

Message 3

WHERE FAITH COMES FROM AND HOW IT GROWS

In this message, I would like to consider with you the important issue of where faith comes from and how it grows.

Faith is central to Christian living. It is crucial in every situation of life and at every stage of Christian development. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without faith, we will not be able to walk with God effectively, for faith releases the power of God to work in our lives.

Since faith is so important, all of us who love the Lord would desire to grow in faith. Yet, at times, we can be puzzled as to how we can grow in faith. Some people think that faith is just something we either have or do not have. Can this be the case? Is it something we cannot do anything about?

If we ponder about it, we know that this cannot be the case because this would be inconsistent with what the Bible reveals. The Bible teaches that God approves and rewards people who have faith and that He rebukes those of little faith. If it is something that we cannot do anything about, then God will neither commend us for our faith nor rebuke us for having little faith.

Some people think that faith is a gift of God. And since it comes from God as a gift, we must wait on God to give us faith. So, they keep waiting, but faith does not come. Then there are others who say that faith is basically the response of man. They say that we must exercise faith and they try hard to do so. But then they find that it does not seem to work because they are lacking in faith and have difficulty exercising faith. Their faith thus remains as weak as before.

To answer the questions as to where faith comes from and how we can grow in faith, it is important to go back to our understanding of what true faith is.

What true faith involves

We saw, in the first message, there are two essential elements in true faith: firstly, the recognition of truth, and secondly, the appropriate response to the truth. If we understand these two aspects, we will see that true faith is neither something merely given by God nor something we generate. Neither of these adequately explains where faith comes from and how we can grow in faith. A life of faith is a relationship of trust in the God of truth. It is a life lived in accordance with the truth.

How faith comes about and how it grows

For faith to take place and grow, we need revelation of the truth. God is the One who reveals the truth to us. We must therefore look to Him to reveal the truth to us and help us understand, appreciate and absorb the truth into our hearts and live by it. When truth revealed by God is received into our hearts, faith is born. And when we live in accordance with the truth received into our hearts, we will be living a life of faith and faith will grow.

God delights to reveal the truth to those whose hearts are open, responsive and cooperative, to those who are hungry for truth and who will act on it.

You may ask, "What if there is no hunger in my heart for the truth? How then can I even begin to have faith?" In reality, it is God who takes the initiative and seeks to bring about every aspect needful for the life of faith and its growth. Our part is to cooperate with what God seeks to bring about in our hearts. The apostle Paul exhorts us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). He then tells us that it is God who is at work in us, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (v. 13). We see from here that both God and man have a part in it. We must not depend on ourselves for any aspect of the life of faith. We must depend on God. At the same time we must not be passive and merely wait for God to bring it about, but actively look to Him and cooperate with what He desires to do in our lives. I will explain and elaborate in the rest of the message how all this works out.

Faith and man's cooperation with God

Not only does God open up the truth to us, He also encourages and enables us to live out the truth. Even when we recognise the truth, we cannot live it out without God's enabling. We therefore need to cooperate with God and depend on His enabling to live out the life of faith.

The life of faith involves a few important elements. One element is the mind. The Lord renews our mind and helps us to grasp the truth and learn to see things from the perspective of God's kingdom. Another element is the will. Having recognised the truth, we have to exercise our will to choose and act accordingly. This can at times be very difficult, for example, when we are going through intense spiritual opposition and attacks by the forces of darkness. We may be misunderstood, persecuted and maligned, and we may have to pay a high price for obedience to God. We may feel spiritually dry and exhausted and God seems far away. At such times, we need all the more to exercise our will to choose to walk by faith, in obedience to the Lord, despite our disinclination to do so. However, we need to do so in fellowship with God. As we affirm our faith in Him, we can be assured God is watching over us and will help us to be triumphant in all of life's situations.

Outworking of true faith does not just involve the mind and the will. Revelation of truth, spiritual insight and absorption of the truth into our lives take place in our

heart, mind and spirit. Our whole being is involved. Our whole being must commit to living according to God's revelation and to the light He has shown us.

As we walk with God in this way, He will continually reveal more to us. We will grow in our appreciation of who He is and be drawn into closer fellowship with Him. Our spirit will grow stronger and we will grow in spiritual maturity. Our life of faith will then grow in meaning and quality.

Some people say they just want a simple faith. They say, "I just trust God and that is enough." As a result, they neglect to seek true knowledge. This is a wrong idea of simple faith. If we do not grow in our understanding of God and His ways and how we are to work out our lives together with the brethren, and if we do not know how the enemy works, how can we effectively cooperate with God? If we do not know what the truth is, how can we live it out? We must therefore not neglect seeking God for true knowledge. We must earnestly desire to understand the truth so that we can act upon it. This is the will of God for us. Paul prayed unceasingly for the Colossian believers that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that they may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:9-10).

I will now go on to consider with you various aspects of the life of faith to understand how it works and how we can grow in faith.

The Lord Jesus – Author and Perfecter of our faith

Hebrews 12:2 exhorts us to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. That the Lord Jesus is the author of our faith tells us that the initiative comes from God. He is also the perfecter of our faith. All that is needful for a life of faith comes from God.

The Scriptures tells us that God is the Father of lights (James 1:17). And the Lord Jesus also proclaims: "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12). He is the light that shines forth that we may walk in the light. It does not mean, however, that the moment light is revealed, we will automatically walk in it. There is a need for us to respond positively to the light revealed and to follow the Lord Jesus. That is why the Lord Jesus tells us in John 8:12: "He who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life".

The Lord Jesus also tells us in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life". He is the way in which we should walk. He is the truth on which our faith should be built. He invites us to draw near to Him when He says: "Come to Me" (Matt. 11:28). The life of faith is thus one that is characterised by a close walk with Christ.

Along this line, we see John 1 revealing the Lord Jesus as One who is full of grace and truth.

John 1:14, 17

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

“Grace and truth were realised through Jesus Christ” can be understood along two lines. The first is that grace and truth characterised His life, being manifested in all His words and actions. The other line of understanding is that we can realise a life of grace and truth in our lives through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can attain to and live out a life full of grace and truth in union with Him. As we walk with Him, and are united with Him, we too can live a life that manifests grace and truth – a life that demonstrates God’s grace, and one that is lived according to the truth. This in essence is the life of faith.

So if we want to live a life of faith, we have to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to grow in our knowledge of Him, be united with Him, and walk in Him who is the truth.

In Luke 8:22-25, we read of an occasion in which the Lord Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. The disciples were in a boat with the Lord Jesus when they encountered a strong wind and a raging sea. At that time, the Lord Jesus was asleep and the disciples were filled with fear. They woke Him up, exclaiming: “Master, Master, we are perishing!” At that, the Lord Jesus rebuked the wind and the surging waves and they became still. Then He said to the disciples: “Where is your faith?”

Why did the Lord Jesus rebuke them for their lack of faith? One reason is that they had not truly appreciated who the Lord Jesus is. If they had understood who He is, the Creator of the universe, and that all things are under His control, they would not have that kind of fear. They would have known that, being together with Him, they were safe. Lack of faith has to do with a failure to appreciate who the Lord is and a failure to trust and rely upon Him.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of faith

The Holy Spirit plays an important part in the life of faith. The Lord Jesus reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. As the Spirit of truth, He leads and guides us into all the truth.

John 16:13-14

13 “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

14 “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

We see an interesting relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We saw earlier that the Lord Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. As the Lord Jesus is the truth and as the Spirit of God reveals to us the truth, it would mean that the Spirit of God reveals the Lord Jesus to us and helps us to appreciate Him. Verse 14 points in that direction. It is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction to our hearts and enlightens our minds to understand and appreciate who Jesus is.

In the wider context, the Spirit of truth will guide us into all the truth. Whatever area of truth we desire to know, we can look to the Holy Spirit to help us. Truth should not just remain as head knowledge. It should become a part of our lives. And this can come about only through the Holy Spirit helping us to grasp the truth and assimilate it into our lives.

David tells us God desires truth in the innermost being (Ps. 51:6). The Spirit of truth helps us to know the truth, absorb the truth into our innermost being, walk in truth and be men of truth. This is the way we become men of faith and live the life of faith.

In Galatians 5, faith is listed as one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

The word "faithfulness" in verse 22 can also be translated "faith". The two concepts are closely related. The life of faithfulness is the life of faith – the life of obedience to God. As the Spirit of God works in our hearts and minds, He will produce in us the fruit of the Spirit, and consequently we grow in faith as well. But this is not solely the work of God. We must respond positively to God and cooperate with Him to bring this about.

The Scriptures and the life of faith

Another important aspect to consider is the place of the Scriptures in the life of faith.

In John 17:17, the Lord Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth". Here, the Lord Jesus was praying to God the Father that we may be set apart to walk in the truth and live a holy life. He went on to say: "Your word is truth". This clearly implies that the word of God is very important in our knowing the truth and walking in it.

When we refer to "the word of God", some people immediately think of the Bible. The word of God is not synonymous with the Bible. The word of God refers to what God communicates to us; it can include what God is speaking to our hearts in our daily experience and as we spend time with Him in prayer. However, much of what God desires to communicate and reveal to us come through the Scriptures. The Scriptures is a very important source of truth. The apostle Paul tells us: "All Scripture is inspired

by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures can equip us to know how to walk in faith and truth.

Romans 10:17 is a verse often referred to when people talk about where faith comes from.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

The first part of this verse tells us that faith comes from hearing. The second part tells us this has much to do with the Lord Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has taught.

D.L. Moody was a great evangelist who brought many people to the Lord. He loved the Lord deeply and was well regarded as a man of faith. He recounted how he used to keep on praying that the Lord would grant him faith. But it just did not seem to come. One day, he read Romans 10:17 and the verse struck him. Yes! Faith comes from hearing the word of God (the KJV has the alternative reading "the word of God" instead of "the word of Christ"). It dawned on him that he should not just keep on praying for faith, but he should spend more time searching the Scriptures. As he concentrated on studying the Scriptures, he found his faith growing stronger.

We should long to know the Scriptures. 1 Peter 2:2 exhorts believers to "long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation". As we read the Scriptures prayerfully, being eager to learn and receive from the Lord, He will speak to us and nourish our spiritual life.

If the Scriptures is important in helping us grow in faith, what happens to people who do not have access to the Scriptures or who are illiterate? I consider these to be special circumstances. The Lord can still minister to such people. And there is still a need for them to understand and obey the truth.

But where the Scriptures is available, God expects us to spend time to search the Scriptures, meditate on it, and grow in our understanding of the truth.

The Lord Jesus says: "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and are life". As we read the Scriptures in faith, looking to God with a responsive heart, the Spirit of God makes the Scriptures alive to us and through it speaks to us and ministers life to us. We will find the truths of God becoming clearer to us. We will grow in appreciation of God and will be drawn closer to Him. We will have greater confidence to trust Him in the different situations of life. I am sure many of us, from time to time, do find this true in our own lives.

Faith acts on God's revelation

Example of Paul

Let us consider how the apostle Paul responded to God in faith. Before becoming a Christian, Paul was not living in accordance with the truth. He was persecuting the Lord's disciples instead. While on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians in that city, the Lord Jesus appeared to him.

Acts 22:7-8, 10

7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

8 "And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'

10 "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

Before this encounter, Paul did not understand that Jesus is the Lord. But in that dramatic encounter, he recognised Jesus to be the Lord. And the moment he recognised who the Lord is, he said: "What shall I do, Lord?" He did not stop at mere recognition of Jesus as Lord. He did not say, "Well, that's it. I have met the Lord. Now I will carry on with my own life." Instead, he responded positively to the revelation and cooperated with the Lord. And so the Lord instructed him: "Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do".

From then on, we see Paul faithfully seeking to understand the truth, to grow in the knowledge of God and His will, and to faithfully work them out in his life, whatever the cost, no matter how difficult. For Paul, it was a continual process of receiving and living out God's revelations, resulting in growth of faith.

Years later, when Paul appeared before King Agrippa, he gave an account of his conversion experience. He recounted what the Lord had told him:

Acts 26:16-18

16 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

The Lord Jesus had appointed Paul and commissioned him. Paul summed up his response to the Lord in verse 19:

Acts 26:19

"So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Paul was not disobedient. He was faithful; he obeyed what the Lord had revealed to him.

Example of Noah and Abraham

In Hebrews 11, we see other believers acting on God's revelation with a responsive heart. Hebrews 11:7 tells us about Noah's faith.

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Here, we see God revealing to Noah about things to come. Although Noah had not seen with his physical eyes what God had warned him, yet in faith and with a responsive heart, he acted on God's instructions.

In the same way, when called by God, Abraham "obeyed by going out".

So we see consistently that in a true life of faith, there is a revelation of the truth, whether directly from God or indirectly through His people or other means. The man of faith will respond to what God has revealed and act upon it.

A life of faith does not merely consist of specific acts. It is a life that is focused on God and lived in fellowship with Him. The man of faith will not just wait for specific instructions from God. As God has revealed many spiritual truths and principles in the Scriptures, the man of faith will align the whole direction of his life to faithfully work out what God has revealed, with the Spirit of God drawing him and enabling him in that direction.

Praying for more faith

What I have said earlier about praying for faith might have given the impression that we ought not to pray for faith. That is not what I meant. It is proper to pray for faith. But we need to understand how it works. Faith has to do with God's revelation and God's enabling as well as man's response.

In Mark 9:22-24, we read of an incident involving a father and his demon-possessed child. The father told the Lord Jesus:

Mark 9:22

...if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"

In His reply, the Lord Jesus made clear to him the importance of faith, of believing in Him and what He can accomplish.

Mark 9:23

And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes."

Immediately, the boy's father cried out: "I do believe; help my unbelief" (v. 24). This man's cry is a prayer for more faith. On the one hand, he said "I believe" because he had some idea who the Lord Jesus was. But on the other hand, he also said "help my unbelief" because he knew he had inadequate knowledge of the Lord and could not trust Him properly. He knew his faith was weak. So he cried out to the Lord to help him deepen the quality of his faith.

What this man saw in himself is also true in many of us – we believe, yet we know our belief is not wholehearted. We know something is lacking, and we too may cry out to the Lord for more faith, for a greater revelation of the truth, and for a deeper appreciation of who He is. When we have such a longing, the Holy Spirit can reveal to us more of the truth, more of who God the Father is, and more of who the Lord Jesus is. As we see more of the truth, we may be convicted of certain courses of action. Yet we find ourselves too weak to act on them. In such situations, we can pray to the Lord to strengthen us and enable us to fulfil His will, and He will encourage and help us to carry out those courses of action. This is an illustration of praying for more faith and how the Lord responds to the cry of our heart.

Let us look at another passage – Luke 22. After warning Simon Peter that Satan would be sifting him like wheat, the Lord Jesus told Peter that He was praying for him.

Luke 22:32

but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

The Lord Jesus prayed for the disciples, that their faith may not fail. Following the Lord's example, we too can pray for our own faith and for the faith of other believers. As we seek to live for the Lord in trying situations, we can cry out to Him to guide us, grant us wisdom and make clearer to us the path we should walk, and strengthen us to walk in it.

Our prayer life is very closely related to our faith. True prayer is placing our confidence in God, and believing that He hears us. As we spend time in prayer, we develop in our relationship with God and grow in our understanding of who He is and of the realities in the spiritual realm. As we grow in our knowledge of God, our

confidence in Him grows; so will our ability to walk in accordance with His ways. In this way, our faith grows.

Growing in faith

We see then that if we want to grow in faith, we must earnestly desire for it in our hearts, and we must diligently seek to understand and obey the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. It is important for us to spend time alone with God each day in prayer and in reading and pondering over the Scriptures. We must also gather regularly with the brethren for worship, prayer and fellowship, listening to the preaching of the word, learning together from the Scriptures and encouraging one another to live out the truth.

If we glance through the pages of church history and read biographies of great men of God, we will find two outstanding characteristics of such men. One is the way they love the Scriptures, the way they study it, meditate on it and assimilate it into their lives. The other is their prayer life. They recognise the importance of prayer and give priority to developing their prayer life. Likewise, if we want to grow in faith, we need to give priority to the Scriptures and to prayer.

Besides these, it is also important to rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to us and to enable us to act upon it. This is what Paul means when he tells us in Galatians 5:16 to walk by the Spirit. We are not able to meet the requirements of God in our own strength. We will find ourselves constantly failing and indulging in the desires of the flesh. That is why the Scriptures exhorts us to walk by the Spirit, that we may put to death the deeds of the body and not indulge in the desires of the flesh.

Since knowing the truth is important to a life of faith, some may think they need to have much knowledge of the truth before they can grow in faith. This is not true. For most of us, the starting point is not that of asking the Lord to reveal more truths to us, for we already have sufficient knowledge. Rather, it is to act upon what we already know.

Often, we fail to grow in greater understanding of the truth because we fail to act on what we already know. And if we neglect to live according to what we already know, if we are unwilling to submit ourselves to God, the Lord may not reveal more to us. We may hear the truths, but we fail to gain spiritual insight because the Spirit of God does not open up to us the riches in His truths. Hence it is important for us to act on what we already know. As we do so, we can earnestly look to God to reveal more. In this way, our faith will grow.

When we think of revelation of the truth, it is helpful to think of both its width and depth. We often think only of the width – learning new truths. But we should also seek to grow in depth – a richer grasp of truths which we already know, a deeper insight into their meaning, including their practical outworking and implications.

For example, we all know that God is love. But it is possible to appreciate God's love in ever deepening degrees. This is true also for the other attributes of God such as His sovereignty, omniscience, omnipotence and wisdom. We may know each of these attributes of God, but how deep is our grasp of their meaning and reality in our lives? As we look to the Lord, He can reveal to us deeper meanings of these attributes and how such knowledge can make a difference in the way we live our lives.

Life of faith and purity of heart

The quality of our faith is closely related to the purity of our heart. In the Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus tells us: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

As far as I am able to understand, there are two main elements in the issue of the purity of heart. One element has to do with our hearts being cleansed by the blood of Christ so that sin is no longer a barrier in our relationship with God and to His working in our lives. The other has to do with the whole direction of our lives, which must be towards truth, holiness, righteousness and purity. The pure in heart are those whose hearts have been cleansed, and who have set their hearts on what is of God, that which is holy, righteous, good and pure.

We can see these two aspects in Hebrews 12:1-2.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

On the one hand, there is purity of life – the laying aside of every encumbrance and the sin which entangles us. On the other hand, there is the direction – running the race, moving in the direction God desires us to, setting our eyes on the Lord Jesus.

A life of faith is a Christ-centred life, one lived in union with the Lord, and one in which we walk steadfastly, undistracted by temptations or hardships. As we set our heart to live such a life, the Lord Jesus will continue to perfect our faith and complete what He has begun in us.

After a whole chapter on faith in Hebrews 11, the writer continues to exhort his readers about living by faith in Hebrews 12. In verses 10-11, he tells us a life of faith includes the discipline of God.

Hebrews 12:10-11

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

God disciplines us for our good that we may share His holiness. Discipline is not pleasant, but it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. A life of righteousness and holiness is God's goal for us.

Life of faith and challenges and "risks"

A life of faith is not always plain sailing. It does, from time to time, involve challenges and "risks". Here, I am using "risk" the way people usually use it. They may anticipate dangers, or things going wrong, and they then become fearful for themselves or for others. To them, these are risks.

Take for example Daniel's three friends. In the face of tremendous pressure, they held fast to what they believed and refused to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar. They knew they were taking a great "risk", for Nebuchadnezzar had threatened to put them to death.

If we stand up for God, we may likewise have to go through trials and tribulations. But this is not risk in the ultimate sense because as we trust God, we will never suffer ultimate harm. All things will work together for good to those who love God. Even if we lay down our lives, it would be a glorious death. God appreciates this kind of faith and will richly reward those who walk with Him in this way. Out of such sufferings come blessings. The kingdom of God is built up through such lives.

We cannot cross a chasm with two small steps. It requires one big step. Likewise, in the life of faith, there are times when we have to take a big step. When we are at a crossroad, we may be fearful and uncertain. But if we are clear of the path God wants us to take, we have to be prepared to take that step, trusting God as we do so.

It was not easy for Abraham to go forth when God called him out of the land of Ur. He did not know what it all meant and where it would lead to. He had to take a giant step of faith. He could not step out just a little and then return home. He had to trust God all the way.

It was just as difficult for Noah when God called him to build the ark. Many of us read the account in a matter-of-fact way. But if we ponder on it, we will realise it was a huge undertaking of faith. The ark that Noah had to build was huge, large enough to take in all species of the animal kingdom. An ark as big as this would have taken Noah many months to build. And there were no indications of an impending flood that would cover the earth and destroy all flesh. All he had was the word of God. But that was sufficient for Noah to proceed in faith and build the ark. Most likely, as Noah worked on the ark, many people would be laughing and sneering at him for his folly. But Noah trusted God and kept on building the ark.

At times, we may be called to take a giant step of faith like this. Even before we start, we must be prepared to build the whole ark, as it were. It is no use building half an ark or a quarter or one tenth. There must be that wholehearted submission to the Lord to obey Him, even if it appears to others a risky venture or an act of folly.

However, it is helpful also to remember that where major issues are concerned, we need to be more cautious and prayerfully consider the whole matter before the Lord. It would also be good to discuss with the brethren and to seek counsel and prayer support from them.

There must be a sufficient basis before we move and it must be from God's perspective, how He desires us to act, and not according to natural thinking or how the people of the world expect us to act.

One who bases his actions on natural thinking may say to himself: I want concrete evidence that shows a big flood is coming. Show me scientific evidence that a thunderstorm is brewing, or the ice cap in the North Pole is melting, or something catastrophic is about to take place. If not, I don't have sufficient basis to build the ark. But this is not the sufficient basis we are talking about.

The sufficient basis I am referring to is our understanding of who God is, what He desires, and all that He has revealed to us in the Scriptures. In our understanding of where God is leading us towards, has He sufficiently shown us that this is the step we should take?

In other words, we are not rash when it comes to taking a big step and making a major decision. In fact, we should never be rash, and all the more so where major issues are concerned. Instead, we should be very cautious and very prayerful. In all honesty before God, as we pray and look to Him, has He made it sufficiently clear to us what we should be doing?

I use the expression "sufficiently clear" because in the things of God, there are at times unknown factors. For example, when God called Abraham to leave his homeland, Abraham did not know exactly what would happen in the days ahead. He did not and should not wait till God had revealed to him all that would happen in the future. In any case, the Lord might not reveal that much to him. But what God had revealed was sufficient, and Abraham acted on that basis.

In many major issues of life, there will be unknown factors. As responsible Christians, we need to be sufficiently clear that God is leading us. Once we are clear about it, we should be prepared to act as He leads. This is a mark of someone with quality faith.

For most of us, we do not have to face the kind of challenges that Noah and Abraham had to face. But as we learn to step out in faith in lesser issues, the Lord may lead us through more difficult situations, to issues of greater significance, where a more definite act of faith is needed.

Quality faith is stable, not easily tossed to and fro

Quality faith is one that is not easily tossed to and fro or dictated by circumstances or the realm of the visible.

We may go through situations that appear dark and dreary, discouraging and hopeless. But God is the unchanging, perfect God of glory; He is always faithful and reliable. No matter how dark situations may appear, He is still the God of light. In Him, we will find light and life, hope and grace. There will always be direction from above. He will not let us struggle through life alone. He always watches over those who desire to walk with Him.

A true life of faith transcends feelings and circumstances. It is based on knowledge and truth. We may not feel good. We may not feel God's presence. We may not even feel that we have faith. But we have already come to know who God is. We know that God is near to those who are faithful to Him. We know that He is with us as we walk with Him, and we know the Holy Spirit dwells within us. So, we do not respond according to our feelings or the outward circumstances. We act on the basis of knowledge, on the basis of truth. A life that is stable and of quality is one that is steadfastly lived out on the basis of truth. This is a point I cannot over emphasize. From time to time, we will be assailed in this area. Let us grasp this issue well and nurture this settled posture of living on the basis of truth. Otherwise, we will not be able to attain stability and, from time to time, our faith will be shaken and our life in turmoil.

Faith includes trusting and believing in what we do not see in the visible realm. As we walk faithfully in this way, God may let us see His hand at work. As we trust Him, we know that we will not be acting in vain. Positive results will follow. Sometimes we see partial results, sometimes we see more. When we are clear about the path God desires us to take, we must persevere in it whatever the outward appearance of things.

An example of such a situation is what Abraham went through, which Paul refers to in Romans 4:19-21.

Romans 4:19-21

19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Abraham contemplated his own body. He was advanced in years. His body was as good as dead; so too was Sarah's womb. Humanly speaking, it was a hopeless situation. How could they possibly have a child of their own? Yet, Abraham did not waiver with respect to the promise of God. Instead, he grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, believing that God would do what He had promised. Abraham's faith did not rest on natural thinking or on what he could see with his natural eyes. It rested on the promise of the unchanging, faithful God. And as events turned out, Abraham did have a child with Sarah. Isaac was born.

As we walk in faith with God, we may not see the fruit or the consequence of our actions immediately. There will also be many things that we do not fully appreciate or see now. The full results may only be revealed in eternity. While on earth, we must trust God and continue to do what is right in His sight.

Concluding remarks

Quality faith is not accidental; it does not just come upon us. It does not depend on how intelligent we are. It also does not depend on how hard we believe or how willing we are to take risks. These are not at the heart of true faith.

True faith, ultimately, is a moral issue. It has to do with our love for truth and righteousness and our positive response to God and what He is seeking to bring about in our lives. These are the critical issues.

It is feasible for us to live a life of faith. God desires us to live a godly life and He has made all the provisions for us to do so (2 Pet. 1:3). God takes the initiative to reveal the truth to us and draw us to Himself. He also works in our hearts and encourages us to respond positively. But He does not compel us. Our response of faith has to be voluntary. And the quality of our response will determine how well we grow in faith. Ultimately, positive response to God is what differentiates the man who grows well in the Lord from the one who does not.

There are other factors that affect the life of faith, such as learning and growing in the context of healthy church life. However, at the very heart of it, the life of faith has to do with the person's desire and determination to live out the truth and walk in the light. May we, by the grace of God, strive to live such a life.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Some people say:
 - a. Faith is something you either have or do not have. There is nothing you can do about it.
 - b. Faith is a "gift of God". You just have to wait for God to give it to you.

Share your thoughts on these views.

2. Reflect on Philippians 2:12. How does this verse help us understand our part and God's part with regard to our growing in faith? What other scriptural passages can you think of that speak on this subject?
3. Some people say they just want a "simple faith". In what sense is this attitude positive and in what sense negative?
4. Share your appreciation of the role of (a) the Lord Jesus Christ (b) the Holy Spirit (c) the Scriptures, in nurturing our faith.
5. "A life that is stable and of quality is one that is steadfastly lived out on the basis of truth". Which biblical characters exemplify this quality? Elaborate.
6. From this message, summarise the key elements of a faith that is stable and of quality.
7. Reflect on your own life and consider what may be deficient in your faith. What steps can you take to nurture your faith?

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