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“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

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FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT: FAITH

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

The seventh quality in the list of the fruits of the Spirit is faith. When we think of faith, of course we think of belief in the existence of God, but it also can be the quality of fidelity or reliability within a person.

I’m not sure if there is any test facing the modern Christian world more devastating than the constant and unrelenting attack on faith.

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Do we believe? If we do, do our actions reflect it?

In considering that this is the first of the last groupings within the fruits of the spirit—faith, meekness and temperance are about how we relate with ourselves—it is significant that faith can involve both our personal belief in God and our own reliability and character.

We will talk about these two characteristics today as well as three kinds of faith as described in the book of James.

To begin, let's ask a simple question: what does faithfulness look like?

Jesus is our greatest example. His life shows consistent, dependable, committed action. The fruit of the Spirit in our lives should take the same form. When we are dedicated and responsible with...

- ...how we spend our money, living with control of our spending so that we have means to give to those in need, we are faithful (Mat. 25:21);
- ...how we spend our marginal minutes, taking opportunities to pray, meditate, and encourage others, we are faithful (Luke 16:10).

It's a different story, though, and our faithfulness could be in question if ...

- ...we miss opportunities to use our abilities or our time because we are afraid, or lackadaisical, or distracted, or lazy (Mat. 25:24-26);
- ...we can't be counted on for small things, so there is no way we can be counted on for great works (Jer. 12:5, Pro. 25:19).

Want some application? This applies to everything. Here are some family examples:

- Mothers

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Tit. 2:3-5)

- Fathers

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

- Married couples

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord...as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;...So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ...Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Eph. 5:22-33)

- This is required of children, too.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. (Eph. 6:1-3)

My mother told me over and over, “actions speak louder than words.” I hated to hear this growing up. It usually meant that I wasn’t in line in one way or another. It’s no good to talk the talk if you can’t walk the walk. This is true of faith. No action equals dead faith.

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a

brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (Jas. 2:14-17)

In the beginning we mentioned that faith can have a dual meaning, both that we should have belief in God, and be disciplined and dependable in our lives. Both are necessary. We might believe that God is real, but if our actions tell a different story, then we don't have true faith.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (Jas. 2:18-19)

Acknowledging God intellectually, but without taking action on our belief is dead faith. Acknowledging God intellectually and even being moved emotionally, but still not taking action on our belief is demonic faith.

A faith that believes in God, that is convicted that Jesus is the Christ, that he rose from the dead, that asks, "what must I do?," that takes action, that is dependable and reliable, that is a dynamic faith.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers,

and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (Jas. 2:20-26)

To summarize, faith involves belief in God as well as reliability and trustworthiness on our part. It is not simply belief, but belief accompanied by actions based on that belief. Because we believe in God, we keep the commandments of Christ (John 14:15); because we believe Jesus died to cleanse us from sin, we despise sin and work to cleanse ourselves from sinful behaviors (Rom. 6:6); because we believe in God and want to be worthy of his calling, we discipline ourselves and grow in all areas of the Christian life (2 Tim. 2:15, Col. 3:12-17).

Faith is the first fruit of the Spirit that relates to ourselves. Like love at the front of the list, the next two depend on it. To have meekness and temperance requires the reliability and dependability that true faith provides.

Do we have faith? Does it show?

CHAD PRINCE
(Oxford, AL)

ARE YOU FAITHFUL?

If your car starts once every three tries do you feel satisfied that it is faithful as a reliable car? Is it considered faithful service if your paper is delivered every Monday and Thursday although you signed up for every day delivery? Does your boss consider you a reliable employee if you only miss work a few times a month unannounced? If your refrigerator stops working for a day or two every now and then do you find yourself saying, "Well, it works most of the time, I'm happy with it?" If your water heater provides an icy-cold shower every now and then, is it dependable? If you miss a couple of loan payments every year does the bank say, "Ten out of twelve isn't bad!"?

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SOCIETY'S DIVISIONS AFFECT BELIEVERS

Consider Acts 6:1:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

Oftentimes the values that a society holds are reflected in and embraced by the church whether they are biblical or not. Coming to faith in Christ does not automatically change one's view of the world and its people. We may reproduce and even defend sinful attitudes and actions that are normal for our surrounding culture.

The early church faced that problem (Acts 6:1). Hellenist widows, traditionally neglected by the Jews, were now being neglected by Hebrew Christians who had brought that attitude with them into the church.

Likewise, later church history shows that Christians were among those who advocated and even promoted such evils as slavery, segregation, apartheid, and the holocaust. To be sure, Christians were also among those objecting to and overthrowing those practices. But many chose to accept cultural norms that were opposed to Christ's message.

This reality forces us to ask some troubling questions: What values in modern society do we uncritically accept? How are divisions in our culture revealed in our churches, at work, and

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in our neighborhoods? How does the gospel of Jesus challenge those attitudes? What changes do we need to make?

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“Society's Divisions Affect Believers,” The Word in Life Study Bible New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996, pp. 1934.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Which son did Jacob love more than all the others?
2. For how many years did the Israelites wander in the wilderness?
3. Why did Elimelech go to live in Moab with his family?
4. Who gave gifts to Jesus when he was a young child?
5. Who did Jesus say was the “father of lies”?

...and remember last month’s questions?

1. What was the name of Moses’ brother? AARON (Exodus 7:1)
2. Whose name means “father of a multitude”? ABRAHAM (Genesis 17:5)
3. What was noticeable about Jacob’s twin brother, Esau, at birth? HE WAS RED AND HAIRY (Genesis 25:25)
4. What happened to Jesus forty days after his resurrection? HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN (Acts 1:3-11)
5. What are the names of Lazarus’ sisters? MARY AND MARTHA (John 11:1-3)

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
March 30 - April 2	Goochtown Eubank, KY	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)
April 6 - 9	Junction City Junction City, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 7 - 9	New Bethel Cullman, AL	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)
April 10 - 14	Rainsville Rainsville, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY) Topic: The Book of Revelation
April 21 - 23	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 21 - 23	Lockport Lockport, KY	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)
April 28 - 30	Verona Verona, KY	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)
April 28 - 30	Willow Oaks Russell Springs, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 28 - 30	Valley Valley, AL	Brad Prince (Carrollton, GA)

**God asks not about our ability or
inability, just our availability**