A Strong Faith

August 28, 2016

Ephesians 2:1-10

In the beginning, it wasn’t enough for God to just make a body when He created man. He made him a spirit, a soul, and a body. And that hasn’t changed. Each person born into to the world today is a spirit, a soul, and a body.

Each of you here today is able to know God and be aware of His existence. And with your spirit, you know before you sin that that sin is wrong. And, with your spirit you feel guilt afterwards if you do commit sin. You also can know when your spirit has been cleansed by the blood of Christ. And with your spirit you worship and serve and love God.

Your soul, on the other hand, is your personality; what makes you you. All you think and feel and decide; as you use your mind, your emotions, and your will, your soul is expressing itself.

Now, your body is your physical being. You know when you are cold and when you’re too warm. You sometimes feel ill. Whatever pertains to the physical universe surrounding you is felt and known by your God-created and God-designed physical body.

So, what did God do when He made Adam? He made him a wonderful unity of these three things; spirit, soul, and body. And, as God’s created being, you function best as one unit by being three parts. You are a spiritual, personal, and physical entity.

Another way of putting it is this. You are three in one. Sometimes you’ll read theologians refer to this as the triune nature of man. And, in God's wonderful design, you aren’t even aware of it. You just live because you are fearfully and wonderfully made. So, in one sense you are a spirit; a soul; and a physical being. Yet, you function as one unit.

Today’s sermon is this; “A Strong Faith.” And I’d like to focus your heart and mind on this question “Where does faith fit in? Is it in your spirit? Is it in your soul? Or, is it in your body? Or, is it all three? And the answer might surprise you. Shall we pray?

Let’s open our Bibles together to I Thessalonians chapter three and follow as I begin reading at verse one. Now, before I read, I want to ask you to look for Paul’s teaching on faith.

I Thessalonians 3:1 *“Wherefore when we [Paul and his companions] could no longer forbear [wait], we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; (2) And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning* ***your faith****: (3) That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.”*

Now, as I read these passages with you, notice how much the Holy Spirit is concerned with your faith.

Here it is in verse two. I Thessalonians 3:2 *“...to establish you, and to comfort you concerning* ***your faith****:...”*

Now, move down to verse five *(5) “For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know* ***your faith****, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.”*

And look further on down to verse six. *(6) “But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of* ***your faith*** *and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:…”*

And look at verse seven. (*7) “Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by* ***your faith****:...”*

How concerned are you about your faith? And are you concerned for anyone else’s faith?” Probably most of your time you have your own life on the top of your agenda. But, you might just be missing out on a rich blessing by being concerned for the faith that is in the other people in your life.

The Apostle Paul, as you know, was a man with a heart for others. Here we find him concerned about the faith of the Christians in the Church at Thessalonica. He had been to Thessalonica. He’s seen people saved and baptized. And he’d seen a Church established there. Now, he’d moved on.

But Paul was not one to forget his own children. His heart was always towards the hearts of those God had given to him. He knew what you and I might be missing out on; that the thing that really matters in the lives of those around you is their faith. Because without it, according to the words of Hebrews 11:6, you can’t please God. With it, you are free to let God have His way with you. You are able to function with God’s hand upon you when you live and walk by faith.

Now, as you know, God is invisible. We know this from John 4:24. *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”*

So, the invisible God can only be worshipped with your spirit. And the one thing that must live inside your spirit is the truth.

So, here’s what’s on my heart today. First of all, faith is an operation of your spirit.

When the LORD created you He designed you for worship. And, being that He is the Invisible God, how else could you worship Him except with your spirit? You and I worship an invisible person. For example, when you say “I believe whatever God says,” you are expressing something from your spirit.

Let me try to illustrate your spirit for you. Try to imagine, for just a moment, that God doesn’t exist. You see, your spirit is part and parcel of what you are. And just like your personality and your body are the direct creation of an All-mighty, All-powerful Creator, so your spirit was created by an All-mighty, All-powerful, all-present Creator. So you recognize Him as He is: The invisible Creator. And you recognize yourself as *His* creation. How? By your spirit.

You live and walk by faith. Acts 17:28 *“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (280 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”*

Hebrews 11:27 *“By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”*

Your spirit is that part of you that makes you aware that God is here. He is present even though He’s invisible. And, consider this. In just one brief second of time, you can speak to Him either in your thoughts or in an audible voice, and you sense that He hears and that He’s listening to you.

So, as you can plainly see, faith is an operation of your spirit. It’s an expression of your spirit. Now, it’s true that you soul is involved with your faith. But, true faith works inside your spirit.

On the other hand, doubt is an operation of your mind. When you doubt, you are allowing your mind, or your emotions, or your will to rule over your spirit. As a matter of fact, you can’t make your mind accept what you don’t believe. We’ve all tried it. But that’s not the way God made you. So, although this sounds a bit psychological, don’t try to convince your mind of something you aren’t sure of in your spirit.

Now, what did Paul do soon after he left the city of Thessalonica? He sent send someone back to check on the people who had become Believers in Christ. And what was Timothy to concern himself with. He was to concern himself with their faith. Look again at verse one.

I Thessalonians 3:1 *“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear [wait], we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; (2) And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God,...”*

Did you notice that line “when we could no longer forbear...?” What did Paul mean by this? He meant that he was so concerned that he could no longer wait to find out how the Christians back in Thessalonica were doing.

So, he’s concerned about their faith. You too must be concerned about the faith of those the LORD has brought into your life.

Now, turn back with me to I Thessalonians 2:17. *“But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. 18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.”*

After just a few weeks pass and Paul is concerned for the Christians in Thessalonica. Paul wanted to see them. And, more importantly, he wanted to know how they were faring spiritually.

So, verse one, *“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear...”* ; when he and Silas couldn’t wait for a letter to arrive, (they couldn’t wait any longer for news), he sends his co-worker Timothy back to the city of Thessalonica to quote “check on their faith.”

Now, why? Why should you and I or why should Paul be so concerned about the faith of those people the LORD brings into our lives?

Here’s why. Because we know that the only way they will grow in their relationship with the LORD is as they learn the joy of living and walking by faith. Isn’t that what he says in verse two? I Thessalonians 3:2 *“And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:...”*

Whatever was going on when Timothy arrived back in Thessalonica, he was there to help them with their faith” to “establish” and to “comfort” them concerning their faith.

First, then, faith is an operation of your spirit.

Second, God’s ideal for you is that you become strong in faith. Look again at Paul’s message to the Thessalonians. I Thessalonians 3:1 *“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; (2) And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to* ***establish*** *you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:…”*

Do you see that term “establish”?

It simply means to “strengthen.”

Here’s how Jesus uses this very same term. And it’s translated “strengthen.” Luke 22:32 *“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”*

This word comes from the farmer’s backyard. It means “to make upright and immovable." Haven't you at some time tied a tomato plant to a stake? Why did you do that?

Here's why. You want your tomato plant to become strong and straight and firm. You want it to be capable of producing good tomatoes. That’s what Paul wanted for his “Thessalonian tomato plants.” That's what this term “establish" means.

I hope someone has a wish and a prayer that your faith would be strong. But whose faith are you concerned about? Are you working towards the strengthening of someone else’s faith?

The opposite of “strong” in the faith means this. Turn with me to II Peter 2:14 *“Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable (not established) souls:*…”

And II Peter 3:16 *“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”*

This term “unstable” is the exact opposite of the term “establish” that we find here in I Thessalonians 3. So, what does the LORD want for you? What does He want for each of His children when it comes to your faith? His ideal is that your faith be strong. Rather than being unstable, you can be strong in faith.

And folks, there's really only one way for your faith to become stable. It’s found in the Book of Romans. Romans 10:17 *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

Just passing through difficult times doesn't always strengthen your faith. What strengthens you is when a particular principle of passage of Scripture can be applied in your life *while* you are going through the trial.

A lady was having an elegant dinner party and wanted to serve mushrooms, but was a little uncertain about the mushrooms, so she fed some to the dog. He ate them and everything seemed all right, so she went ahead and prepared the mushrooms served her dinner. During the party the maid hurried to the hostess and said, “The dog is dead. All the guests rushed to the hospital and had their stomachs pumped. After the confusion was over, the maid was heard to say, “I never got a chance to tell you with all the confusion. But the dog has been run over by a car.” [Found on [www.focusongod.com](http://www.focusongod.com)].

Faith hears. But faith, as an operation of your spirit, listens to the words of Scripture and looks for a way to apply it.

In Romans 10:14 we read this. *“(14) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

*(15) And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

Your faith grows according to not just what you hear; but when you hear the Word of God.

First, faith is an operation of your spirit.

Second, God’s ideal for you is that you become strong in faith.

Third, your faith will be tested. Look with me again at I Thessalonians 3:3 *“That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. (4) For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.”*

Folks, you and I have been appointed unto afflictions. But look a bit closer at verse three. You've also been given the means by which your afflictions will not move you.

What Paul means is this. When you've got challenges and trials in your life, move ahead by faith.

Sometimes Christians foolishly ask “why is my faith being tested?” Or “Why am I going through these things?”

Christian, stop thinking it’s unusual or out of the ordinary for your faith to be tested. Stop assuming that afflictions are not part of the Christian life. Listen to the truth of the Word of God on this matter.

I Peter 4:12 *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: (13) But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”*

Here’s a word from Psalm 34:19 *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”*

Here’s what your daily practice should look like. Colossians 1:24 *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:...”*

II Timothy 1:8 *“... but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;...”*

II Timothy 3:11 *“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.”*

II Timothy 4:5 *“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, ...”*

Stop thinking “Something's wrong with my walk with the LORD. I'm going through a lot of trials and troubles.”

Instead, recognize the simple fact that true faith is always tested. God’s ideal, remember, is that you become “strong in faith.”

And the reason your faith is being put through trials and tests is so that you will see that reliance upon the LORD is the only way to live the Christian life. There’s no other way.

Here’s what we know about that great leader Abraham. Romans 4:20 *“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;...”*

What did Abraham have that you don’t have? Did he have a copy of the Scriptures? No. Did he have godly friends that would keep him on the right track? No. Did he have a Pastor or spiritual leader to encourage him? No. He had this though. He had God’s word. He had God’s promises.

Do you remember a line from the Book of Ephesians that goes like this “Be strong in the LORD”? In simple words that means this. Live by faith. Believe God. Trust God. Go to the LORD with your trial and your trouble. And cast all your cares upon Him.

Offer Him your whole spirit and your whole soul and your whole body. Ask Him to work out His will upon you. And, as you now know, His will that you be strong in faith.

Let me say it again. “Stop believing that afflictions are not part of the Christian life. But when you experience them, go to the LORD with them.”

One day the Apostle Peter experienced just this very thing. Here’s what we read in Luke 22. Luke 22:31 *“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: (32) But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: ...”* You’ve got Someone praying for you just like Peter had Someone praying for him.

First, faith is an operation of your spirit.

Second, God’s ideal for you is that you become strong in faith.

Third, your faith will be tested.

Fourth, your Father is most honored and highly pleased when you choose to walk by faith. Hebrew 11:6 *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*

What do you think of that? God says it’s impossible.

How many here today are attempting something impossible? Trying to live to please God and not simply trusting Him?

Your Father wants to be pleased. But it's not by trying so hard and letting yourself get so discouraged that you quit. It’s not by hoping that you are pleasing Him. He’s not interested in your trying to do things apart from faith. That, folks, is doing the impossible.

And last, there’s one thing you might have overlooked. Romans 14:23 *“... for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”*

That is a very bold statement. And the implication is this. “Why do you think you can move ahead in your life (in any area) when you won't go ahead by faith in the LORD?”

How would you like to really please your Heavenly Father? Here’s how. Stop your life long enough today to ask yourself this question, “Am I trusting the LORD right now? Am I trusting Him in the midst of my trials and afflictions?”

Folks, check your spirit. Is there faith in it this morning? Your faith, remember, is an operation of your spirit. Your faith is what God wants to increase. Your faith grows as you live according to His words.

Now, let me add a final word here. I want to add a word here about doubt. Doubt, folks, is an expression of your mind.

There’s a story given in the NT about Peter walking on the water. Here it is.

Matthew 14:22 *“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. (23) And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. (24) But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. (25) And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

*(26) And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. (27) But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. (28) And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

*(29) And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. (31) And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”*

Didn't you ever wonder why the LORD asked Peter “Why did you doubt?" Here's why. When you go ahead with faith, you are acting from your spirit. When you doubt, you are acting from your mind. There may be room in your mind for doubt. But there’s not room for it in your spirit.

Jesus says this in Luke 12:29 *“... neither be ye of doubtful mind.”*

First, faith is an operation of your spirit.

Second, God’s ideal for you is that you become strong in faith.

Third, your faith will be tested.

Fourth, faith is what most honors and pleases your Father.

So, what will it be today? Will you take God at His Word and trust Him to accomplish His will upon you? Today you have a choice.

Today is the day to believe His Word and respond to Him.

Will you submit your heart to the LORD and walk with Him by faith? Will you let Him have His way today?

Here it is again. I call it the Prayer of Surrender. It’s a wonderful prayer and I’m sure it honors the LORD when you pray it and truly mean it. “LORD, I submit all that I am to you; my spirit, my soul, and my body. Do with me what is most pleasing to you. Work out Your will upon me today.”

And always remember that when you don’t go His way, He’s always ready to take you back and get you back on track Here’s His word. I John 1:8 *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

He’s the Forgiver. The blood of Christ is enough. Christ’s crucifixion and His shed blood are for you.

Now you can see why I often ask this question. “If you died today, are you certain that you would enter the Gates of Heaven? Either you are relying on the work of Jesus on the Cross of your eternal security or you are relying on your good efforts to get in? Which is it?

Now, it may be that you are not a Believer in Jesus Christ thus far in your life. And the question, of course, is, “Why not?” What are you allowing to hinder you from turning to Jesus Christ and receiving His free gift of eternal security?

The Bible is just as plain about this. Today is the day of Salvation. What will you do about the condition of your heart for eternity

 The one eternal matter that stands between you and God is the matter of sin. And Jesus has already gone to the cross to take care of that for you.

So, here's what you need to do.

REPENT

BELIEVE

Here’s a simple salvation prayer for you to pray if you’ve never trusted the LORD for His free gift of eternal life.

T‬he moment you repent and believe on Jesus Christ, you are declared righteous in God’s sight and you truly enter into a love relationship with God for eternity. And you are saved by that love for eternity. Have you prayed the sinner’s prayer? Have you come into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ? If not, why not?

Shall we pray?

Would you take your hymnal and turn with me to Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

“Within man’s spirit there are three functions: **conscience**, enabling man to know what God justifies and what He condemns (Rom. 9:1

**Rom. 9:1** I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit,

[See More](http://online.recoveryversion.org/txo/45_Romans9.htm#9:1)

Verses accessed from the Holy Bible Recovery Version (text-only edition) © 2012 Living Stream Ministry www.lsm.org

 and note 2) **fellowship**, that man may contact God, worship God commune with God (John 4:24; Eph. 6:18a; Rom. 1:9); and **intuition**, giving man a direct sense of  God and a direct knowledge from God (Mark 2:8; 1 Cor. 2:11). [Found on [www.holdingtotruth.com](http://www.holding) Footnote 5, on [Genesis 2:7](http://online.recoveryversion.org/bibleverses.asp?fvid=7996&lvid=7996)  in the [Recovery Version](http://www.recoveryversion.org/)].