



# Light from the Word

## Contending for the Faith

*“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”<sup>1</sup>*

The first question to consider is what is “faith” as used in the biblical text? A brief definition is provided in, *“Now faith is the substance [the confirmation, the title deed] of things hoped for, the evidence [the conviction of their reality] of things not seen.”<sup>2</sup>* Faith is perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses.

The Greek word for *faith* used in the New Testament is “*pistis*”; a noun meaning firm persuasion, moral *conviction*, especially *reliance* upon Christ for salvation. Another word often used is *believe* and the Greek word is “*pisteuō*”; a verb meaning to have faith in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing; to entrust especially one’s spiritual well-being to Christ. Most of the references for faith (noun) or believe (verb) point to our relationship with Christ.

Another question is what is *“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”<sup>3</sup>* as also in the passage, *“to them that have obtained like precious faith with us...?”<sup>4</sup>* And how do these commandments relate to our salvation and/or our Brotherhood? That is, what is meant by the term “like precious faith” or “the faith?” Does it refer to our Brotherhood or is it meant to be deeper than that? While “faith” is never used in Scripture to refer to a church or denomination, believers are exhorted to “continue in the faith,” “contend for the faith,” “stand fast in the faith,” etc. In these instances, Scripture is exhorting the believer to continue to abide in biblical doctrine, to abide in Christ.<sup>5</sup> It is essential for us to understand that “the faith” refers to the doctrines of Christianity of salvation through faith in Christ.

Using the term “like precious faith” to refer to our Brotherhood is not supported in Scripture and can diminish our focus on Christ as the object of our faith. It can elevate our Brotherhood too highly even though it is important and is precious; but not equal with our saving faith in Christ or the Word. It might even lead to an attitude that Jesus warned against in a parable where a Pharisee said, *“God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.”<sup>6</sup>*

On the other hand, treating the Brotherhood too lightly can be dangerous too and is also unbiblical. It may encourage individuals to come to Christ but not seek to be committed or spiritually accountable to a church body. They may be attempting to maintain flexibility or autonomy in their spiritual walk. But this comes at the cost of missing the blessings of community—accountability, a covenant relationship with other members, discipline, submission, etc. And there is a particular danger in adopting a pattern of switching churches as a response to personal preference or a focus on one’s felt needs. Our faith in Christ will flourish in community as we labor together in Him.<sup>7</sup>

Consider the comment by a now-departed retired elder in reference to the Bible and our Brotherhood, *“I just want to urge you, press on in the same right spirit of Paul and Titus, with a healthy loyalty to the good paths of our precious heritage and an unwavering, unwavering allegiance to the whole counsel of God.”*

The next question to consider is what is meant by the exhortation to *“earnestly contend for the faith.”<sup>8</sup>* When we look at the context of this verse coupled with the account in 1 John 2:18-27 we are exhorted to preserve the pure Gospel as delivered by Christ and counter the advance of false teachers who would distort truth, diminish the value of Christ’s finished work, and even deny Him. It is important to

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contend for “what we believe” not just to focus on “how we project” that belief. Jude and John give the call for all Christians to contend for truth—for the whole and pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to be rooted in the Word.

From that point the manifestation of what we believe should be a natural progression as we practice our faith or belief. Our faith may begin as the size of a mustard seed but that seed is meant to grow into the mustard tree.<sup>9</sup> Consider the sequence, “*And beside this, giving all diligence, add (exercise) to your faith virtue ... knowledge ... temperance ... patience ... godliness ... brotherly kindness ... charity.*”<sup>10</sup> It seems that Peter is encouraging us to grow our faith. The terms “earnestly” and “giving all diligence” suggest maximum effort or strenuous effort is to be expended as we “add to” (or grow) our faith.

Paul states that we are to “*work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.*”<sup>11</sup> From the account in John 15:5 and Gal 2:20 (and numerous others) it is apparent the “work” is not done through our own efforts or strength but only through God’s empowerment. “*For it is God*

*which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*”<sup>12</sup>

We often get confused on what is God’s part and what is our part. It appears significant that Paul uses the terminology to “work out” not “work for” our salvation. This seems to suggest we are to allow that which God imputed in us (true saving faith) to work its way out to be seen of men that “*they may glorify God*”<sup>13</sup> and “*draw all men unto Me.*”<sup>14</sup> As we “work out” or exercise our faith we help preserve “true faith,” the biblical faith of our fathers. Our faithful example will reveal the validity of our faith, be a reflection of Christ to others, help advance His kingdom, and bring God glory.

Paul gives further direction when he says “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do ... I press toward the mark for the prize...*”<sup>15</sup> Paul is not fearful of his position in Christ but rather stating he has work to be done as he pursues the goal of conformity with the image of Christ. That should be our focus as well as we earnestly contend for the faith; that we may also be conformed into His image. Any focus other than the pursuit of Christ-likeness can and often does lead to a spiritual leanness centered on pride, the deception of self-righteousness and/or doctrinal error.<sup>16</sup> Without a Christ-centered

focus empowered by the Holy Spirit we may lose the inner vitality of our first love as did the Ephesian church.<sup>17</sup>

What motivated Paul in his pursuit of Christ-likeness; as he faithfully contended for the faith? He answers that question by writing, “*For the love of Christ constraineth [compels] us ...*”<sup>18</sup> Paul was driven to seek God with all his heart by the “agape” love planted in his heart.<sup>19</sup> We also should seek that motivating factor (love of God) – He is worthy of our best!<sup>20</sup>

(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Jude 1:3

<sup>2</sup> Heb. 11:1

<sup>3</sup> Jude 1:3b

<sup>4</sup> 2 Pet. 1:1

<sup>5</sup> John 15:4-5

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:11

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 10:23-25; 2 Cor. 6:1

<sup>8</sup> Jude 3

<sup>9</sup> Luke 13:19

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-7

<sup>11</sup> Phil. 2:12

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 2:13

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 5:16

<sup>14</sup> John 12:32

<sup>15</sup> Phil. 3:13-14

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 10:1-4

<sup>17</sup> Rev. 2:2-4

<sup>18</sup> 2 Cor. 5:14

<sup>19</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 22:36-40