

THE FIGHT OF FAITH!

JAMIE MCNAB

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We have been looking the last few weeks at how God's Word can ... and should ... encourage us.

Of course that requires that we spend some decent quality time in God's Word! Maybe we should be like the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily? Or maybe we think we can get by with "weekly" study ... or just on the Sabbaths? That won't be enough.

Last week we touched on LIVING BY FAITH — in particular using the EYE OF FAITH. Walking by faith and not by sight. And faith needs us to be familiar with God's Word ... it depends on our spending good quality time in the scriptures. There's no getting around that.

Romans 10:13-15, 17 (NKJV)

13 For "**whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.**"

14 **How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?**

15 And **how shall they preach unless they are sent?** As it is written:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

17 **So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

The Word must be preached and heard! That's how faith comes.

We all know about faith ... that the just (us) should live by faith ... we've heard a number of messages ... but we've probably all experienced disappointments? Our attempts to walk by faith have not always succeeded.

There's a reason for that.

1 Timothy 6:6-12 (NKJV)

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.**

11 **But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.**

12 **Fight the good fight of faith**, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

We are told to “fight the good fight of faith”. If there’s a fight ... there must be enemies?

Many of us would like to live by faith ... imitate some of the men and women of Bible times. But if we are going to do that ... we need to recognise these enemies to faith ... and be prepared to fight against them.

And it’s said to be a GOOD FIGHT (one we win!)

There are several key enemies. Enemies because in many ways they are counterfeits of faith. We think we’re in faith ... but it’s likely to end in tears because it’s not genuine faith we had ... it’s a counterfeit!

Then we get all confused. We believe we had faith ... but it didn’t seem to work.

Matthew 9:27-31 (NKJV)

27 **When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, “Son of David, have mercy on us!”**

28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And **Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”**

They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” (A statement of faith)

29 **Then He touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be to you.”**

30 **And their eyes were opened.** And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, “See that no one knows it.”

31 But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.

Let’s look at the most common enemies to our faith ... so we can be aware ... be vigilant.

FIRST ENEMY: CONFUSING FAITH WITH FEELINGS

This is very very common. It saps our confidence ... trust.

- “I don’t feel that God hears my prayers any more”.
- “I don’t feel that God is with me in this trial”.
- “I don’t feel that God loves me anymore”.

Well — our feelings can be very real to us. But feelings have nothing to do with faith.

Faith is a decision we make. A decision to believe what God has said.

Our feelings can go up or down with the weather ... tiredness ... last night’s dinner. We can’t base our decisions on physical feelings ... good or bad.

If our feelings line up with our faith ... fine. Feelings can follow faith ... but can’t lead it.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (NKJV)

7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

This is a conscious decision. Based upon knowledge. It doesn’t matter if we feel confident of an answer ... if we feel optimistic. Faith is a decision to believe.

1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

This is the confidence ... that we know His Will ... His Word ... He hears us and we have the petitions that we have asked for. Never say: "If it be Thy will". This is a prayer of faith.

2 Peter 1:2-4 (NKJV)

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you **in the *knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**, *(we are supposed to know God and Jesus)*

3 **as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, **through the knowledge of Him** who called us by glory and virtue,

4 **by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises**, **that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

We need "full and precise knowledge" ... *Greek: Epignosis... which comes from the Word of God.

Question: What does the Bible say? Not .. Do I feel confident ... or nervous?

George Müller's Definition:

Faith is the assurance that the things which **God says in His Word** are true and that **God will act** according to what **He has said** in His Word. This assurance, **this reliance on God's Word**, this confidence **is faith**.

So ... if you feel uncertain ... you can ignore it. Your feelings don't affect your faith.

SECOND ENEMY: TO CONFUSE FAITH WITH MENTAL ASSENT

This is very common. Superficially they look alike.

Mental assent is an intellectual agreement with scriptures. We see the logic of the scriptural position.

But it's just in our head. We mentally assent/agree to the truth of scripture. But ... it's only HEAD KNOWLEDGE. It's not in our heart.

- Do you believe God can heal? Yes.
- Do you believe it's God will to heal? Yes/No?

- Do you believe you're healed? "Well. I'm a hoping!"

We need revelation ... rather than just information. We need a renewed or transformed mind ... not the old carnal/worldly mind.

Mark 11:22-24 (NKJV)

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "**Have faith in God.**

23 For assuredly, I say to you, **whoever SAYS to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and *does not doubt in his heart, but believes (in your heart) that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.* (You do have to speak)**

24 Therefore I say to you, **whatever things you ask when you pray, *believe that you receive them, and you will have them.***

Does not doubt in his heart ... BUT BELIEVES (in his heart). Not just a mental "acceptance". This is genuine ... real ... conviction.

Romans 10:6-10 (NKJV)

6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above)

7 or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "**The word is near you, *in your mouth and in your heart***" (that is, *the word of faith which we preach*):

9 that **if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and *believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***

10 For ***with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***

Faith in two places ... in the mouth and in the heart. The point I'm making here is: Heart ... heart ... heart. Faith will be in the heart.

Hebrews 10:19-23 (NKJV)

19 **Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,**

20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Not some lightweight mental assent. A true heart ... in full assurance of faith!

Hebrews 10:22 (AMP)

22 Let us all come forward and draw near with true (honest and sincere) hearts in unqualified assurance and absolute conviction ...

True heart = authentic ... genuine ... deep conviction — not just “mental assent” that evaporates when things get delayed or go a way we don’t expect.

2 Timothy 1:3-5 (NKJV)

3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day,

4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy,

5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

Genuine Faith ... KJV: “Unfeigned” or another translation says ... “authentic”.
More than just intellectual agreement.

Closely related.

THIRD ENEMY: RELYING ON HUMAN REASONING

We may want to rely on faith ... but it doesn’t appear logical ... or reasonable ... to our human minds. So ... we think about it ... and then we go with our intellectual analysis ... our human reasoning.

We seem to think God can only do things if we’re able to figure them out and they satisfy our logical ... rational understanding.

Relying on what must make sense to our limited minds will destroy faith. Faith is a decision to believe God's Word because it's God's word!

2 Kings 5:1-15 (NKJV)

1 **Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honourable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valour, but a leper.**

2 **And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife.**

3 Then **she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."**

4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel."

5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. ***(About \$3.8 million?)***

6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

8 So it was, when **Elisha the man of God** heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? **Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.**"

9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house.

10 And **Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean."**

11 **But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'** ***(Here's Naaman's logic)***

12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" **So he turned and went away in a rage. (What was he doing? He was using his reasoning powers!)**

13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”

14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant.”

Naaman almost reasoned himself out of his healing.

Another healing story: And people did miss out because they relied on human reasoning.

Luke 5:17-26 (NKJV)

17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. (How many got healed? Only 1)

18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralysed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him.

19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” (Faith has corresponding actions. Mental assent doesn’t)

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts?

23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’?

24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralysed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 **And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear,** saying, **"We have seen strange things today!"**

God's power was there to heal them all. But ... the scribes and Pharisees began to reason about what they saw and heard. It didn't make logical sense. It didn't match their theology.

Luke 5:1-9 (NKJV)

1 **So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret,**

2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.

3 Then **He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.**

4 **When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."**

5 **But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."**

6 **And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.**

7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

9 For **he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken;**

NEVERTHELESS ... AT THY WORD.

Jesus' instructions made no logical sense ... Peter had experience ... wisdom as to where fish can be found... he'd been out all night. Jesus' instructions were ridiculous!!

But ... if we've had a Word from God ... our limited human analysis shouldn't enter into it.

The right way to do it is: “Nevertheless ... even though it seems illogical and irrational to me ... at Thy Word ...”

We have to be careful not to elevate our intellects above the Word of God.

Peter made the right choice here ... even if it was unenthusiastic.

Isaiah 55:6-11 (NKJV)

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found,

Call upon Him while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way,

And the unrighteous man his thoughts;

Let him return to the Lord,

And He will have mercy on him;

And to our God,

For He will abundantly pardon.

8 **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.**

9 **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.**

10 **“For as the rain comes down,** and the snow from heaven,

And do not return there,

But water the earth,

And make it bring forth and bud,

That it may give seed to the sower

And bread to the eater,

11 **So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;**

It shall not return to Me void,

But it shall accomplish what I please,

And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

God’s thoughts are not like ours. God’s ways are much higher.

We can’t use our limited knowledge ... limited insights ... limited experience (of 30 or 50 or 80 years) ... to cast doubt on the ways of God.

God’s Word will accomplish ... it will prosper ... no matter what anyone thinks or how “great” their intelligence might be. Just like the rain on the earth!

Jeremiah 32:26-27 (NKJV)

26 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying,

27 **“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. *Is there anything too hard for Me?*”**

There is nothing too hard for God!

Jeremiah 32:16-17 (NKJV)

16 “Now when I had delivered the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying:

17 **‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. *There is nothing too hard for You.*’**

Humanly ... we'll often look at circumstances ... situations ... think: “There's no way God can or will sort this out. It's too late ... or ... it's far too complex ... too messed up”. And we're basing our view on our own thinking ... our own impressive intellect??

We didn't create the universe. We're not eternal. God is! And nothing is too hard for Him. His Word will accomplish ... always.

One fatal enemy to faith is to look to our human wisdom and reasoning.
WRONG CHOICE!

Today we've looked at just 3 enemies ... don't confuse faith with feelings — don't just have mental assent — and don't lean on human reasoning.

There are more enemies to look at next week!