

# WHEN OUR FAITH IS FACING CHALLENGES

James Orhosere

## INTRODUCTION

What is faith?

*The Macmillan English Dictionary* defines faith as *strong belief in a god or gods*. In **Hebrews 11:1-2**, the writer sets the thesis of the chapter - *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*

## THE NATURE OF FAITH

The people to whom *Hebrews* was written faced a deadly challenge to their spiritual lives. They were in great danger of falling away.

In the latter part of *Chapter 10*, the writer dealt with this challenge to their faith directly, warning his readers of what would happen if they did fall away.

**Hebrews 10:26-31:** *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has*

*rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

The writer encouraged them by saying that he really believed that they would persevere. He then concluded that portion of his letter with these words - *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:39).*

What did these Christians need, to avoid falling away, to make sure they would be saved eternally? **Faith!**

Having declared that faith is the key to the Christian's ultimate salvation, the writer demonstrated what *faith* is and what it means.

To that end, he preached a sermon on the nature of faith. As we read through the sermon, we can learn what the Holy Spirit has to say to us about the nature of faith.

- ❖ ***Faith accepts what cannot be sensed physically:*** The first truth we learn about the nature of faith is that faith involves accepting as fact what cannot be experienced with the physical senses - ***Hebrews 11:1*** *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Having faith means that one acts on his belief that spiritual realities are real even though he cannot with his physical senses prove that they are.

This nature of faith comes in ***Hebrews 11:3*** - *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

- ❖ ***Faith makes us pleasing to God:*** The second truth we learn about the nature of faith is that it causes us to be pleasing to God.

***Hebrews 11:4-7:*** *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous,*

*God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

As the writer continued through the Scriptures, he told us about **Abel** (Genesis 4), **Enoch** (Genesis 5) and **Noah** (Genesis 6). All of these are said to have pleased God, and the inspired conclusion is that they have faith - *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

- ❖ ***Faith obeys:*** The third truth we learn about the nature of faith is that faith obeys - ***Hebrews 11:8-12:*** *By faith*

*Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

### **Why is Abraham regarded as the father of the faithful?**

It is because he obeyed (verse 8). Perhaps, the greatest examples of Abraham's obedience is cited in **Hebrews 11:17-19**, *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up,*

*even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. Here, Abraham was willing to offer his son, Isaac at God's command. What a great faith!*

- ❖ **Faith looks forward to the ultimate reward:** The fourth truth we learn about the nature of faith is that faith looks beyond the present circumstances to the ultimate reward.

The emphasis in **Hebrews 11:13-22** is on the fact that the heroes of faith did not in this life see the fulfilment of their expectations - *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and*

he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

Abraham was promised a land but never received it while he lived. *What then is faith? It is looking beyond the present and seeing in the future, the fulfillment.*

- ❖ ***Faith helps us to make wise decisions:*** The fifth truth we learn about the nature of faith is that faith enables us to choose what is right in the sight of God - ***Hebrews 11:23-28*** - *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith*

*Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

The Israelites had to decide if they would obey God and sprinkle blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses when God sent the tenth plague. Then, they had to decide whether or not to march into the Red Sea at God's command. These were difficult decisions. However, the people made the right ones. *What enabled them to do so? It was faith!*

- ❖ ***Faith enables us to triumph:*** The sixth truth we learn about the nature of faith is that when we depend on God, we triumph over all obstacles. The Israelites escaped Egypt against all expectations. The walls of Jericho fell down, even

though (*according to human logic*) Jericho should not have fallen to Israel. Victory comes through faith against insurmountable obstacles.

## WHEN OUR FAITH IS TESTED – WHAT DO WE DO?

**James 1:3** *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* Probably the testing James meant was persecution. The idea is that when a Christian's faith is challenged and he still remains faithful, he grows spiritually. However, not everyone passes the test. *Is our faith ever tested? Are we ever tempted to give up on God?* When life is going badly for us – because of sickness, bereavement, financial difficulties, family conflicts, and threats of divorce or personal problems – our faith is tested or challenged. Sometimes, this is true even when our lives are going well. Prosperity can tempt us to be materialistic. In such case – what do we do? The experience of the Israelites as they stood on the shore of the Red Sea provides some guidelines.

- ❖ ***When our faith is tested, we should remember that matters are not as bad as they seem:*** That was true for the Israelites. They thought they had escaped. Imagine their jubilations. Then they reached the edge of the sea and their joy turned to despair.

They faced the sea in front of them and behind them was Pharaoh's army. The forces against them were seemingly overwhelming. They saw no way out – ultimately, God delivered them.

Like the Israelites, we tend to look at the negative, imagine the worst and fail to see the positive possibilities when we are faced with problems. We must have faith that the situation is not as dark as it seems.

- ❖ ***When our faith is tested, we look to God:*** The Israelites in **Exodus 14:10** cried out - *And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.* That much they got right – but then they started to complain. In doing so, they exhibited two negative attitudes that continued to characterize them – *forgetfulness and ingratitude.* They forgot what God had done for them and they were ungrateful for His blessings. Nevertheless, God responded to their cry by promising them deliverance. Moses assured them that God would rescue them -

**Exodus 14:13-14...** *“Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today....”*

Sometimes, people move farther away from God instead of drawing closer to Him even turning away from the church. *May that never be said of us!*

- ❖ ***When our faith is tested, we should go forward:*** That is, we must press on in the upward way heading for the Promised Land. The most remarkable thing about the story in *Exodus 14* is found in God’s instruction - ***Exodus 14:13*** *And Moses said to the people...Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD....* ***Exodus 14:15*** *And the LORD said to Moses...Tell the children of Israel to go forward.* How would you have felt if you had received such a command? Their faith was tested. To their credit despite their misgivings, they did indeed *go forward* into the sea. As the sea opened, they marched through on dry ground. By so doing, they were saved – delivered from the peril.

What about us? When our faith is challenged, we usually know what we ought to do - *Depend on God - Stand*

*still and see the salvation of the LORD - then go forward.*

Paul said in ***Philippians 3:13-14***...*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*Is there a sea in front of you? God can open the sea. Is there a wall in front of you? God can help you tear down that wall. Have you encountered a closed door? God can open that door, walk through the sea, tear down the wall or enter through the door.*

The solution to the testing of your faith is simply to *keep the faith, to keep doing what the Lord would have you to do.*

## CONCLUSION

God has the answer for our individual lives and for the corporate life of the church. We must hear His instructions and press on even when the way ahead seems impossible. The God who could open the Red Sea can open a door for us that will result in our being blessed and in our being a blessing to others.

***God bless His words in Jesus  
Name – amen!***