

WHAT IS FAITH?

A Christian Guidebook 6



T. M. Moore

A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *What Is Faith?*

Faith is not unique to the Christian life.

All religions operate on faith in something. Even secularists have faith, whether in their own wits and skills, their IRAs and pensions, their friends and loved ones, or any of a plethora of other things that people believe in for happiness.

So, what makes Christian faith different? How can we know, as Christians, that we have really believed?

Those are the questions we will address in this, Part 6, of our study, *A Christian Guidebook*.

This *Guidebook* is designed to help us be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us by reviewing essential Christian doctrines and shoring-up the Biblical foundations of each. Our goal is to lead you into the Word of God so that you can gain a clearer and more lively understanding of what we as Christians believe.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Two Facets of Faith

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11.1 (my translation)

A faith to live

In his classic book, *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer identified a problem affecting post-World War II Christians, one that continues into our own generation.

Tozer lamented the fact that, for too many believers, the life of faith was little more than an intellectual and subjective experience. The reality of Christ and His saving work was something to understand, consent to, and confess and, perhaps, to experience; however, to Tozer it seemed to have had little impact on the way Christians of his day lived. Tozer saw little evidence that believing in Jesus made a difference in people's lives.

For most of the Christians Tozer knew, the only *real* world was the world of sight, sound, and touch. The world where Christ rules at the right hand of God was not *real*, at least, not in the same way that the material world is *real*. He wrote, "Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We do not deny the existence of the spiritual world but we doubt that it is real in the accepted meaning of the word." He continued, "If we would rise into that region of light and power plainly beckoning us through the Scriptures of truth, we must break the evil habit of ignoring the spiritual. We must shift our interest from the seen to the unseen."

Assurance and evidence

In other words, true faith has a certain focus—the things that are above, as Paul defined them—and it issues in certain actions that give evidence of the reality of that unseen realm where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-3).

Tozer's understanding of the life of faith thus comports nicely with that of the writer of Hebrews. A literal translation of Hebrews 11.1 is, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith itself is a gift of God, the fruit of His grace working in our lives (Eph. 2:8, 9). Full faith, faith that saves and that continues increasing in salvation, consists of two aspects—assurance and evidence. Faith, the gift of God, has an inward and an outward dimension.

Assurance is an inward conviction, a sense of confidence, often accompanied by a sense of wellbeing. *Evidence* is something outward, something we can see, that can be observed and judged. True faith, therefore, consists both of an *inward assurance* of the truths we believe, and the *outward practice* of those convictions, so that the *evidence* of what we *confess* is on display in every aspect of our lives.

Having provided this definition, the writer of Hebrews next presents a kind of "Hall of Fame" of the faithful (Hebrews 11), showing by the example of well-known saints of old how what we *believe* is only brought to fullness by *the way we live*.

Full and lively faith—*true* faith—consists of two facets: the *content* of our faith—what we understand, believe, consent to, and feel assured of; and the *practice* of our faith—the evidence of our beliefs as this emerges in every area of life. The writer's definition of faith is consistent with what we read everywhere else in the Bible. True faith, *full* faith, faith that leads to salvation, eternal life, and ongoing sanctification, is not just a matter of intellectual consent and affective experience.

Merely *saying* that we believe, or even *feeling strongly* that we are in the favor of God can offer no assurance that we are true followers of Christ. We must have *full faith*—two-faceted faith—or we have *no faith at all*.

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Known by our fruit

Jesus concurs, for, as He said in Matthew 7.20, “by their fruits you shall know them.” Anyone can *say* he believes in Jesus and feel *sure* that his sins are forgiven and that he is going to heaven when he dies. But true faith is not simply this *assurance* of the things we hope for. It’s not just a good and comforting feeling. True faith is borne out in *evidence*, the evidence of a life wholly given over to the unseen Lord, a life dedicated to Him and devoted to the pursuit of His agenda, by His means, and for the sake of His outcomes and glory. A life of self-denial, cross-bearing, good works, and increasing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The apostle James says that if we profess to believe in God, that’s fine as a starting-point. But there needs to be evidence of the reality of that faith. Otherwise, faith in the Lord, having no evidence to demonstrate it, is simply dead and non-existent (Jms. 2.14-26).

Dead and non-existent, says James. Faith is not just something we affirm or feel. Faith results in a changed life that looks more and more like Jesus in all its aspects.

The challenge to us as followers of Jesus Christ is to make sure that what we profess and practice is true faith, *full* faith. Certainly we need a clear understanding of the Christian hope—the hope of glory and eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. That hope must be understood, embraced, nurtured, enlarged, and expanded day by day, using all the means the Lord has provided.

But that *assurance* of things hoped for, if it is real, will ultimately bring forth *evidence* that we are devoted to God and Christ, seeking to live increasingly “under the heavens”, and determined to bring the reality of the unseen realm to light in very concrete ways through our own words and deeds.

Full faith is two-dimensional, expressing an inward assurance and hope, and issuing in an outward life of devotion, service, witness, and love.

Search the Scriptures

1. How would you explain to an unbeliever what it means to “believe in Jesus”? What Scripture would you use?
2. Explain what it means to have *assurance* as part of one’s faith. Can you think of, say, a psalm that illustrates this?
- 3 Why do we insist that faith must also bring forth *evidence*? How can you see that in Ephesians 2.8-10?

Next steps—Conversation: Ask some of your Christian friends to explain the difference between assurance of faith and evidence of faith. How do they see these as fitting together?

2 Looking to Unseen Things

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. Hebrews 12.22-24

Eyes in our hearts

A. W. Tozer explained that the beginning of full faith is in looking beyond the things we can see to that realm of unseen things, where Jesus rules at the right hand of God. We must “see” Jesus as both Savior and Lord to embrace and receive Him, and to do that we must look on what is unseen with a heart of faith (Eph. 1.15-23). Unless we learn to live with a view to the then-and-there, we’ll never experience the power and joy of full faith now and here.

The writer of Hebrews says that this, after all, is where we have come to, if indeed, we have come to true saving faith. Because of our faith in Jesus, we can see beyond the veil that separates the material from the spiritual world (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We have an “eye” in our heart, Paul insisted (Eph. 1.18), by which, through faith, we may see realities beyond the material world which we know to exist because we know the Lord Jesus Christ, and He dwells there.

So real is this spiritual realm, and so vital to full faith, that the apostle Paul instructs us to “set our minds” on unseen things and to let these be the defining landmarks and guideposts of our faith (Col. 3.1-3). In Hebrews 12.2 the writer uses a participle—“fixing your eyes”—to describe what should be the *characteristic orientation* of our every waking moment.

True and full faith wants to say with David, “I have set the Lord always before me” (Ps. 16.8)

The unseen world

We will not know full faith in Christ, or the full and abundant life to which He has called us by grace through faith, if spiritual life consists of merely *inward understandings and assurances*, apart from the *outward evidence* of true saving faith. And that evidence will be impossible to realize to any extent until we fix the eye of our heart on Jesus Christ exalted in glory.

The unseen world of Jesus Christ, exalted at the Father’s right hand, is filled with angels celebrating and serving His every command, saints assembled before the throne of Christ, precious and magnificent promises, and a glorious City to Come. This is the world to which all have come who truly believe in Jesus Christ. This is our homeland and our destination. Our citizenship is lodged in this realm. Our lives are formed and shaped by the standards of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit which emanate from the glory of God and Christ.

If we are living full faith, having the eye of our heart fixed on the world of unseen things, the *reality* of that world and all its beauty, goodness, and truth will begin to be *evident* in our daily lives, filling our lives with the overflowing Presence of Jesus Christ (Jn. 7.37-39).

And especially of Jesus, exalted and ruling and exuding the glory of God and transforming us into His own image (2 Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Seeing the unseen

So what does this entail? How do we set our minds on this unseen realm and keep the eye of our heart focused there throughout the day? Let me suggest three critical components of a life fixed on unseen things.

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First, we must gain a better understanding of the landscape of unseen things—the true nature and composition of that realm to which we’ve come and into which God has conveyed us (Col. 1.13), especially the vision of Jesus exalted and reigning in glory. The writer of Hebrews sketches this in outline form in our text. Many other passages of Scripture—especially in the Psalms and Revelation—flesh out this landscape of unseen things. It is our duty to study and meditate and set these images, in particular the glory of God in the face of Jesus, as the backdrop for all our thinking and living (2 Cor. 4.6).

Second, we must labor to carry this vista with us throughout the day. This will require a different approach to the time of our lives. We may need to schedule new activities at various times of the day: brief retreats for prayer and learning the songs of saints past and present which celebrate this glorious realm and our place in it.

Ancient chants, great hymns of the past, spirituals, and even many contemporary praise songs can help, when coupled with intermittent prayer throughout the day, to keep us focused on our true provenance and citizenship. Learning to pray the psalms can be an especially helpful means of fixing our eyes on the unseen world to which we have come in Jesus Christ. Meditating on and memorizing passages that speak directly into this heavenly vista can also be important to help set our minds there.

We must take more seriously the disciplines of praying without ceasing and singing to the Lord and one another as ways of experiencing and expressing the fact that our lives are hidden in an unseen realm with Christ in God, and we are seated there with Him (Col. 3.3; Eph. 4.6).

Finally, seek opportunities to *talk with other believers* about the glories of this unseen realm—how it appears to you, how you experience and seek it, how thinking on the landscape of unseen things lends strength to your daily walk with the Lord.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. We will not make progress in realizing more mature faith unless we first begin to set our minds on the things that are above.

Search the Scriptures

1. What do you understand by “unseen” things? What Scriptures have guided your thinking about this realm?
2. Why should we expect looking on such “unseen” things to bring forth “evidence” in our lives? How do 2 Corinthians 4.6 and 16-18 lead us to think about this?
3. Meditate on 2 Kings 6.8-19. What’s the difference between those who can “see” the unseen world and those who cannot? Which are you?

Next steps—Preparation: Prepare a list of the “unseen things” that we should be “looking to” in order to develop a full faith. Talk with some Christian friends: To what extent, and in what ways, do these unseen things factor in their own lives?

3 Struggle and Work

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.
Hebrews 12.3

No easy road

The Christian life is not intended to be a life of ease. It is, rather, a life of struggle and work. We have not yet believed as we should until we have embraced this facet of faith. The evidence of a lively faith becomes visible through struggle and work.

We have been redeemed by Jesus Christ unto good works (Eph. 2.10); we must daily work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12); and we must not allow ourselves to grow weary or fainthearted in this high and holy calling (Gal. 6.9, 10). If we are fully assured that Christ has died for our sins and risen again that we might have life, then we will certainly apply ourselves diligently to the task of knowing more of His salvation day by day (Ps. 116.12-14).

We do not struggle and work to *gain* salvation; that comes to us by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2.8, 9). Rather, we struggle and work *because* we are saved, because being saved, we cannot help but long to know more of Jesus and to express the new life we have in works of love toward God and our neighbors (Eph. 2.10).

The Christian life is like running a marathon race or fighting in a battle raging against us on all fronts. Any other way of living the Christian life is not the life of full faith.

There are two aspects to the Christian life which make this struggle particularly difficult. First is the reality of sin. Even though Christians have been redeemed and forgiven of our sins, still, we continue to sin. If we say that we do not sin, we are kidding ourselves and lying to God (1 Jn. 1.8). A law of sin, which dominated our lives before Christ, continues to operate within us, reminding us of old and sinful pleasures and seeking to distract us from the pursuit of holiness in the fear of God (Rom. 7.21-23; 2 Cor. 7.1).

Moreover, the sinful world in which we live strews our paths each day with temptations, inviting us to walk in the ways of the flesh rather than the ways of the Lord (Gal. 5.16-23). The reality of sin exists within and everywhere around us, and we must resolve to struggle against it.

Second, spiritual forces of wickedness in high places assail us continuously, sometimes subtly at other times more dramatically, but always seeking to distract us from our concentration on the things of Christ and to divert us from the path He calls us to walk (Eph. 6.10-20; 1 Jn. 2.1-6).

If we're going to know full faith in Jesus Christ, we need to be prepared to struggle, both against the sin in our souls and the world and those spiritual forces that would deceive and derail us from our course and calling. We must work out our salvation in fear and trembling, for this is the mark and manifestation of true faith.

Be done with sin!

We are called to be done with sin, to lay it aside, even to hate it (Eph. 4.17-24; Ps. 97.10), and succeeding in this daily and ongoing challenge requires that we grow in the Lord and keep a close watch on all aspects of our daily lives (2 Pet. 3.18; Eph. 5.15-17).

If we truly believe in the Lord and are seeking to orient our lives according to the righteousness and peace and joy in the Spirit of His unseen realm, we will daily discover areas of our lives—thoughts, affections,

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priorities, and practices—that are out of accord with the ways of our glorious King Jesus. We must check these at once, confessing, as the Spirit searches us (Ps. 139.23, 24), all that is contrary to the Lord and His will, and taking up instead whatever things are holy and good and true in their place (Rom. 12.21; Phil. 4.8; Ps. 119.59, 60). Thus we struggle against lingering sin and work to become more like Jesus.

If we excuse sinful thoughts or practices by insisting that the Lord knows us and loves us just as we are, while we may feel *assured* that all is well with us and Him, the *evidence* coming forth in our lives will suggest otherwise. No struggle, no work, no cleansing or growth. It's that simple.

An ongoing struggle

“Fightings and fears, within, without”: This struggle against sinful ways will never be finished in this life, so we need to be ready to engage it every single day.

At the same time, we recognize and respond to the discipline of the Lord as He intervenes in our lives when, for whatever reason, our vigilance against sin has not been sufficient. The writer of Hebrews tells us to expect discipline from the Lord, and he warns us that such discipline is never pleasant (Heb. 12.3-11). The Lord's discipline goads and guides us to get back into the struggle and work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

God is determined to keep us on the path of righteousness, since this is the faith-evidence He seeks and the place where we can know fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Our Father will use a wide range of disciplines—including loss, setback, ill health, persecution, shame, defeat, confrontation, and more—to get us to see in our lives whatever He sees and is seeking to correct.

So let us prepare for struggle in this walk of faith. And let us take up the tools and disciplines for working out our salvation day by day. As we fix the eye of our heart on Jesus, let us be vigilant to confess and repent of all sin and to recognize and respond to the discipline of the Lord, so that we may bear up under it with thanks, praise, and circumspection, until He brings us to the progress He desires for us in knowing the life of full faith.

Search the Scriptures

1. In what ways do you experience this “struggle” of faith? Where do you turn in Scripture for strength to help you in the struggle?
2. How can believers prepare themselves to deal with the temptations they are sure to face every day (1 Corinthians 10.13)? Meditate on Psalm 73 as you think about your answer to this question.
3. How can looking on Jesus Christ and other unseen things help us prevail in the struggle for full faith? Why not memorize Psalm 16.8?

Next steps—Preparation: Where do you most expect to struggle and work as an aspect of your faith today? Can you identify some passages of Scripture to prepare and fortify you for this?

4 Worship along the Way

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12.28, 29

First and foremost

The Christian life is, first, foremost, and always, a life of worship. It comes to us by grace, is sustained and advanced in us by grace, and nurtures a life of good works by the grace of God. And the grace we know and which helps us grow so that our lives will show Jesus to others is unto praise and thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 4.15).

The fact that, through Jesus Christ, the believer has been ushered into the very Presence of God Himself, should be sufficient to inculcate a mood of worship in all we do (cf. Rom. 12.1, 2). As we meditate on the unseen realm, where Christ is seated next to the Father and in the Presence of the Holy Spirit, and where He and myriads of angels serve Him and multitudes of departed saints adore Him, our sense of wonder, awe, adoration, and, yes, fear should be greatly enhanced, leading to more spontaneous and ongoing worship as part of the evidence of our true and lively, full faith.

Our lives can resound with and express the ongoing cry of “Glory!” that characterizes the throne room of our God (cf. Ps. 29.9; cf. Rev. 4.8-11; 1 Cor. 10.31).

In our day most believers treat worship as an activity in their week rather than a way of life. Worship is what we do together on Sunday morning and perhaps one or two other times during the week. Worship may factor into part of our daily devotional time, for those, that is, who practice such a discipline (as all full-faith believers do).

But the idea that we are continuously in the Presence of the Lord—with Him where He is—seems hardly to impress the contemporary Christian. Which of us can say with the psalmist, “I have set the LORD always before me” (Ps. 16.8)? Do any of us see our lives from the vantage point of being seated with Jesus amid the glory cries of the heavenly hosts (Eph. 2.6)? If it were in fact the case that we had “set our minds” on unseen things and were continually “looking to Jesus,” it would doubtless be true that our frame of mind, and even our daily practices, would reflect a more worship-full approach to life.

Worship as work

The words “worship” and “work” are frequently associated in Scripture. Indeed, in the Hebrew language they share the same root word.

Worship is work, the most important of the “good works” for which we have been redeemed by the Lord (Eph. 2.10). Worship is the foundation of our love for God and of how we show that love. In worship we refocus our lives on our true citizenship and destination; we draw near to the Lord, exalted in glory, so that we might bask in His abundant beauty, goodness, and truth; we confess our sins, pour out our praises, bring offerings of thanks and song, and wait upon the Lord to search and shape us by His Word and Spirit. This is worship acceptable to God, the worship which we have been redeemed to express as our primary work of full faith.

The acceptable worship God requires of us is not only acceptable on the Lord’s Day, however. It is acceptable and expected all along the way in our walk with Jesus as the most important way we experience living in a realm of realities *unseen* as well as *seen* (cf. Rom. 12.1, 2).

Worship is the quintessential way of expressing full faith.

Worship throughout the day

The Scriptures suggest various ways we might bring worship more consistently into our daily lives, all day long.

First, as previously mentioned, we might follow the example of Biblical saints, as well as of saints throughout the ages of Church history, and establish set times to meet with God for meditation and prayer each day (cf. Ps. 55.16, 17; Dan. 6.10; Acts 3.1). By retreating into the Lord for ten or fifteen minutes at various times during the day—in meditation, by praying a psalm, or by offering up your next activity to the Lord in prayer—we continuously renew and reinforce the spiritual foundation and framework of our lives and are refreshed by the spiritual resources God has provided.

In addition, learning and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—which Paul described as evidence of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21)—can create a *continuo* of praise beneath and throughout the activities of our day. We're not much used to singing to the Lord other than at Sunday worship. But this is a discipline which has refreshed and sustained saints throughout the ages, and it's one we can benefit from as well.

Finally, making a point to speak with, encourage, and pray with other believers during the day can also keep us in a mode of worship and connect us with the unseen realities that define our lives. Find a soul friend to meet with weekly for prayer. Pray for the people around you all day, and tell them you do. Ask for prayer requests and invite fellow believers to join you for a few moments of giving praise and thanks to God.

Our God is a consuming fire, and He calls us to worship Him, not just as a regular activity in our week, but as a way of life. Worship throughout the day—and an attitude that inclines to worship continually, even in the midst of every other activity—is a fruit and evidence of full faith.

But we must work hard at this, just as at every other facet of our walk with and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Search the Scriptures

1. How would you explain the idea of “worship” to a new believer? What is worship? Why does it matter? How should we do it? To what Scriptures would you point to support your explanation?
2. What do you think should be the relationship between worship on the Lord's Day and daily worship? How does Romans 12.1, 2 teach us to think about this?
3. Spend a little more time meditating on Romans 12.1, 2. How does Paul's teaching here support the idea of worship “along the way”? What's “reasonable” about this?

Next steps—Demonstration: Jot down one or two of the ideas suggested in this column for bringing worship more consistently into your daily life. Practice these for the next few days, and then share your experience of doing so with a Christian friend.

5 Love One Another

Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also. Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Hebrews 13.1-4

All you need

Back in the '60s, when the Age of Aquarius was still trying to be born, pop singers pled with their audiences to help build a more loving world. “All you need is love,” the Beatles insisted. “What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” crooned Dionne Warwick.

Of course, the world did not become a more loving place, all that schmaltzy music notwithstanding. Pop music today doesn't sing much of a world of love; its focus is more individual, sensual, and debased. If we can't have a world of love, then let's just get whatever we can while we can. That seems to be the sentiment pervading much of contemporary life and culture.

But the world still knows that love is the answer. It just doesn't have any effectual means for how to make love happen.

Francis Schaeffer wrote that love is the quintessential mark of Christian faith (*The Mark of the Christian*), the evidence of full faith in full flower. He was right, of course. The writer of Hebrews therefore reminds us that when we rightly worship God we will also love our neighbors as ourselves. Full faith, faith that practices unseen realities, will issue in love—both for God, and for our neighbor.

Whom to love

Note the different people toward whom the believer is to direct his love, as suggested in our text.

First, to fellow Christians: “Let brotherly love continue.” Some of us might want to ask, “When did it ever begin?” Do the people in your church seem genuinely to love one another? Do they even know one another? And what about the other churches in town? Does the love of Christ connect the congregations in your community in an ongoing effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3)? Probably not. But love toward our fellow believers is the starting point for a life of love. If we cannot love those who share our faith in Jesus, how will we ever find a way to love the last, the least, and lost among us?

Second, the writer urges love toward perfect strangers—the guy at the checkout counter, the clerk at the post office, the fellow in line behind you, new neighbors on your street. Hospitality is not just a discipline we practice in our home. Wherever we encounter strangers, they should experience from us the sense of integrity, worth, and value that we acknowledge in them as image-bearers of God.

Next, we are to love the outcasts of society—prisoners and those who are mistreated in one way or another. This is a large category of people who need the love of the Christian community, including the poor, those who are abused or abandoned, believers persecuted for their faith in other countries, people who are taken advantage of by their employers or co-laborers—even those who rail against our faith in Jesus Christ. Justice and love require that we exercise the faith of Jesus in showing concern for and working to relieve the plight of those who suffer in various ways.

Finally, we need to practice love in our homes, beginning with our spouses. Here I'm sure we could all use a refresher course on showing the love of Christ to those closest to us. If we honor our marriages and the families that derive from them, we will work hard to make the love of Christ the foundational principle and constant atmosphere of our homes.

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All this we must learn to do without so much as coveting a grateful response (v. 5). We are content to know that the Lord sees our work of love and that He will never leave nor forsake us.

Make love your aim!

But where can we learn to love like this? First, by fixing your mind on Jesus in all His glory you can begin to delight in the One Who *is* love, so that meditating on His glory becomes a transforming experience of love in your soul (2 Cor. 3.12-18). The first fruit of the Spirit, and therefore the first evidence of true faith, is love; and we cannot learn to love without learning Him Who is love. Meditating on Jesus, singing to Jesus, sweetly rehearsing His many beautiful, righteous, and good attributes can help us grow in love for Him.

Second, take up the counsel of the psalmist and begin meditating on the Law of God daily (Ps. 1). All that God teaches us about love is grounded on a right understanding of His Law, as understood and interpreted by the rest of Scripture (Matt. 22.34-40). If we neglect the Law of God, we cannot expect to have the mind or power of God's Spirit working in us toward full faith (Rom. 8.5-9). The Spirit yearns to teach us the Law of God, so that the works of the Law can flow from us, in Him, like rivers of living water (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Jn. 7.37-39).

Finally, plan for love. Look ahead at each day and consider the opportunities for love you will have. Prepare for these by seeking the Lord, thinking through His Word, and considering what you know about the people you will encounter—how best to love each one. Ask the Lord to establish the work of love for all your daily activities, and He will surely help you every moment (Heb. 13.6; Ps. 90.16, 17).

Love requires that we do good and share with others (Heb. 12.16), and that we encourage and assist one another in bringing forth full-faith evidence of good works, out of the inward assurance we have in Jesus (Heb. 10.24).

This is pleasing to God and part of the evidence of full faith at work in our lives. Make love your aim, and aim it wherever you can.

Search the Scriptures

1. Meditate on John 13.1-15. What would you say are the key components of love as we see them here?
2. What are the primary obstacles Christians need to overcome in showing love to the people around them? Suggest some ways of overcoming these, and use Scripture in your suggestions.
3. How does the calling to love relate both to the *assurance* of full faith and the *evidence* of it?

Next steps—Transformation: Who are the people in your life who should most consistently experience the love of Jesus through you? On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the best rating, how are you doing? For each person, pick one way you might show the love of Jesus more consistently each time you see him or her. Then get going!

6 Follow the Leaders

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13.17

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5.12, 13

The problem with authority

In our day “authority” has become a kind of four-letter word. Those who serve in authoritative roles—police, public officials, credentialed professionals, parents—are looked askance at and vilified, especially if they try to wield their authority without due regard for the presumed autonomy of those in their charge.

Those in places of authority are routinely mocked, cursed, and opposed by people who don't give a fig for their authority and think we all ought to have an equal voice in pretty much everything.

The sad thing is, many of those in authority—including leaders in the church—have earned the scorn of those they're called to serve by failing to fulfill their service as unto the Lord.

In the Church we're particularly squeamish about authority, and one reason is because, in recent years, many who have been invested with authority in the churches—pastors, priests, evangelical leaders—have proven themselves unworthy of that trust.

In most churches I suspect we prefer to think of “leaders” rather than “authorities.” Leaders have to earn the right to be followed, which, in our day, they typically do by being energetic, visionary, funny, and people-oriented (“-pleasing”). And even then, following a leader is strictly optional, if we think there's some benefit in it for us. Church leaders have authority only as long and as far as the people are willing to extend it to them, and so they're always running things up the flagpole to make sure folks are going to salute before they launch off in some new direction.

A leader, we can choose to follow or no, depending on whether we're willing to go where he or she is leading. But to an *authority* we must submit, even if only grudgingly, because they have the power to admonish, hold us to an account, and bring us to discipline. And submitting is not exactly high on our list of things to do, even when our “leaders” fulfill their duty of watching over our soul.

Submit we must

But submit we must, even in the Church. We show that we believe the Lord and trust in His Word, and we demonstrate the evidence of that faith when we submit to our church leaders *as unto the Lord* (Col. 3.23, 24). Submitting to proper authorities is an integral component of full faith. If we want to gain the benefit God intends for us from those appointed to lead, we're going to have to learn to submit. *Not* to submit is sin, since it involves disobedience to God's Word. But for many of us, it's a sin we think we can excuse.

Of course, we must only submit to *anyone* as we would to the Lord Himself, that is, when they are acting as His servants on our behalf and for His glory. Church leaders must submit to the Lord and His shepherding will and guidelines, or they will fall afoul of His grace and forbearance (Ezek. 34.1-10).

When we submit to another person we extend a high degree of trust to them, acknowledging our need of their insights, skills, and other endowments. In the military, soldiers submit to their platoon and squad leaders because this is the best way to save their own lives. On an athletic team the players submit to the coach. In the Church believers are called to submit to their leaders because this is an important way to express and to

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realize a healthy soul and full faith in Jesus Christ.

But with so many voices clamoring for our attention, urging us to follow them—frequently couched in terms requiring donations to their work—how can we know who the real leaders are?

Tests for real leaders

Our texts suggest concrete tests for real leaders. First, they teach the Word of God faithfully (Heb. 13.7). They aren't trying to impress anyone with how clever, witty, or visionary they are personally. Their desire is that the Word of Christ might dwell in people richly, and all their teaching is based on that holy and inspired Word (Col. 3.16).

Second, their lives exemplify the things they teach (Heb. 13.7). True leaders are people whom, as you follow them, you begin to become like in ways that reflect full faith in Jesus Christ (Jn. 13.1-15).

Third, true leaders care for our souls (Heb. 13.17; 1 Thess. 5.12, 13). They are interested in us, want to get to know us, do everything they can to serve and build us up; and they will go the extra mile when necessary to help us become people of full faith in Jesus.

Such people—teachers of God's Word, examples of full faith living, and earnest shepherds—can be trusted, followed, and submitted to in the confidence that God will use them for good in our lives. Our faith grows and matures as we follow the teaching of Scripture and submit to those God has appointed to care for and lead us.

Submitting to such leaders is yet another *evidence* that we have a faith that is not only *assured* of hope but is a living force in our everyday lives.

Search the Scriptures

1. According to Paul (1 Tim. 3.1-13) what qualifies a person for leadership in a local church?
2. J. I. Packer wrote that every believer is a leader of someone else. As followers of Jesus, we are all leaders. Review the tests for leaders cited in this meditation. How do you match up to these?
3. What should you do and what can you do to help your church's leaders fulfill their calling?

Next steps—Transformation: How would you describe your attitude toward church leaders? Are you supportive? Grateful? Critical? Pray that God will give you the grace to submit to authorities according to His Word.

7 Do Not Be Led Astray!

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. Hebrews 13.9

Difficult and demanding

The course of life is long, and the course of the Christian life is difficult and demanding. We can expect many distractions along the way—subtle voices telling us that concentrating on unseen things is folly, that if God really loved you He wouldn't make your life so difficult, that worship on Sunday is sufficient, that others should be loving and sharing with you rather than you taking all the initiative, that you don't need to submit to any church leaders, and that you don't need more teaching from the Word, or that you can decide for yourself just what the Christian life really ought to be.

There will be no shortage of voices suggesting that this “full faith” enterprise isn't worth it, and that all you have to do anyway is just believe.

Such voices, however, are not those of the Word of God. They are the winds of doctrine that blow continually around, over, and through the Church, enticing gullible believers to embrace something other than the teaching of Christ and the apostles (Eph. 4.14). Their source is not the God of Scripture but the father of lies.

Against such voices the writer of Hebrews commands that we “not be carried” away.

False teachers in every age

In every age there have been smart, clever, articulate, and persuasive false teachers who have led many believers into a compromised faith. They use all the language of Scripture and elevate the Name of Jesus, but their teaching departs from the truth of Scripture in subtle ways, and those who follow them never quite get around to knowing full and abundant life in Christ. They speak the language of grace and love and attract devoted followers of all kinds. But they are winds of false doctrine, and we must not hoist the sails of full faith into them. If we do so, and continue to do so, allowing our “faith” to be defined by false winds of doctrine, we will prove that our “faith” is in fact no true faith at all.

The writer of Hebrews is as urgent about this as Paul and Peter and John: Do not allow yourself to come under the thrall of false teachers, no matter how appealing they may be, for you will not attain full faith in Christ by sitting at their feet.

So how do we keep ourselves from being led astray by false teaching?

By pursuing full faith in Christ day by day! The only way to keep from being blown off the course in the race we have been appointed to run is to make sure that we are *staying* on that course, day-in and day-out. This means ongoing attention to both facets of full faith—making *sure* of the *hope* we have in Jesus Christ, and *working* to bring forth the *evidence* of that hope in every aspect of our lives.

A full-time calling

Living the Christian life is a full-time endeavor. The tendency among so many contemporary Christians is to live their lives in niches—work life, family life, avocations and diversions, church and Christianity, and so on. The only thing that connects and drives all these niches is the personality and desires of each person who lives this way, not faith in Jesus Christ.

As many studies and polls have shown over the years, the vast majority of those who profess to be born-again followers of Jesus Christ lead lives which are barely distinguishable from their wrong-believing contemporaries. They spend their money in the same way, watch as much television, participate in the same

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diversions, spend as much time cruising the Internet, incur as much debt, and divorce at about the same rate.

This is because they're living their "faith" in a niche—the niche of church and Christian activities. This is where they do their "Christian thing." The rest of their lives seem hardly affected by their profession of faith in the King of glory. They're living *niche* faith rather than *full* faith, and niche faith may well be no faith at all.

If this is how you live, then you will certainly be vulnerable to being blown off the course of full and vibrant Christian faith. Our Lord Jesus has redeemed, not just the souls of those who believe in Him, but their whole lives. He has reconciled us, whole and part, back to God, and He is now in the business, by His Word and Spirit, of making all things new in our lives. We who have faith in Jesus are called to join Him in restoring the reconciled world, beginning with our own lives.

Assured of eternal life because we have trusted in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we must now be about the business, as Paul puts it (Phil. 2.12), of working out—*out*, not *for*—our salvation day by day. We must strive to yield all our relationships, roles, responsibilities, possessions, and time to the Lord Jesus Christ. From these various staging-grounds, assured of the hope of glory in Jesus (Rom. 5.1, 2), we may show the watching world the reality of full faith, evidenced in the undeniable power of transformed lives.

Live this way—live full faith!—and you will not be led astray but will grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and be fit and ready to serve Him day by day.

Search the Scriptures

1. How might you be able to tell when you were beginning to be "led away" into something other than full faith?
2. How can Christians help one another in keeping to the path of full faith? Can you cite some Scripture to support your answer?
3. What is faith? How would you explain faith to a friend who was interested in becoming a Christian? What Scripture would you cite?

Next steps—Transformation: Do you have a soul friend or a prayer partner? If not, find one. Prayer partners and soul friends can be valuable assets in the journey of faith.

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For reflection or discussion

1. What are the two dimensions of full faith? What part does each of these play in the life of faith?
2. What obstacles must we overcome in striving daily to increase in full faith?
3. Why do you suppose so few Christians today seem concerned to press on (Phil. 3.14) to full faith?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

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Thank you.