

# The Exchanged Life

## Introduction

“Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). I like this translation that says faith is the substantiation of things hoped for. Some of you know that I was a detective for a number of years. When we were investigating something, and we had something in our grasp, you might say, it was not enough to go out there and make the arrest; but the situation that surrounded it, along with the other evidence that was being gathered around it substantiated what we believed to be true. It was substantiating this what we believed to be true; it gave evidence that it was true.

When we read this and say, “Now, faith is the substantiation of things hoped for.” Well, if we want our faith to be built up, as it were, there is one thing that we have to do. Even as we gathered around the table today, the table of remembrance, we need to be keenly aware every day of the Lord working in our lives and through our lives, taking note of it, remembering it. When we were so weak that we could not pray, God supplied grace that stirred our hearts to pray. When things were just not well in relationships, and we would pray, almost wondering, “Could this ever be made good?” And all of a sudden, the Spirit of God moved in such a way that the situation changed, and we took note that it was the Lord, and I had nothing to do with it. As these things are brought to our attention day by day, it is substantiating faith, and the next time, there is faith to meet the next challenge. God has proven Himself before our very eyes that He is the God who answers prayer, and our faith is built up now.

Faith is a substantiation of things hoped for, and it says in this translation “the evidence of things not seen,” or another translation says, “the assurance.” That word assurance for the believer gives peace to his soul. He has been assured of this because of the working of Christ. When I say I witnessed Christ, I do not mean in this particular way that I am witnessing Christ to other people, which we should be doing. Rather, I am witnessing Christ Himself, working, doing, moving, healing, preaching, and teaching. I am witnessing Him doing this, and as I see my Lord and Savior in these ways, my faith is bolstered.

## Personal Testimonies of Faith

I have three little stories to tell. I am in every one of them, but the stories are not about me. After a few years in the Lord in New York, I was a young man and for the first time in my life I had a regular, steady job. We bought a little house out on Long Island, and it was not even a quarter of the size of this room. Even though it was a little house we loved it. Here I was, with this little house, and for the first time I had real security in my job.

## **Moving to Florida**

We felt the Lord speaking to our hearts, saying, “I want you to move.” We were meeting at that time with a group of about fifteen other young couples, all new in the Lord, but it was wonderful with great fellowship. We even took vacations together. And now, in the midst of all this security, He said, “I want you to move.” It was confirmed in prayer with and through these other brothers and sisters I was meeting with. The ringer of this was we felt He wanted us to move to Florida, which I did not particularly care for, and I only knew one person who lived in Florida. But the Lord convinced us and showed us that it was so clear that not to obey and move would have been sinful. That is how clear it was. At that time, I had two children, and we packed ourselves in this old Buick station wagon and moved to Port Charlotte, Florida.

## **God’s Provision and the Lesson of Trust**

When we got there, it was in the middle of the recession during the seventies. There was not much work going on around. At that time, I was working in my construction trade. As soon as we got the house a little settled, I went out to look for work. I found the biggest contractor in town, and I approached him about working. He said, “Well, I have a house for you that you can go in and work at.” I said, “Okay.” Then he told me how much I would be paid for that as a subcontractor, and it really set me back on my heels because I was coming from New York, and the pay was a lot better there than in Florida during this time. It was a little bit shocking to me, but I told him, “Look, I am going to do this house, but after you see my work and the quality of my work, let us sit back down and negotiate.” So, I went out, did the job, and went back to him. He was very pleased with it, and I said, “Well, do you have another house?” He said, “Well, come back in about two days.” Two days later, I went back and asked him, “Do you have a house?” He said, “Not yet, but come back in a couple more days.” I went back in a couple of days and asked the same question, “Do you have the house?” He said, “Not yet.”

I got in my car and drove away from his office, and the Lord spoke to me as clearly as I am speaking to you right now. He said, “You see, with your personality and your expertise in your trade, you still cannot provide for your family. When are you going to trust Me to be your provider?” I repented and said, “Lord, I am sorry.” Three days later I received a call from a completely different contractor, and he gave me work. I started working and did not miss a day of work until the Lord moved me into the restaurant business, which some of you have heard about recently.

## **Open a Pizzeria**

And the way that happened was my father had come down to visit us in Florida, and he said, “Why don’t you open a pizzeria over here? There is no good pizza place down here.” I said, “Well, Dad, I do not know anything about that business, and I do not have that much money. I cannot see the possibility of doing that.” He said, “Well, you know, we have some cousins that live in Jamaica, Queens, in New York. They have a pizzeria.

You can go there, learn from them, and come back.” I said, “I do not know.” But he convinced me that would be the way to go, to get out of the trades and do something different, and he gave me \$3,000 to help me do this. So, I went to my cousins in New York, drove back up there, and I worked with them for a week. They gave me the recipes, but it was a very, very busy place. They gave me the recipes and I worked there. I had the opportunity, amidst all of the hustle and bustle, to make one pizza. That was it. In the pizzerias in New York, they would throw the pizzas up in the air and catch them.

I went back to Florida, found a storefront that I was able to put a down-payment on. Now I am working my trade and going into this storefront, building it up, building partition walls, and making counters to work on. I was working until 11 o'clock at night, trying to do as much as I could myself because I did not have much money. I was using that \$3,000, which went very quickly. From the work that I was doing, I took care of my household and invested money in this little storefront. As I went along, I had a big sign on the front that read, “Coming Soon, Amato's New York Pizza.” That was it.

Well, one night, about a week before we were supposed to open, literally, there was nothing in the store in the way of food products, and I did not have much money at all. About 11 o'clock at night, I am walking out of there after working in the store, and this black Lincoln Continental pulls up. A guy gets out of the car and says to me, “Are you the owner here?” I said, “Yes.” He introduced himself; I forgot his name right now. He said, “Yes, I am the Roma food distributor in this area. I would love to have your business. Here is my card.” I said, “Oh, okay.” He asked me, “Where are you from?” I said, “Well, I am from New York, out on Long Island.” He said, “Oh, yeah, I am from New York on Long Island.” And he looked at me and asked, “Do you know a guy by the name of Steve Amato who lives in West Babylon on Long Island?” the adjacent town to where I lived in Long Island. I said, “Yeah, he is my father.” “I know your father,” this guy said. The Lord knows where you are. He knows the circumstances of your life. He knows what you need, and His timing is always perfect.

A couple of days later, I called him up and made an appointment to go to the warehouse. When I went to the warehouse he showed me all around. After that, we went back to his office, and he said, “Okay, so tell me what you want. I would love to do business with you.” “Well, I said, first of all, I cannot tell you what I want because I do not know what I want; I have never done this before. And the second thing is this: I do not have any money for this.” He said to me, “That is okay. I will stock this store for you with everything that you need. Then, next time you give me an order, you can pay for that order and pay a little bit more to go against this bill, but I will stock you.” That week, he brought everything to the store and stocked it up completely.

Now, keep in mind, I have only made one pizza. So, the day I am going to open up, I get there nice and early. I mixed a batch of dough because you have to mix the dough and let it rise, and then you can start to use it. We were going to open at 11 o'clock that day. I mixed the dough, and it was a disaster. Now it was getting closer and closer to the time that I have to open the store. I made another batch of dough. I thank the Lord; He gave me enough wisdom to get in there early that day. We were supposed to open at 11

o'clock, and the time was ticking away. But I said to myself, this is the first day. Who is going to come into the store? We opened at 11 o'clock. Who is going to come into the store at that time? A few minutes before 11, I went and I ripped the paper sign off the window, and I walked back to the counter. It was not two minutes later that the door opened, and my first customers walked in.

Well, I did not know what to do, but I called my brother who had moved down, and my mom was down there. They were all working at the store. We put the dough on the table where we make it. We gathered around and prayed. Then we made that first pizza, and it was as if I had been making pizzas all my life. We put it on the table, and that customer was a customer until the day we closed the store. It was God who showed up. But did I recognize it? Yes, we recognized it, but that is what I was saying about this issue of faith. Every time He showed up, every time He demonstrated His faithfulness, my faith grew within me.

### **Salvation By Grace Through Faith**

In Ephesians 2:6 it says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

We come into the family of God by His grace and by His mercy. When the Lord first looked at me, He had His eye on me, just like He had His eye on you. While you were yet in your mother's womb, He had His eye on you, and He had His eye on me. When He looked at me, His determination of me was this: "Oh, he is pitiful. He does not have anything. He cannot do anything. He is nothing." That was His evaluation of me as He looked at me because I was born in sin. And that is where He looked at me.

What was His plan for me when He saw me like that? There was only one thing left. There was no improving me. The only thing that was left for Him to do was to put me to death. And that is exactly what He did in His mercy. He put me in His Son, and I died in His Son. I died His death, but He did not leave me there, just like He did not leave you there. Because not only did I die in Christ, but I was raised up with Him to newness of life. That is something of what we are going to hopefully express today: that He has given you and me a new life. But are we living that new life?

### **Baptized Into His Death**

In Romans 6:3 it says, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

I would ask that question of us, "Do we know that?" Sometimes if we ask that question, people will say, "Yeah, I know that. I have been around for quite a long time. I have heard plenty of messages on that. I have read plenty of books about that. Yeah, I know that." But I have to ask you, is it yours? The only way it is going to be yours is if it is apprehended by faith. Just as that little illustration before about faith is the substantiation of things hoped for; in this matter as well, it is only yours if you arrest it

by faith. You do that by remembering the Lord Jesus over the years that you have known Him.

Here we are in a pitiful state at one time, living in darkness. And in the midst of that darkness, one day, that glorious day that I will never forget - and I am sure you have not forgotten that glorious day - when the Lord opened my eyes to see how utterly sinful I was, perverted in so many ways, and He opened my eyes to see that. What did I have? I had nothing of any value.

At that point in time, it was the very light of God. In John 1:4-5 says, "He was the life, and the life was the light of men." He was the light, and He was the life. At that very moment, my darkness was pierced by that light. He opened my eyes to see that I was the one who needed a Savior. When I called on Him, He gave me new life right then. It was not a life to be worked for. This new life that is spoken of here (we are going to read it in just a second) is His very life, and it cannot be learned. You cannot learn this new life, and you cannot gain this new life. You have to receive this life through faith in order to walk in it.

Again, I am convinced that first comes obedience, then comes faith, and this faith is substantiated because we witness Christ at work. Romans 6:3-4: "Do you not know that as many of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus was baptized into His death. Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in this new life."

We are not given a choice of doing it this way, and that this way is my way or His way. It is not my life that pleases the Father; it is His life that pleases the Father. But He has given us His life so we can be pleasing to the Father every day, conscious of the Lord Jesus. It is not that we are sort of walking around in a stupor with our heads up in the clouds thinking of it. No, it is not like that. But He gives us the reality of it. There is something that has happened within us that we can say, "yes, I belong to Him, and He belongs to me."

### **In the Likeness of His Resurrection**

Romans 6:5 says, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." There is power in the resurrected life. He has power for you and me to overcome, to be victorious. There is power there, but it is not your power; it is His power; it is His life. We read in Ephesians, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves." This life began by His initiation, by the Lord's initiation. It will be like that until we see Him face to face. It is all the Lord Jesus, all the Lord Jesus. It is His life.

Romans 6:6-7 says, "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin."

Have you ever seen a dead man sin? On the other hand, have you ever seen a dead man do good and righteous works? No. A dead man is dead. He says, you died in Christ, but you also have been raised up with Him.

Romans 6:9-11 says, "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also, reckon (take into account) yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Reckon yourselves dead. How do we do that? How we do that is by seeing Christ, knowing by faith that He died on the cross for your sins and mine; we are in Him. I can reckon myself dead, because of what He has done, what He has demonstrated in my life.

This was not reality to me until after being with the Lord for some time. Now it was the truth, that is the truth. But my understanding of it, the receiving of it, and being benefited by it was not until the Lord made it clear and real to me. That is why it says here, likewise, you also reckon, consider all that you have seen and witnessed by yourself of the Lord Jesus, and then you can believe: "Yes, I am dead to sin; that life is no more. I have a new life!"

As I walk this way with the Lord, I think I am speaking for every one of you. I hope I am not being presumptuous; I do not think so. As I am walking with the Lord after this glorious new birth and all that accompanied it, those first few years in particular were just exciting. Seeing things I had never recognized before, that were right in front of my face, but I was blind to them. Now He has opened up my eyes to this and I can actually see God moving, hearing, and being able to hear the voice of God instructing through His Word, which at one time was just another book on the shelf. Ah, glorious things!

## **Christ as the Source of New Life**

### **Struggles With Sin and the Desire to Improve**

But I began to recognize something about myself that I should not say all of a sudden, because they were there all the time. There were things that were offensive to my Lord, things in my character. Maybe I lied too much. Maybe I was harsh. Maybe there were some other sins in my life that were recurring. When these things rose up, I would get before the Lord and say, "Lord, I am so sorry. I really am sorry, Lord. I hate myself when I do those things. Please forgive me, Lord. I will do better, Lord. I am going to do better, Lord, forgive me." I would go along, and all of a sudden, boom, the thing pops up again. I got to the Lord now, shaking my head. "Oh, Lord, I am just a mess. Forgive me, Lord, but I am doing better. If You have noticed, Lord, I am better than what I used to be." There was a time, as foolish as this may sound, my dear brothers and sisters, I would judge my spirituality on how long I went between my sins. "Ah, good. This was two weeks now. I have been doing pretty good. Not too long ago, it was just like a week." I could easily lose my temper or do something foolish.

I was trying really hard. I prayed hard and earnestly. “Lord, change me, Lord. I want to be kinder. I want to be able to love more. I do not want to speak lies.” The Lord said, which I have shared here before, the Lord spoke to my heart. He said, “You see, you are just as weak today as you were the day before you knew Me.” I agreed with Him. “You are right, Lord, I am. I am so weak. Please forgive me, but I will be trying harder.” The Lord let me see He was not interested in making you or me a better person. He was not interested in making Lenny Amato better. He had to convince me there was no hope for me outside of Him. He had to convince me that He had to be my life. It took some time because I was still trying to be good. Again, He had to say to me, “I am not interested in making you good, Len. I am interested in your living out of your new life, out of your new life. That is what will please Me.”

### **The Issue of Faith**

As I said before, to live in newness of life, you cannot learn to do it. You cannot gain it by doing, as I was trying to do. That is where this issue of faith is important. Again, I found that in this new life, your life - that life you once lived - was crucified. The Lord had to orchestrate circumstances, as He also does in your life. He had to orchestrate circumstances where I was ready to get in there and fix the problem, address the issue, because that is who I am. Naturally I am a fixer, I want to fix things. “You got that? I will tell you what you should be doing. These are the scriptures you should be reading.” I wanted to fix it. The Lord began to show me just that. All of a sudden, there will be that situation you will encounter, and you will be ready to take hold of it. The Lord is saying, “No, no, that is you. That is your life. Leave it alone; let Me deal with it. Let Me do this work because you cannot.” What do you have to offer? That is what He says to me, “Len, what do you have to offer?” I have nothing to offer. “What can you do, Len?” I realized that what I do is filled with frustration. That is what my Christian life was like. It was frustrating. The harder I tried, the “behinder” I got. Why? Because I was still living out of the old man, the old life.

He brings us into those situations, and all of a sudden, He wants us to put the stops there. He puts stops there, and He says, “No, no, trust Me. You say you believe that I am a God who answers prayer; pray and see.” I know, again, I could speak for many of you here that you have prayed for things, and some years later, all of a sudden, that thing that you prayed for came through. God knew what the time and the occasion were for it to happen. Sometimes I stand in wonderment. There are some things recently I have been praying about, and all of a sudden, there it is, and it almost surprised me. Oh, my goodness. That prayer really worked. It was not that my prayer really worked. In my impatience, I forgot that I asked the God who answers prayer to do this.

### **We Are Delivered from This Body of Death Through Christ**

In this seventh chapter of Romans, we are very familiar with this predicament that I found myself in, and you may have found yourself in as well. Paul is saying the very things that I want to do, that I will to do. I see that the Lord wants this and wants that in my life and wants my life to be this way. The very things that I will to do, I do not do. The

very things that I do not want to do, I find myself doing. We know he goes through all of this. It is agonizing; it is frustrating. That is what he was experiencing, just like you experience. I am speaking for some other person here besides myself. That was Paul's frustration. That was my frustration. He comes to this part where he says, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

This is just a little sidestep here, and some of you already know this, but Paul was speaking to Roman believers. He knew his audience. I used to say this; I have said this about Paul the Apostle: when Paul spoke, he knew his audience. When he was going up to Mars Hill to speak to the philosophers who wanted to hear this new thing, Paul said, "As I was traveling here, I noticed that you are a very religious people and you have many altars to many gods. Then I saw this one altar to the unknown God. It is He whom I have come to share with you." He knew his audience. Sometimes we need to have a better understanding of that in our own lives and the people we are talking to.

Paul was talking to these Roman believers, and he says, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" In Roman law, as capital punishment for those who went against the state and the empire, their sentence was death. What they would do is take a body, a rotting body, and strap it to that man, arm to arm, leg to leg, around his chest, until the putrefaction from the dead body entered into the body of the man sentenced to this horrible death. The Romans knew what Paul was saying: "Who shall free me from this body of death?" That is what he was referring to. What a way to go.

Then he says, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. 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." This issue of walking in the Spirit encompasses everything that we have heard before. It is all part of this new life: we are actually walking in communion with the Lord Jesus in an intimate, abiding relationship with Him. That is what this new life is—this communion and intimacy with God, where He is our very life. Paul says, "Oh, the only thing that can free you and me from trying to do this in our own strength is that we, by faith, embrace this new life."

## Conclusion

Again, we embrace it by recognizing the working of the Lord Jesus every single day in our midst in so many and innumerable ways. Your faith is built, and my faith is built to believe that truly I have died, and truly I have been given new life. It is not something, no pie in the sky. Like I said before, you cannot learn it, and you cannot gain it by doing things. You have to embrace it by faith. Because He has demonstrated to you and me in so many ways that He is a faithful master to serve, that He is the one who heals. Those little stories I told about the faithfulness of the Lord: how He showed up the way He did for those groceries, to supply me work. Some of you know the miraculous healing of my leg, the healing of my hand. I have seen people healed. I have witnessed Christ as the healer. I have witnessed Christ as the prophet when I have heard others speak and

share. Brothers and sisters in an assembly come and say a word that was just needed at that time. We witness Christ in all of His beauty; we witness Him, and He causes us to take hold of this new life. He will orchestrate day after day situations where you can recognize that the Lord is in control, and He is saying, "Len, take your hands off of this." More and more, He will bring us into the intimate relationship that He is looking for. It is the life of His Son in you and me that the Father is looking for. It pleases Him, and it will please you. It pleases me. I think that is all He wants to say.

*Dear Father, I again bow my heart before You because we serve such a wonderful Master, Your Son. Lord, get hold of us, teach us, and show us that Your life is what is so pleasing; Your Son's life is what is so pleasing to You. In Your mercy, You have given us His life. We ask this again in His precious name. Amen.*

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