness should be confused with faith.

The story of ancient Israel and her legacy of being stiff-necked is a case in point.

Deuteronomy 9:5-7 It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.

False faith is human nature deceitfully trying to convince us that we really believe in God while we remain stiff-necked. Although stubbornness may seem like self-control it is not when it is based on wrong goals and principles. The motivation must be based in Christ who strengthens us; this is the basis for steadfastness.

So, the first spiritual lesson is that we should never be in a condition where we have lost control of our emotions.

The second spiritual lesson is that what is so wrong about being in this condition of unbelief is that it shows a lack of trust and confidence in God. That is why Christ reprimanded His disciples. When Christ said, "Where is your faith?" He was also saying, "Don't you trust Me?"

This type of worry and distress always carries with it a lack of implicit trust and confidence in God. It is a lack of faith in His concern and care for us. It means that we take charge, and we are going to look after the situation ourselves, feeling either that He does not care, or maybe that He cannot do anything, and so we have to take control ourselves.

That is what makes it so terrible, but I am sure that we do not realize that we are doing that. It seems obvious as we look at it objectively in the case of these disciples; but when we are worried and distressed and do not know what to do, and are giving the impression of great nervous tension, anybody looking at us is at liberty to say: "He sure does not have much faith in God." We can always see somebody else's sins more easily than we can see our own.

War brings on people these trials in an exceptional way, but even now, in times of relative peace, anything that comes across our path and causes us trouble, immediately shows whether we believe in God and trust in Him, by our response and reaction to it. Is it belief or unbelief, is it faith or faithlessness?

Let us look at a few general principles we can extract from the incident on the boat.

First of all, in looking at the general idea of faith, what about what we might call the trial of faith?

Scripture is full of this idea of the trial of one's faith. Take for example, the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. In a sense, that is an exposition of this theme of the trial of faith. It lists all of those people who were faithful, and also lists the trials that they withstood.

Every one of those men was tried. They had been given great promises and they had accepted them, and then everything seemed to go wrong. It is true of all of them. Think of the trials of a man like Noah, the trials of a man like Abraham, the trials that men like Jacob, and especially Moses, had to endure. God gives the gift of faith and then the faith is tried. So if you ask God for faith then very likely you are going to get that faith tried, and you will have to activate that faith.

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Peter, in his first epistle in the first chapter, says exactly the same thing.

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

That is the theme of all the scriptures. We find it in the history of the Patriarchs and of all the Old Testament saints, and we find it running through the New Testament. It is especially the theme of the Book of Revelation, especially Revelation 2 and 3.

So we can deduce from this that we will find ourselves in a position in which our faith is going to be tried. Storms and trials are allowed by God. If we believe that we will never have any more worry for the rest of our lives, once we are Christians, we are embracing a terrible fallacy.

It is a delusion—it is not true. Our faith will be tried, and James goes so far as to say it is a blessing.

James 1:2-8 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind... For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

God permits trouble, He permits the wind to blow and the clouds to roll, and everything may seem to be wrong, and we ourselves to be at risk. We have to have the right perspective and realize that God does not take His people and lead them into some kind of present utopia in which we are protected from all the enticements and challenges of the world. We are here for character building and learning how to be part of the family of God in preparation for the Kingdom of God.

We are living in the same world as everybody else. The apostle Paul seems to go further than that.

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

It is a privilege to believe in Christ, because it is by the faith of Christ in us that our sins are forgiven; that we become reconciled to God, and have the hope of the kingdom of God. It is a great blessing, because it saves our minds from the tortures and deadly influence of unbelief—it saves us from the anxiety, restlessness and darkness of faithlessness.

Knowing that His disciples would be scattered, Jesus both warned and comforted them by emphasizing that they would find peace in believing in Him. Earlier in chapter 16, He emphasizes the love of the Father and that whatever we ask in Christ's name the Father will provide. Faith is one of those things that the Father personally provides. Verse 27 of John 16 tells us that "the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved [Christ] and have believed...."

John 16:31-33 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

These are some of the most encouraging words in the whole Bible.

God allows the storm to come. Our situation may very well become quite desperate and we may appear to be in danger of our lives. Everything may seem against us. But it should not drive us to despair.

And while all this may be happening to us, God may seem totally unconcerned for us. That is when the real trial of faith comes in. The wind and the clouds were bad enough and the water coming into the ship was terrible. But the thing that to them was most terrible of all was His apparent unconcern for their lives.

While Jesus was still sleeping and not apparently caring, they woke Him and said, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" He appeared to be unconcerned, unconcerned about them (or so they thought). Imagine the feelings of these men, the total despair and hopelessness that they felt imagining that their Savior was

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unconcerned for them. But it was all in their mind, we know, because He had more concern than anybody possibly could.

They had followed Him, and listened to His teaching about the coming kingdom of God, they had seen His miracles and were expecting amazing things to happen; and now it looked as if everything was going to come to an end in shipwreck and drowning. Should He not have been concerned? they thought.

We all know something of this condition of trial and trouble, and of a feeling that God somehow does not seem to care. He does not seem to do anything about it.

The fact that God permits these things, and that He often appears to be quite unconcerned about it all, really constitutes what I am describing as the trial of faith. Those are the conditions in which our faith is tried and tested, and God allows it all, God permits it all.

Let us go on to the second question. What is the nature of faith, the character of faith? This is really the primary message of this incident and it is brought out very clearly in Luke's gospel account.

Notice the way that Luke records Christ's way of putting the question in the incident.

Luke 8:25 But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

That is the key to the whole problem. In observing Christ's question, it is clear that it implies that He knows perfectly well that they have faith. The question He asks them is, "Where is it? You have faith, but where is it at this moment? It should be here; where is it?"

Now that gives us a key to understanding the nature of faith.

Let us look at it negatively for a moment. First, faith is not merely a matter of feeling. It cannot be, because one's feelings in this kind of situation can be very changeable. Christians are not meant to be dejected when everything goes wrong. We are told to rejoice.

Feelings are connected to happiness alone, rejoicing takes in something much bigger

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than feelings; and if faith were a matter of feelings only, then when things go wrong, and feelings change, faith will go. But faith is not a matter of feelings only, faith takes up the whole person including his mind, his intellect and his understanding. It is a response to truth. There is action involved. A person cannot have faith without action. Faith without works is a dead faith.

The second negative thing is even more important. Faith is not something that acts automatically, faith is not something that acts magically. This is the blunder that we have all, at some time or another, been guilty of believing. We seem to think that faith is something that acts automatically.

Many people, it seems, think of faith as if it were something similar to a thermostat on the wall that controls the heating and cooling for your house. You set the thermostat at a specific temperature to maintain your comfort level, and it acts automatically.

If the temperature rises above that, the thermostat comes into operation and brings it down; if you use your hot water and the temperature in the tank is lowered, the thermostat on your water heater automatically activates the heating element for electric tanks or the flame for natural gas tanks; and it brings the water back up to the set temperature automatically.

There are people who seem to think that faith acts like that. They assume that it does not matter what happens to them, that faith will operate and all will be well. Faith, however, is not something that acts magically or automatically.

If it did, these men on that boat with Jesus would never have been in trouble; faith would have come into operation, and they would have been calm and quiet and all would have been well. But faith is not like that.

Now that we know what it is not—What is faith?

Now let us look at it positively. The principle taught here is that faith requires activity; it is something that has to be exercised. It does not come into operation itself; we have to put it into operation. It has to be activated, in a sense it has to be turned on.

Now let us divide that up a little. Faith is something that we have to bring into operation. That is exactly what Christ said to the disciples. He said, "Where is your faith?" which means, "Why are you not taking your faith and applying it to this situation?"

It was because they did not apply it, they did not exercise it, because they did not put

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their faith into operation, that the disciples had become unhappy and were in a state of anxiety.

How then do we put faith into operation? Faith is something that we have to apply. The first thing we have to do when we find ourselves in a difficult situation is to refuse to allow ourselves to be controlled by the situation. The disciples on the boat should have applied their faith and taken charge of it, and said, "No, we are not going to panic." They should have started in that way, but they did not. They allowed the situation to control them.

Now relating this principle to a physiological problem—many women, especially in the beginning stages of their change of life, experience anxiety, or worse, toward controlling those to a certain extent. Do not let the anxiety set in, catch it as soon as the feeling raises itself. Take control of it immediately, before it has the opportunity to mature.

Sometimes you are dealing with only fractions of a second reaction time. Immediately put things into their right perspective. And prepare ahead of time with proper nutrition to help ease the severity. This is by no means a cure all for this physiological imbalance and pollution poisoning. But it certainly will help when you put things into perspective and before it has time to mature.

Faith is a refusal to panic. Faith is a refusal to panic, no matter what. Initially, faith means unbelief kept quiet. Faith means self-control in action. This is what the disciples did not do; they allowed the situation to grip them; they became panicky. Faith, however, is a refusal to allow that to happen.

We must not be controlled by circumstances. When a problem arises, making no decision is a decision to do nothing. It is a relinquishing of control. So we must take charge of ourselves, and pull ourselves up. We determine how we are going to react in any given situation. Will it be indecision, panic or self-controlled action? Our reaction must be the activation of the gift of faith.

In reality, God is the One who makes it possible, but we have the responsibility to activate what God has given us already, as members of God's church. We have to assert ourselves. But it does not stop at that. That is not enough because they may be nothing but resignation, and that is not the whole matter of faith. Of course, we cannot leave God and Jesus Christ out of the issue of faith. I do not in any way mean to say that we have to do it all, or that it is by our power. We certainly have the opportunity whenever a problem or trial comes up, to make a decision what route we should take.

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Having taken that first step, having pulled yourself up, remind yourself of what you believe and what you know. That again is something that these disciples did not do. If they had just stopped for a moment and said, "Now then, what about this crisis? Is it possible that we are going to drown with Christ in the boat? Is there anything He cannot do?"

They had seen His miracles. He turned the water into wine. He can heal the blind and the lame, and He can even raise the dead. Is it likely that He is going to allow us and Himself to be drowned in this way? Impossible!

In any case, He loves us, He cares for us; He has numbered the very hairs of our head. That is the way that faith reasons. It says: "I see the raging waves and the fierce wind, but God is still on His Throne, He is almighty and He is merciful."

That is faith, it recognizes and holds on to truth, and reasons from what it knows to be fact.

In John 8:32 Jesus say, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

That is the way to apply faith. The disciples on the boat did not do that, and that is why they became worrisome and panicky. We will have anxiety and become panicky if we fail to recognize and hold on to truth—if we fail to put things in their right perspective. God is still on His throne! This is one of the things that happened to Worldwide, when it went awry and left God's truth. A lot of people became very panicky over it, and one man said, "I did not realize that the truth was so important until they tried to take it away."

So faith, having refused to be controlled by circumstances, reminds itself of what it believes and what it knows. It is inconsistent to say, "I believe in God." But, not believe that He has the power and desire to intervene in the lives of His saints.

Then the next step is that faith applies all of that to the particular situation. Again, that was something that the disciples in the boat did not do, and that is why Christ puts it to them in this way:

"Where is your faith? You have the gift of faith, why do you not use it? Why do you not bring all that you know to bear on this situation, why do you not put this specific problem in its right perspective?"

That is the next step in the application of faith. Whatever your circumstances at this

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moment, bring all you know to be true of your relationship to God to bear upon it. Then you will know, without a doubt, that He will never allow anything to happen to you that is spiritually harmful; and that any physical trauma that He allows to happen, and that you may have to bear, will always end in something better.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

We do not always understand everything that is happening; but we will know for sure that God is not unconcerned. That is impossible! The One who has done the greatest thing of all for us, must be concerned about us in everything, and though the clouds are thick and we cannot see His face, we still know that He is there.

God will never let anything ultimately harmful take place with regard to His saints. Nothing can happen to us, but what He allows. It does not matter what it may be, some great disappointment, or maybe an illness or injury, or it may be some other tragedy, but we can be sure that God allows that thing to happen to us because it is ultimately for our good, or for someone else as an example.

The book of Hebrews tells us how to renew our spiritual vitality. It requires chastening and disciplining.

Hebrews 12:3-13 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives" If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths

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for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

What he is saying is to strengthen yourself and activate your faith. "No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness." That is the way faith works. But we have to exercise it. It does not come into operation automatically.

We have to focus our faith on the situation and say, "I know that God is sovereign over all things, and that Christ also has authority over all things, and because that is true, I am going to apply it to this situation. That means this problem cannot be what I think it is; it must have some other explanation."

And you end up seeing that it is God's gracious purpose for you, and having applied your faith, you then endure. You just refuse to be moved. The enemy will come and attack you; the water will seem to be pouring into the boat, but you stand on your faith, the faith of Jesus Christ.

That brings us to the third and final principle—the value of even the weakest or smallest faith.

However poor and small, and however incomplete the faith of these disciples was on this occasion, they at any rate had a sufficient amount of faith to make them do the right thing in the end. Having been distressed, alarmed, exhausted and panicky, they went to Christ.

They still had some kind of feeling that He could do something about it, and so they woke Him and said: "Master, Master, we are perishing! Master are you not going to do something about it?" One could argue that this was very weak faith, but it was faith.

And even faith "like a grain of mustard seed" is valuable because it takes us to Him. And when we go to Him this is what we will find; He may be disappointed with us and not conceal that. He may rebuke us, and say, "Why did you not reason it out, why did you not apply the faith that I have given you, why do you have anxiety; why did you not apply your faith as you should have done?"

He will let us know that He is disappointed in us and He will rebuke us; but, He will not reject us. He will not drive us away. He did not drive those disciples away, He received them, and He will receive us, He will bless us, and He will give us peace. He will

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intervene on our behalf.

He rebuked the wind and the sea and there was a great calm. He produced the condition that they were so anxious to enjoy, in spite of their lack of faith. This is the omnipotent and merciful and loving God that we believe in and follow.

Though He is disappointed in us often, and though He rebukes us, He will never neglect us.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

This is quoted from Deuteronomy 31:8, "And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.

God will do for us what He did for His earlier disciples; He will give us peace. With this peace He gave them a still greater conception of Himself than they had before. They marveled, and were full of amazement at His wonderful power.

When you find yourself in this position of trial, trouble and testing, take it as a wonderful opportunity of proving your faith, of showing your faith, of manifesting your faith, and bringing glory to His great and Holy Name. We know that He will never be unconcerned about us, and that He will never, never leave us alone, because He has every hair of our head numbered.