

HOME BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Things That Challenge Our Faith

- 1 -- To Believe the Promises of God**
- 2 -- To Believe Without Seeing**
- 3 -- To Believe When Others Disbelieve**
- 4 -- To Believe Even When Sin is Alluring**
- 5 -- To Believe in the Face of Persecution**
- 6 -- To Believe Unto Victory**

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Lesson One

CHALLENGE....."To Believe the Promises of God!"

Do you believe that God will carry out His promises? It is easy to say "yes" to this question! But why does God have to struggle so hard in His word to convince us to believe His promises? And whether we like to admit it or not, we do struggle at times to face this test of our faith. It is one thing to DESIRE what is promised and quite another to show we believe by our obedient life. Have you noticed God's efforts in the Scriptures to convince us that He will carry out His promises? The following are just a few that could be given:

Hebrews 10:23 _____

Hebrews 10:35-36 _____

Hebrews 6:18 _____

Hebrews 3:18-4:1 _____

Israel's Struggle to Believe!

Israel wanted to go into the Promised Land, but they became fearful and unbelieving! They failed the test! Another generation came on that did believe God's promises.

But the Nation of Israel missed out on believing one of the greatest promises of all—the coming of the Messiah (Savior, Redeemer). This promise from God was given first to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:15 _____

The promise was next given to Abraham.

Gen. 12:3; 22:18 _____

It was next given to King David.

2 Sam. 7:12-13 _____

It was continually repeated through the Old Testament Prophets....the most obvious being Isaiah 53:1-12.

The New Testament opens up with the preaching of John, the forerunner of the Redeemer, and John identified Him as the Messiah.

John 1:29 _____

If believing the promises of God is so easy to do, then why did Israel reject Jesus in spite of so many efforts to foretell of His coming in the Old Testament?

There were many, many other promises of God to the Israelite Nation—some of which they believed and some they did not and suffered the consequences!

Leviticus 26:17-18 _____

Leviticus 26:33 _____

The Israelite Nation was cut off from being acceptable to God because they would not believe the promises of God.

Romans 10:1-3 _____

Romans 11:20-22 _____

The Value of the Old Testament Promises for us today!

If we are wise, we will profit by their mistakes! God not only had these promises written down for their benefit, but for ours as well.

1 Cor. 10:11 _____

Rom. 15:4 _____

The Real Issue for us today

If Israel had such a hard time believing, is it possible that we are having the same struggles? If they were cut off because of unbelief, will we not also be cut off for our unbelief of the promises of God?

Rom. 11:22 _____

God's Promises to us today!

Acts 2:38 _____

Eph. 1:3 _____

Rom. 8:28 _____

Matt. 6:33 _____

1 Cor. 10:13 _____

John 14:1-3 _____

1 John 5:13 _____

John 5:28-29 _____

2 Pet. 3:13 _____

We dare not be among the scoffers or unbelievers of the promises of God.

2 Pet. 3:1-4 _____

Special Thought to explore!

Will God carry out His promises concerning our petitions to Him?

1 John 3:22 _____

James 1:5-6 _____

John 17:20-21 _____

Was Jesus' prayer for those who would believe on Him answered by God? He prayed that they may all be one like He and the Father are one—are we?

Special Question to deal with!

**Are the promises of God conditional? ___Yes; ___No
If Yes; then, what are some of the conditions?** _____

We have a challenge—to believe in the Promises of God! If God cannot lie, then why don't we believe? What are the things that hinder us from believing? _____

Lesson Two

CHALLENGE....."To Believe Without Seeing!"

True, sincere belief **must** be a challenge...because so much emphasis has been placed in Scripture on believing! This is seen in both Old and New Testament Scriptures. It is easily illustrated by the Apostles of Jesus.

- a) They were chosen by Jesus;
- b) They saw Him perform miracles;
- c) They heard the voice of God from Heaven giving recognition to Jesus as the Son of God;
- d) etc.;

And yet, they still had trouble with belief! Jesus even rebuked them for their faith being so weak—**"O you of little faith!"** (Matt. 8:26). Judas, after being with Jesus for over three years, betrayed Him to the religious leaders of the Jews. And Peter denied Him three times with an oath. And even all of the disciples forsook Him when He was taken in the Garden. So, why is it such a challenge to believe—even when you are there on the spot and witness such things?

The Christian Walk is one of Faith and not Sight! (2 Cor. 5:7)

What is meant by this expression? Does this mean that one's faith is merely a "leap in the dark" or "a blind faith?" Why do we constantly hear the expression: **"Seeing is Believing?"** Does a person have to see something in order to believe it? How was the Apostle using this expression in 2 Cor. 5:7?

We need to go to the context in order to correctly understand how this expression is used. The Apostle is talking about the hope of the Christian after this life is over (2 Cor. 5:1). He infers that there is going to be a resurrection of the body, that has gone into the grave. Our spirit was "housed" in that body while living on earth. At death, the spirit left the body (Jas. 2:26). In the resurrection, they will be re-united. But the old body will be changed into a new

"spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44). This new body is no longer "mortal" but "immortal." (1 Cor. 15:54).

Now, to the real issue....how did the Apostle "**know**" that all of the above would happen? He could not have known it by "sight" for he had not seen such! But he could know it by "faith" because God said so! He was fully assured or certain of this great "FACT!" Faith has the ability to make the unseen, real! ***"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*** (Heb. 11:1).

"Seeing is Believing!"

Let's go back to the above statement and examine it further also. Is there a value to seeing things in respect to faith? We need to go to the conversation Jesus had with Thomas (John 20:24-31). After Jesus' resurrection He appeared to the Apostles (with the exception of Thomas). When they later told Thomas that Jesus was resurrected and that they had seen Him, Thomas said that he would only believe if he could see Him, himself. For some reason, he did not believe their word. About a week later, Jesus appeared to the Apostles and confronted Thomas about his lack of faith. He told him to see his nailed-scared hands and to put his hand into his side and then added: ***"Do not be unbelieving, but believing!"*** Thomas then openly stated: ***"My Lord and my God!"*** Seeing helped Thomas to believe. Then, Jesus added: ***"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*** Again, Jesus is not advocating "blind faith," but faith based on evidences. The last two verses of this reading make this clear. The miracles that Jesus performed were evidences sufficient to help people believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God. There is a value in "seeing" but such does not automatically bring faith. Many of the Jewish people saw these miracles but did not believe!

"Sight" versus "Faith"

When "sight" is contrasted to "faith," it is different from the idea of "Seeing is believing." It is like comparing "light" to "darkness," or "the enlightened" as compared to "the unenlightened." (John 3:19-21). It is to walk after the "wisdom of men" rather than the "wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:19-21; 2:4-8). It is to walk after the "philosophy, empty deceit, the tradition of men, and the basic principles of the world" (Col. 2:8) rather than after Christ who is *"the way, the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6).

To walk by "sight" is to walk by what the world advocates, by the approval or esteem of men, or under the influence and persuasion of things seen and temporal. It is to make our judgments, decisions, and to determine our actions on the basis of what the world says or offers.

To walk by "faith" is to walk as God directs us in His Word (2 John 9) or to walk by the "wisdom" of God (1 Cor. 2:5). It is to "see" and to "know" the "unseen" as though they were actually seen with our physical eye—we are just that sure of their existence!

Why "Sight" Challenges our "Faith!"

Three things stand out in my mind as to why "sight" is a challenge to our "faith!"

1. The Majority verses the Minority! (Matt. 7:13-14). The majority is going the broad way, but the minority is traveling the narrow or difficult way. Numbers play a big role in why people follow or walk a certain way (John 5:44). However, Jesus points out that those who follow the majority go the way of destruction, but those who follow the few leads to everlasting life. We need to follow the way of "faith!"

2. The Pride and egotism of men. (1 John 2:16). Pride has been a problem with mankind from the very beginning. Eve gave in to the temptation of pride (Gen. 3:5-6). Satan fell because of pride (1 Tim. 3:6). James and Peter both warn of the dangers of pride (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). If a man truly believed in God, he would not "pit" his "wisdom" against the wisdom of God! Such would be very foolish! (Prov. 3:5). And yet, it is done all the time! Man is warned: ***"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil."*** (Prov. 3:7). We need to walk the way of "faith" not the way of pride and arrogance!

3. Deception. (Heb. 3:12-13). Eve was deceived by Satan's lies (1 Tim. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3). Satan works through his "ministers" that pose as "ministers of righteousness!" (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Their purpose is to deceive! We are warned about the "deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22). We are warned not to let others deceive us with empty words (Eph. 5:6). We are also warned of the danger of "self-deception" (1 Cor. 3:18). Any of us can be deceived if we are not very careful and concerned about walking the way of "faith" rather than "sight!"

Concluding Thoughts!

Jesus indicated that the first and great command is to: ***"love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*** (Matt. 22:37). It would seem most appropriate to me to suggest that we need to **believe** in God with our whole being also! The evidences are there to help us to believe in God. And if God is God, then we certainly ought to believe in what He says! Our walk is a walk of faith, not a walk according to the course or principles of this world. May we allow God to increase our faith by dwelling on the Word of God that gives up and strengthens our faith (Rom. 10:17; Acts 20:32).

Lesson Three

CHALLENGE....."To Believe When Others Disbelieve"

In this lesson we are looking at people who say that they believe in God, in Jesus as the Christ, and in the Bible as the Word of God. And yet, in spite of the above, when the test comes, they really do not believe! It is amazing how people like this can affect the faith of others!

Let's go back to the time of Joshua and Caleb. There were twelve spies sent into the land of Canaan to spy out the land. The ten spies were not considered unbelievers in the sense of being idolatrous, but believers in the one true God. And yet, God condemned them because of their **unbelief**. (Heb. 3:18-19). And the unbelief of the ten seems to have affected the faith of the nation of Israel that resulted in their not being allowed to go in to possess Canaan. It took a new generation to come that did believe to go in and possess the Promised Land.

Believing, when those close to us do not believe!

Jesus foretold of this danger in describing the overthrow of the city of Jerusalem.

Luke 21:16 _____

During His public ministry He also stated that family and friends would be a problem for believers.

Matt. 19:29 _____

Matt. 10:34-36 _____

Matt. 10:37 _____

Matt. 10:21 _____

Even some of Jesus' family did not believe in Him at first.

John 7:3-5 _____

Examples of Unbelief in Families

1. Cain killed his brother because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12).
2. Josephus' brothers sold him into Egypt because their hearts were evil towards their brother (Gen. 50:18-21).
3. Eli, the High Priest, honored his sons above God (1 Sam. 2:27-36).

It is significant to notice that unbelief on the part of family members can often affect other members of the family in various ways. It often leads to unbelief and rebellion as well. Stephen pointed this out in his sermon recorded in Acts 7:51. In some instances, family members can look upon other members as being dead as far as they are concerned. They disown and even disinherit their children because they no longer hold to the false teachings of the parents.

Even close friends or people at work can put such pressure on the one who believes that they began to compromise their belief of the Word of God. Jesus warns us: ***"You are my friends if you do whatever I command you."*** (John 15:14). It becomes a matter of choice as to whom we will believe and follow! Jesus made it clear that we must love Him more than parents, relatives, friends, companions, etc., or we cannot be His disciple. You are fortunate if you have not had to face up to this choice in your life as a child of God.

Believing in an Unbelieving World!

Put yourself in the place of one of the Apostles of Christ. You are a part of a handful of people who believed in Jesus as being the Savior of the world. You are given the job of taking this message to the world—a world that is full of unbelief in the one true God, much less belief in Jesus as God's Son. How would you feel? How do you think they felt? These few disciples had to believe in the one true God and in His Son—and that it was necessary for the world to believe the same. But, their message was also that the world had to obey the Son in order to be saved eternally. Would you, as a part of this small group of believers, go forth and teach this message? Or, would you have been overwhelmed by the pressures of the world about you and be persuaded to compromise your teaching? But the real question should be—"*What are we doing about preaching and teaching this message to our world today?*" Are we allowing the pressures of an unbelieving world about us to stop us from trying to teach others or to cause us to compromise our message?

Examples that are well-known in the Bible!

1. Noah did not hesitate to preach salvation from a world-wide flood to the unbelieving world of his day—in which only 8 souls were saved (1 Pet. 3:18-21; 2 Pet. 2:5).
2. 7,000 people who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel did not bow the knee to Baal, but continued to believe in the one true God of Heaven—even when the rest of the people did give in to Idolatry (1 Kings 19:18).

It is amazing how many people give in to the pressures of the majority. Have we given in? Have we bowed the knee to Baal (majority, money, power, etc.)?

Believing when Religious Leaders Fall!

When you hear of an elder, deacon, teacher, or a preacher that begins to compromise their teaching or who actually falls away from Christ, how does it affect you? Is your faith made stronger or weaker? Do you begin to question what you have been taught by these persons? During the public ministry of Jesus, He showed the religious leaders up for what they were (Matt. 23:1-39). They not only opposed Jesus every step of the way, but refused to believe in Him even when He performed outstanding miracles before their very eyes. What affect did Jesus' efforts have in causing the people to turn from those hypocritical leaders to the truth of God? Only a few turned, in reality!

Warnings against being misled by such leaders!

The dangers were real! Jesus warned during His public ministry about such dangers (Matt. 7:15) and the Apostles warned in their letters to Christians (Acts 20:28-32; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-5, etc.) about these dangers.

But what if you have a high regard for such leaders who began teaching a compromised gospel? Will you continue to follow their leadership or attempt to correct the situation? Will you be persuaded to compromise or even to fall away because of their example?

We have had two outstanding young men in this general area who have fallen into sin. We can allow this to affect us in a negative way or challenge us to wake up and be more attentive to what we teach and practice.

Our faith in God will be challenged in one way or another all of our lives! We need to constantly be on our guard and be sure that our faith stays strong in our Savior!

Lesson Four

CHALLENGE....."To Believe even when Sin is Alluring!"

The simple definition of "Sin" is: "*A Missing of the Mark!*" But what is the mark? The mark has to be perfection! (Matt. 5:48). It is to be like God, Himself. But in order to get a better understanding of sin, the Bible uses quite a number of words to identify sin. The following may not be a complete list of terms used—but most of them:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Iniquities—Isa. 59:2 | 2. Lawlessness—1 Jn. 3:4 |
| 3. Transgression—2 Jn. 9 | 4. Wickedness—Rom.1:29 |
| 5. Unrighteousness—Rom. 1:18 | 6. Ungodliness—Rom. 1:18 |
| 7. Perversion—Phil. 2:15 | 8. Rebellion—1 Sam. 15:23 |
| 9. Wrong—Acts 18:14 | 10. Disobedience—Rom. 10:21 |
| 11. Evil—Matt. 12:34 | 12. Injustice—Job 16:17 |

Man's disobedience can take two directions:

1. He can go contrary to what God commands; or
2. He can omit to do what God commands.

The outcome of man's sin is a breaking of the relationship with his fellow-man, but more importantly, with the God who created him. It can also bring guilt feelings of wrong doing in the consciousness of the person who sinned.

What Causes Man to Sin?

Man is basically a creature of motivation! We do what we are motivated to do, generally speaking. What are the motivations that would cause us to sin—disobey God?

1. We seem to have built in "inner drives," "passions," "likes," and "dislikes." Some call these things...."needs." If we were like the lower animals, we would satisfy these needs, drives, likes, etc., in any way we could—regardless of its effect on other animals about us. But we are not animals! Therefore we are obligated to so act

and satisfy our needs in a way that does not harm others (Phil. 2:3-4). When we harm or hurt others, we sin! Therefore, when we do not love our neighbor as ourselves (Rom. 13:8-10), we sin!

2. We are also motivated by the fear of pain, hurt, sorrow, unhappiness, punishment, etc. We will do things that we may not really want to do, but do them to avoid these things that are undesirable. This is the reason why the threat of punishment for sin can be effective in helping or motivating us to avoid disobedience to God (Matt. 25:41, 46).

3. In a similar way, we are also motivated by the promise of reward of something desirable, enjoyable, or useful. God tries to motivate us not to sin by offering to us spiritual blessings in this life, and eternal life with Him after this life is over (Matt. 19:29).

Sin has to make an appeal to us in some way to cause us to want to do wrong. If sin had nothing to offer us, who would be interested in participating in sin?

Promptings to Sin!

If we know and understand the above thoughts, then why do we disobey God? We know that the consequence of sin is death (separation from God) (Rom. 6:23). Yet, we still sin! What are the things that prompt us or tempt us to do wrong?

1. We are encouraged to doubt the existence of God; or, at least to doubt the rightness of His Law. This was the temptation that Mother Eve gave into (Gen. 3:3-4).
2. Deception is another avenue of prompting to sin. We allow ourselves to be misled in what we believe and do (Heb. 3:13).

3. We are prompted to sin in order to fulfill a need, desire, or passion. Mother Eve saw the fruit that it was good for food and a delight to the eyes, so she took and ate of it. James states that a person ***"is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."*** (James 1:14). We usually do some rationalization to try to justify our wrong actions; but God says it is sin.

4. We often engage in sinful activities because we want to, knowing that God condemns it; yet, we presume that God will overlook or forgive our wrong actions. This is a very dangerous road to travel. Such actions are strongly condemned in Scripture (Num. 15:30; Ps. 19:13; Deut. 18:22; 2 Pet. 2:10).

5. We sin sometimes out of ignorance (Lev. 5:17-19).

Jesus states that all kinds of sins come out of the heart (Matt. 15:19). This is the reason for the admonition by the wise man in Prov. 4:23: ***"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."***

What Does Sin Have to Offer?

Sin has to be desirable, alluring, compelling—offering us an enticement to go in the paths of unrighteousness. There are four things that stand out in Scripture that sin offers that should be obvious to us all.

1. **Pleasures.** (Heb. 11:25; Luke 8:14). Something that we can enjoy, something that satisfies the desires of one's heart.
2. **Riches.** (1 Tim. 6:10-17; Luke 8:14). The rich young Ruler illustrates the stranglehold that riches can have on a person (Luke 18:18-24).

3. **Popularity.** (Matt. 23:1-7; Acts 12:3; Rom. 15:1-3; Gal. 1:10). If we please men, we can escape peer pressure. If we are liked by others we will be accepted by the group.
4. **Power.** (3 John 9-10; Matt. 4:8-10). The temptation to Mother Eve was you will be as God. Men want power over others—to control the lives of others. The world has been full of such people from the beginning of man's existence.

The Power of Choice!

While Satan can tempt us to sin, he cannot force us to sin! The reason is obvious—we have the **Power** of choice! This is what separates us from the lower forms of life. This is what makes man to be man! But along with the power of choice comes the responsibility to make wise decisions. God has given us the power to choose between:

1. Traveling the Broad Way (Easy) or the Narrow Way (Hard) (Matt. 7:13-14).
2. Being a Servant of Sin or a Servant of Righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).
3. Believing and obeying God or disbelieving and disobeying God (James 2:24).
4. Opening our hearts to God or closing them to God (Matt. 13:13-16).
5. Heaven or Hell (Matt. 25:46).

Concluding Thoughts

Do we understand why man sins? Do we understand why we sin? Do we know the solution to man's sin problem? Are we willing to do something about it? ***"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*** (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Lesson Five

CHALLENGE....."To Believe in the Face of Persecution"

Persecution became a real challenge to the faith of the early Christians! Persecution began early in Christianity's existence and continued aggressively off and on for the next 250 plus years until about the year of 312 AD. Persecution was either a sporadic or an organized effort on the part of unbelievers to suppress or to exterminate Christianity. At first, they may have used social pressures, but when this failed, they would turn to violence—physical hurt or harm.

Persecution by the Unbelieving Jews and Romans

1. The Sanhedrin's actions against Peter and John for preaching the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:1-3, ff).
2. A second persecution got underway among the Jewish unbelievers in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4).
3. Organized Roman persecution was led by Nero in the 60's, but it did not last very long.
4. History records at least 10 severe persecutions by the Romans as follows:
 - a) Nero—AD 64
 - b) Domitian—AD 95
 - c) Trajan—AD 100
 - d) Antoninus Pius—AD 161-180
 - e) Septimius Severus—AD 197
 - f) Maximinus—AD 235
 - g) Decius—AD 249
 - h) Valerian—AD 257
 - i) Aurelian—AD 274
 - j) Diocletian—AD 303

Efforts were made to exterminate Christianity, destroy their literature, and demolish church buildings. Constantine ordered an end of persecution of Christians in AD 313.

Persecution of the Righteousness was nothing New!

Persecution was not something new to the early Christians. The Old Testament is filled with stories of persecution of those who believed and tried to live righteous.

1. Cain killed his brother Abel because Abel was righteous (1 John 3:12).
2. The Egyptians made slaves out of Israel (Exo. 1:8-14).
3. Most of the Prophets were persecuted and many killed by their own Jewish people. (Heb. 11:35-40).

Jesus' Teachings on Persecution

Jesus knew what to expect from unbelievers. He wanted to prepare, not only His close Apostles, but all of His followers for the persecution that would come.

1. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10-12).
2. In His fervent prayer for His disciples (John 17:14-16).
3. He foretold what the Jewish unbelievers would do to His followers (Matt. 23:33-39).
4. He told His close disciples what to expect when they go out to preach the Gospel (Matt. 24:9-13).

The inspired Letters of Paul and Peter on Persecution

These letters are filled with warnings of persecution to come, as well as, how to conduct one's self in the midst of such. They also give assurance to the believer who is faithful in the midst of persecution of their heavenly reward.

1. Persecution is coming:

- a) Paul told the Thessalonian Church that they would suffer persecution (1 Thess. 3:2-4).
- b) It was generally understood that all who desire to live godly will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

2. Persecution came:

- a) Paul's suffering is given several times (2 Cor. 6:4-10; 1 Thess. 2:1-2, 14-15; 2 Tim. 3:10-14).

- b) The Thessalonians suffered much affliction because they received the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:6).
- c) The Hebrew Christians suffered (Heb. 10:32-36).
- d) Those to whom Peter wrote had suffered (1 Pet. 3:13-14).

3. How to deal with Persecution:

- a) Get your mind ready for it (1 Peter 4:1).
- b) Commit your soul to God in doing good (1 Pet. 4:19).
- c) Be willing to risk your physical life (Rom. 16:3-4).
- d) Take pleasure or rejoice in it (2 Cor. 12:10).
- e) Be prepared for a battle (Eph. 6:11-13).
- f) Live blameless and harmless lives, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:15-16).
- g) Do not return evil for evil (1 Thess. 5:15).
- h) Endure with patience and faith (2 Thess. 1:4).
- i) Look at the example of Jesus (Heb. 12:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:21).

4. The Rewards offered for suffering Christians:

- a) We become more than conquerors (Rom. 8:35-37).
- b) Have a strong trust in God (2 Cor. 1:8-10).
- c) Realize that we are manifesting the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:8-11).
- d) Realize that our light affliction is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17-18).
- e) We will be commending of God (1 Pet. 2:19-20).
- f) We shame those who evil (1 Pet. 3:14-16).
- g) We glorify God and will be glorified by God (1 Pet. 4:13-14).
- h) Helps us to realize the importance of serving God rather than the flesh (1 Pet. 4:1-2).
- i) The faithful have a promise of eternal life (Rev. 2:10).

Why is Persecution a Challenge to our Faith?

How does persecution become a threat to our faith in God? There are several things that can be suggested:

1. Peter refers to it as a testing by fire (1 Pet. 1:7). It is a means of testing our faith to see if it can stand up under pain, sorrow, suffering, or even death.
2. There is obviously a danger that we will compromise our faith to avoid pain, suffering, loss, or death. Fear enters into the picture (1 Pet. 3:14).
3. People do not like to be reproached or defamed for what they believe or the way they live. Christians have to deal with this same dislike (1 Pet. 3:16; 4:14).
4. There is the danger that Christians will stop preaching Christ so they will not be persecuted, rather than being prepared to give a reason for their hope (1 Pet. 3:15).
5. No one likes to be treated unjustly. Christians are no different! There is a tendency to react to unjust treatment which would hinder the spread of the Gospel (Phil. 2:14-16).

Concluding Thoughts

Have you had to suffer because of your faith in Christ? If it was called for, would you be willing to suffer loss for His Name sake? Would we be willing to give up our lives for the benefit of His kingdom? Is Christianity worth suffering for? Are you fortifying your faith for the day when you may have to suffer persecution? Can you count it a blessing to suffer for Christ and rejoice and be exceedingly glad about it?

Lesson Six

CHALLENGE....."To Believe Unto Victory"

The Apostle John tells us how the victory is won in Christ Jesus! Look at his thoughts as he develops them in 1 John 5:1-5:

- a) The one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.
- b) The one who keeps God's commands:
 - ◇ Shows he loves God;
 - ◇ Realizes His commands are not burdensome.
- c) The one who is born of God:
 - ◇ Overcomes the world;
 - ◇ Our faith overcomes the world;
- d) The Conclusion: We win the victory because:
 - ◇ We believe in Jesus;
 - ◇ We are born of God;
 - ◇ We love God and show it by our obedient faith;
 - ◇ We overcome the world.

It is our "faith" that assures us of the victory in Christ! A friend of our family, when dying, used his last breath to whisper—**"Victory!"** In the Apostle Paul's last writings, he was looking for a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6-8). The Apostle quotes from the Old Testament (Hab. 2:4) when he writes: ***"The Righteous man shall live by faith."*** (Rom. 1:17). It is the Just or Righteous person that will gain the victory by faith!

The statement is clear, but we need to be sure we understand what is meant by the expression "faith!" Because of so much **mis**-understanding and **mis**-teaching about this word, our lesson will try to make its meaning clear!

This Faith is an "obedient" faith!

Everyone knows John 3:16 where it emphasizes that a person will not perish but have everlasting life if He believes in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Verse 36 of John 3 makes it clear what is meant by the word "faith." ***"He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*** (American Standard Version). Thus, the faith that saves and gives us the victory is a faith that obeys. Jesus made this very clear when He said: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."*** (Matt. 7:21). James deals with this issue in detail in James 2:17-26. He shows that faith alone is a "dead" faith and is worthless. It is the obedient faith that is the "perfected" faith that justifies. Our faith is made known by our actions.

This Faith is a Watchful Faith!

There is a continual emphasis to the disciple of Jesus to be "watchful!"

1 Cor. 16:13 _____

Matt. 26:41 _____

1 Thess. 5:6 _____

2 Tim. 4:5 _____

Just as sure as we go to "sleep" on our job as a Christian, Satan will find a way to ensnare us. But it is not just for our own soul, but the souls of others that we need to be faithful watchmen (Ezek. 3:17-21). Elders, in particular, are said to be watchmen for the souls of those who are in their charge (Heb. 13:17). We need to be sure and certain that our faith is based on what God says rather than what men may teach. False teachers abound all around us and they are seeking to deceive the unconcerned and unlearned. We need to awake out of sleep (Rom. 13:11) and awake unto

righteousness (1 Cor. 15:34).

This Faith is a Trusting Faith!

Why do people not heed the warnings from God? Is it because they do not "trust" the One who is doing the warning? Jesus warned the Jewish Nation of the coming destruction, but they did not trust Him (Matt. 23:37-39; Matt. 24:1-34). God gives us sufficient warnings....will we trust Him.

Peter is an example of the need for trust in what God tells us. He and others with him had fished all night and caught nothing. He had given up. Jesus came and told them to cast their nets in a certain place. Peter was a professional fisherman, but Jesus was a "mere" carpenter?? Why should he trust Jesus? But Jesus was more than a carpenter; He was the Christ, the Son of God. Listen to the words of Peter: ***"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."*** (Lk. 5:1-11). Do we have the kind of faith and trust the warnings and promises of God and act on such?

This Faith Surrenders All to Jesus!

A humorist, Artemus Ward, "playfully" boasted during the Civil War": *"I have already given two cousins to the war, and I stand ready to sacrifice my wife's brother."* This is the kind of "dead" faith that many so-called Christians may have—the kind that is willing to do anywhere or do anything for Jesus as long as it requires no expense or sacrifice! One man observed: *"Men will wrangle for religion; write for it; fight for it; anything but live for it."* James states that it is not the hearers of the word, but the doers that are acceptable to God (James 1:22-25).

We sing a song sometimes that helps to emphasize the need for total surrender to Jesus. It is expressed in three steps:

- 1) All of self and none of thee!
- 2) Some of self and some of thee!
- 3) None of self and all of thee!

Jesus does not want partial surrender, but full surrender.

Luke 9:23-24 _____

Phil. 3:7-8 _____

Gal. 2:20 _____

We need a faith that is willing to *"die to self in order to live for Jesus!"* It is offering our lives as *"a living sacrifice"* unto Him (Rom. 12:1-2). Can we say with an honest heart: *"Take my life and let it be wholly consecrated unto Thee?"*

Concluding Thoughts

Faith is important! All who are saved—from Adam to the last man on earth—will be saved by this kind of faith:

1. One that is obedient;
2. One that is watchful;
3. One that is trusting;
4. One that fully surrenders!

This is a genuine faith that brings salvation to our soul, glorifies the God of heaven, and is referred to in Scripture as *"like precious faith!"* This is the kind of faith that John was speaking about when he states by inspiration: *"this is the victory that overcomes the world; even our faith!"*

