

## **A Lack of Contentment May Point to a Lack of Faith**

Jesus said, “Unless a man is born again, he will not see the Kingdom of Heaven” (John 3:3). Put another way, if a man is never born again, he will spend eternity in hell. When a man is born again, his life is forever changed. This new birth produces new life that is completely different from the life prior to the new birth. The new birth actually marks the beginning of one’s eternal life. The life of Jesus is imparted to the individual when he is born again. He begins to share the characteristics of Jesus’ holy life. The pleasures of sin begin to hold less sway and he begins to value the things that please God. From this point on, God works to transform him into the image of Jesus.

If a person has not experienced this new birth, he is dead spiritually and does not possess faith. But the new birth makes people who were spiritually dead come alive and they immediately begin relating to God by faith. (See Ephesians 2:1-4.) At this point, God declares them justified (not guilty) in His sight. For the sake of discussion, I will call these people (those who are born again and now relate to God by faith) “the justified.” The Bible says that the “justified” walk by faith. (See Romans 1:17.) This conveys a continuous way of living rather than a mere decision to adopt a certain belief system.

The main thrust of this article is to show that when a person walks by faith, he will have peace and contentment. Conversely, if a person’s life lacks peace and contentment, it may mean that he does not possess saving faith. In other words, he may think he possesses faith but in reality, he may be deceived. His “faith” may actually be mere head-knowledge of truth expressed in the Apostles’ Creed[1]. Mere head-knowledge of God’s truth cannot save. A man must believe “from the heart” in order to be saved. (See Romans 10:9-10.) When a man is believing “from the heart,” his life contains fruit of that faith. This fruit includes peace and contentment. Therefore, if peace and contentment is lacking, there is reason to be concerned about where we will spend eternity. Because all true Christians are extremely concerned about where they will spend eternity, it behooves us to examine our lives to verify if there is peace and contentment that accompanies believing from the heart. We will begin by examining what it means to “believe from the heart.”

### **Biblical faith (believing from the heart) is aggressive and always produces peace and contentment!**

The New Testament writers use earthly analogies to convey the nature of biblical faith. Paul said it is like running a race in a way that you end up being the winner. He said that it is like being a soldier who has resigned ownership of his life to the one who enlisted him. (See II Timothy 2:3-5.) He said that God has given us spiritual weapons that we must use in battling the forces of darkness. (See Ephesians 6:10ff.) Unfortunately, many people today think that if they go to church as mere spectators and hold to sound decrees, they are Christians and the reality of their faith should not be questioned.

Genuine faith affects every aspect of life, not merely how we spend our time on Sunday mornings. Genuine faith always looks to God as the Provider, Shepherd, King, Master, Comforter, etc. In other words, it affects how we live every moment of every day. Genuine faith produces a great concern about our soul. How we relate to God as Provider, Shepherd, King, Master, etc. is extremely important to us because we do not want to hear on that Day, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.” (See Matthew 7:23.) Only as we relate to Him as our Provider, Shepherd, King, Master, etc. can we be assured that we are relating to Him rightly. Paul expresses the seriousness of this by saying, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” (See Philippians 2:12.)

Do you rely upon God as your provider? Or do you rely upon your own ability to provide? This is a very important question. The answer determines whether you will end up in heaven or hell. If you do a word search on the word “wait,” you will see that the Bible instructs us often to “wait upon the Lord.” It is a posture of faith that looks to God as our provider and as Sovereign Lord. It is an act of submission that goes along with the expression, “Thy

will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Psalm 37:9 says that those who wait upon the Lord will inherit the earth. Waiting may sound like a passive activity but not this type of waiting. It is the opposite of passive. It is aggressive because to wait upon the Lord is usually very uncomfortable to the flesh.

We observe in the life of Esau an absence of faith. He came in from hunting one day and smelled a red stew that Jacob had made. He asked for some. Instead of giving it at Esau’s request, Jacob asked Esau to sell him his birthright in exchange for the stew. Esau, because he was feeling hungry and uncomfortable, agreed to the deal. What would you or I do in this same situation? Would we let our physical hunger rule or would we stop and consider what God would have us do? According to the writer of Hebrews, this act of Esau was a godless act. It was a display of unbelief. (See Hebrews 12: 16.) Evidently, Esau did not consider what God might want him to do. He made up his mind independently as if he was Lord over his own life. This suggests that every decision we make should be made in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It recognizes that we are not the boss of our own lives and that we must look to God as our provider and be satisfied with how and what He provides.

To be in relationship with God, we must relate to Him as He truly is in reality. He is the Sovereign Lord who is our Provider. If in our hearts we do not depend on Him as the real source of all that we need, we are not relating to the True and Living God. Rather, we are relating to a god that we have made up in our own minds. That god is afar off and expects us to provide for ourselves. This is the false view of deism that smears the image of God and changes Him into something that He is not. To all who relate to Him this way throughout their lives, He will one day say, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

True believers rely upon God as if He really is their provider and that He truly cares about every single thing we need. True believers do not trust their own ability to provide. They trust that God knows exactly what to provide and when. The Bible says, “Trust in the Lord with all your hearts and lean not on your own understanding.” It says, “In all your ways, acknowledge God and He will direct your paths.” (See Proverbs 3:5-6.) This reflects a heart of submission to what God wants rather than what we might desire to have. When we live each day like this, it proves how we really think and feel about God. It shows that we really believe that He cares and knows exactly what is best for us.

### **Peace and contentment indicate we are walking by faith.**

Matthew chapters five through seven contain what most theologians would classify as foundational teachings of Jesus. He describes the nature of people who are part of His Kingdom. He also teaches about attitudes and actions that are contrary to His Kingdom. He addresses a variety of subjects that are extremely important. I find it interesting that in the midst of these critical teachings, Jesus also teaches that we should not worry about what we need in order to sustain our life, such as food and clothing. (See Matthew 6:24 – 34.) Jesus does not want us to be anxious about these things.

In the early days of my life as a Christian, I thought that this section did not seem to fit with the rest of what is said in Matthew chapters five through seven. It did not seem to have the same importance as the rest of what Jesus taught in this section. But over the years, I have come to realize that it is absolutely important and that it definitely belongs with the rest of these teachings. Without faith, we will perish. If our faith does not produce contentment resulting in our resting in the loving care of God, then perhaps we have no saving faith. If I am all anxious and worried about whether we will have enough money to pay the bills, I must not really believe what God has promised. Jesus said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Do we believe this or not?

Frankly, I am amazed at how much time I have spent worrying about such things as a Christian, in spite of the fact that God proved Himself faithful over and over. I remember being taught about God’s promise to provide and how He wants us to trust Him. I also taught other Christians these very things. Then, about nine years ago, God began to rearrange my circumstances. Suddenly, I was making one fourth the money that I had been making in the electronics industry. Suddenly, all that head-knowledge about trusting God was put to the test. Though I

once taught others about the importance of trusting that God will provide, I realized that my knowledge about these things was only skin deep. It was as if I missed the class “Faith 101” and God was telling me that I needed to go back and take that class.

During that period, we decided to make a prayer board for all the things needed to sustain the family. We prayed together as a family about those things and God showed Himself faithful and glorious. Whenever God answered one of the prayers, we would note the date of the answer next to the need on the board. Let me give just one example to illustrate. Linda had stepped on her glasses. I tried to straighten them out but they seemed beyond repair. She would get dizzy sometimes because of the way the lenses pointed. So, we wrote on the board, “New glasses for Linda- \$ 400.” (They were special because of her eyesight.) We prayed about this daily for at least two or three weeks but it seemed as if God was not providing. Linda was becoming discouraged. Then, one morning, she was crying out to God in desperation about not being able to see. (Real tears.) Earlier, I had taken the mail from the mailbox and left it on the counter in the kitchen. When Linda came downstairs, she saw the mail and began opening it. There was one envelope from a man who had lost his job a few weeks earlier. She opened the envelope and a \$ 400 check fell out. There was a note from this man that read, “God told me to send this.” (Keep in mind that he was unemployed at the time.) This event brought tears to our eyes. God had used this situation to show that He was watching over us and was able to take care of us. We felt extremely loved by Him.

Many examples of God providing like this could be given. Through these types of events, God has been teaching me that He really is aware of everything we need and is fully capable of providing for us. Nevertheless, I still fall into the sin of worry at times. I know that God is able to provide, but perhaps I question if He will provide in the measure that I consider satisfactory. What if He chooses to provide in such a way that we end up being homeless? I know it would be very uncomfortable to be homeless. But God is able to provide what we really need even if it means that we lose our home. I know that in such situations, God could show Himself more glorious than I could imagine. But still, I don’t like the prospect of going through that. Though God has graciously taught me about His love and care for me, it is obvious that my trust in Him is still not that large. In fact, it seems quite small.

The smallness of my faith concerns me. Jesus said to one man who wished to follow Him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). In other words, “Are you willing to be homeless like me?” Jesus also said that anyone who is not worthy to die for Him cannot be His disciple. (See Luke 14:27.) In reality, we need to be willing to be homeless and relinquish all of what we own into His care to do with it whatever He wishes. This is the type of faith He desires for us to have. And it seems that if we have not come to this place of full surrender and trust, we should not expect to be in heaven. He wants us to trust Him with everything and rest in His unchanging love.

Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). God is conforming us to the image of Jesus. In this process, He is prying from our tight grip every thing we hold dear in our hearts. One of those things is comfort. We love being comfortable and hate discomfort. But it seems as if God has designed things in such a way that He uses discomfort to purge us of our love for this world. Though we might kick and scream as He does this, once stripped of everything, we are left only with Him. But in His presence is fullness of joy. (See Psalms 16:11.) It is there that we find true peace and contentment. Put another way, it is only when we have finally let go of every aspiration and possession that we experience true peace and contentment and rest in the Lord. Only then can we truly say with Paul, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (See Romans 8:39.)

What type of relationship with Jesus do you want? One full of glory or one in which He rarely makes His presence known. If we want a relationship with Him that is full of glory, then there are no short cuts. We must become enrolled in God’s “Faith 101” class. We must learn to wait upon Him for all our needs and learn to trust Him. We must learn to live by faith in God as our provider. We must begin making the type of decisions that will facilitate this type of living instead of hinder it.

## **Obvious example of a decision that will always hinder our ability to live by faith**

To illustrate how the decisions we make will either facilitate or hinder living by faith, I will now discuss the decision to purchase a lottery ticket. This decision may seem to some to be no big deal. But do you see how playing the lottery is in direct opposition to what it means to live by faith? What is the outcome of playing the lottery? Normally, we lose the money used to purchase the ticket. But have we lost something else in the experience? Has our trust in God taken a back seat? What if we win the lottery? What is gained? The flesh gets comfort through immediate gratification but our spirit goes without the heavenly food it needs. Instead of beholding God's glory and power as He provides our real needs, our flesh is gorging itself on earthly, temporal things that can never satisfy our longing for the love and peace that only Jesus can provide.

When we play the lottery, we short circuit God's process of producing the life of Jesus in us. We trade certain heavenly riches for fading temporal pleasure (if we were to win). And as we continue to play the lottery, we continue pouring water on the fire that God desires to light within us. Put another way, playing the lottery tends to extinguish our faith.

When a Christian relates to God by faith as described in this article, there is absolutely no reason for him to ever play the lottery. He already knows that God will provide everything he needs. Playing the lottery would suggest that a Christian is not satisfied with the way God is providing for him. It would also indicate that instead of trusting in the Lord, he is leaning to his own understanding about what he needs. To play the lottery, he must believe that God is not providing sufficiently. In his mind, God must not know what He is doing. Or, the Christian believes that God is providing the way He sees fit but that is not satisfactory. In other words, God is withholding provision on purpose because He is mean. The other possibility is that this person who calls himself a Christian does not actually believe the Bible is the Word of God so all of its teachings about faith (such as Proverbs 3:5-6) have no relevance whatsoever. In other words, he is merely religious and not one of the "justified" who walk by faith. He is an unbeliever headed for hell.

The Bible teaches that "Whatever is not from faith is sin." (See Romans 14:23.) Everything that we do that is not from faith is sin and undermines our faith. Whenever a decision has moral implications and we make up our minds independent of God, we are living as if we are God. Only God has the right to call the shots. He is the King, not us. For us to flippantly decide to play the lottery without even considering what God wants indicates that we take Him lightly. In other words, we despise Him. Such decisions always produce destruction and delusion that destroys our ability to believe.

If we truly care about the fullness of our relationship with God, we must not take any decision we make lightly. Will it hinder our faith or facilitate it? Even a decision as to whether we should go on a nice vacation should not be made independent of God's counsel. If He does not want us to take one, we need to be content with His direction.

## **A parting word of caution**

Many Christians wrongly base the assurance of their salvation on a decision they made in their past to become a Christian. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus told a parable to warn us that people can know the gospel and hold to sound doctrinal beliefs but still end up in hell. He taught that only those who hear His words AND DO THEM will end up in heaven. Those who truly believe the gospel "live by faith." They do not rely upon their own understanding to make decisions. They rely upon God to direct their lives. They do not live independent lives. They live lives of dependence upon God.

What evidence can you point to in your life that indicates you are one of the "justified?" Are you basing your assurance on some decision you made in the past or is there actual evidence in your attitudes and actions that indicates you really do believe the gospel? Would you characterize your life as one that rests in God's provision and looks to Him as provider or are you the one in the driver's seat? If an examination of your life does not clearly

suggest that you are one of those who live by faith in reliance on God, you should not have strong confidence that you truly believe the gospel. It may be uncomfortable to do this type of analysis but it is better to be honest about this matter. True faith always produces a life of dependence on God (rather than yourself).

[1] The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

\*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places