

# Assessing Your Faith

## By Bill Denton

### Introduction

#### A. Illustration

A weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them.

-- Victor Frankl, *Leadership*, Vol. 3, no. 4.

1. Frankl has a point, for it is often the relative strength or weakness of one's faith that determines how well a person deals with the events of life
  - a. I say that because I have seen people face terrible and difficult times and their faith has actually increased
  - b. at other times I have seen a person's faith die all because it couldn't stand up to hard times
2. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that one feeds the other – events of life help develop faith and faith, in turn, enables us to handle the events of life.

#### B. There are also times when it's good to do a little self-examination to try to understand the Health or state of our faith

1. I can think of some reasons people don't do this sort of thing
  - a. they may be afraid to find that their faith is weak
  - b. they may be guilty of a prideful assumption that their faith is strong
  - c. they may not see any value in such self-examinations
2. Assessing one's faith can be a step to spiritual growth because it helps identify things where we need help, questions we need to work through, or things we need to learn

#### D. Faith assessment helps us discover whether or not our faith is really a part of how we live

##### 1. Illustration

My break with faith occurred in me as it did and still does among people of our social and cultural type. As I see it, in most cases, it happens like this: People live as everyone lives, but they all live according to principles that not only have nothing to do with the teachings of faith, but for the most part, are contrary to them. The teachings of faith have no place in life and never come to play in the relations among people; they simply play no role in living life itself. The teachings of faith are left to some other realm, separated from life and independent of it. If one should encounter them, then it is only as some superficial phenomenon that has no connection with life.

-- Leo Tolstoy in *Confessions*. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 32, no. 10.

2. How sad it would be to find ourselves in a time when faith is the thing that could or would help us stand strong, only to discover that it is too weak to help

#### C. The New Year is a great time to do (at least) a general faith assessment on a few key issues

1. These are some of the basics of the Christian life
2. If we do well in these areas, then we can be confident that we have a healthy faith foundation and that we are prepared to experience personal growth

3. If we do not do well in these areas, then we can get some help from people who are strong in their faith, or we can find other appropriate help

## I. How Secure Are You In Your Salvation?

### A. I believe this is one of the most difficult areas for Christians

1. We've been taught correctly that it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace
  - a. Galatians 5:4 (NASB95)

4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
  - b. but we tend to ignore the part of the verse that tell us how to fall from grace
    - 1) it is the part that identifies the fallen as those who are seeking to be justified by law
    - 2) these are people who hold up their own goodness as the standard by which they are made right with God
2. this is not a verse that speaks to people who have their faith in Jesus Christ

### B. For people of faith, there are other verses that are of much greater importance

1. 1 John 5:13 (NASB95)

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.
2. John 10:27-30 (NASB95)

27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;  
28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.  
29 "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.  
30 "I and the Father are one."
3. John 5:24 (NASB95)

24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9 (NASB95)

8 But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.  
9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

### C. A life of faith begins here, for this is the central issue of possessing spiritual life or not

## II. Do You Trust God Enough To Pray?

### A. Prayer is essentially an act of faith

1. Hebrews 11:6 (NASB95)

6 And 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 seek Him.

2. Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB95)

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

3. 1 John 5:14-15 (NASB95)

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

15 And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

**B. Prayer is definitely one of those things that both builds faith and is the result of faith**

1. People who seldom pray simply evidence a lack of trust in God

2. People who pray often are showing that they have a serious, sincere trust in God

### III. Are You Serious Enough About Your Faith To Change Your Life

**A. Illustration**

However we may set out on the path of pilgrimage, we spend a lifetime walking it. There are no rest stops, no plateaus at which we can flop down and say that we've gone far enough. At the beginning, God accepts us in all of our sinfulness and selfishness. But this does not mean that he is content to have us remain in that state. We are all, in the New Testament's terrifying phrase, "called to be saints." Our Father knows our weaknesses even better than we do, and he does not expect us to become saints overnight. But he does demand that we keep moving in that direction, or as the good old **Methodist** phrase puts it, that we continue "groaning toward perfection."

At each step of the journey, the question that really matters is not whether we are a little farther along than some of our friends and neighbors, but how far we have progressed since yesterday. -- Louis Cassels

**B. The biblical term for the changing of a life from unholiness to holiness is sanctification**

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (NASB95)

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

2. Hebrews 12:14 (NASB95)

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

**C. The apostle Paul wanted his readers to know that the power of faith in God brought God's Own help to bear on our temptations**

1. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (NASB95)

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 and all ate the same spiritual food;

4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid

low in the wilderness.

6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY."

8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

2. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (NASB95)

3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil *one*.

#### IV. Are You Building On The True Source Of Faith?

##### A. The scriptures are our source for building faith

1. Romans 10:17 (NASB95)

17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

2. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB95)

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

##### B. Christians amaze me at times, not because of our brilliance or wise behavior, but because we demonstrate a serious lack of both when it comes to developing our faith

1. We'll read anything and seek advice from every source except the Bible

2. We substitute religious papers, journals and popular books for reading the Bible – in other words we read about the Bible, but we do not read the Bible

3. At the same time, we denigrate preaching, criticize sermons, and think Bible classes are only for new Christians

4. We love mental and spiritual independence, and actually demonstrate an attitude that says either that we can't understand the Bible, or that we all get to decide what it means to us

5. Quite frequently, we end up with a God of our own imagination rather than a God who reveals himself to us through his word

##### C. You want a strong faith – let God speak to your mind and heart through his word

## Conclusion

### A. Those are four good areas for some faith assessment

1. How secure are you in your salvation?
2. Do you trust God enough to pray?
3. Are you serious enough about your faith to change your life?
4. Are you building on the true source of faith?

### B. Since we're right at the start of a New Year, why not do this assessment now and get the Year off to a great start?

### C. Invitation