

What would you have done? Christianity was at a precipice. Its very existence seemed to be in danger. I was desperate to take care of Jesus' precious bride, the Church, but had no answers. I went down on my knees, calloused from prayer, and begged Holy Spirit to give me clarity on what to do. And he did.

Holy Spirit assured me that what I saw as a problem was just the normal progression of events that had been ordered by God eons ago. He gave me the solution of a weapon of spiritual warfare that would be the most powerful weapon ever used. I was going to be one of the first of many people to wield this weapon, so I needed to be a good example. What was the weapon? A...simple...letter.

For the first decade of its existence, the Church was comprised almost entirely of Jews who followed Jesus. We knew the Old Testament Scriptures and were able to participate in most of the benefits of the complex Jewish social structure. Even though many of us lived outside of Jerusalem, everyone relied on the direction of the apostles and Jewish leaders, many of whom lived in Jerusalem.

In the second decade of its existence, the Church added many non-Jews to its membership. Peter's conversion of Cornelius started the change, and Paul's preaching increased the speed at which non-Jews were added.

As the leader of the Church in Jerusalem, I saw things differently than most. I saw that our efforts with the Jews had reached a point of diminishing returns. We had saturated the market. Most of the Jews who might become Christians had already converted, and the rest were resistant, if not antagonistic to hearing our message. I saw that the Jerusalem Church leaders were losing their ability to influence and control the Gospel message as Christianity went to non-Jews living further away from Israel. I saw that the Jerusalem Church members were financially impoverished and in desperate need of help.

It was the year 49 AD, and we leaders had just finished the Council at Jerusalem where we decided that non-Jewish Christians did not have to follow the Laws of Moses, especially the rite of circumcision. Holy Spirit revealed to me that this was the turning-point for Christianity. No longer would we leaders at Jerusalem control the content and message of the Gospel. No longer would we direct the daily lives of so many Christians. In order for the Church to grow, it would have to be done in such a way that each Church would be independent and responsible for itself.

In your terms, we needed to go from a centralized organization to a decentralized organization. A more flattened leadership model. That would allow the Church to grow rapidly, but it would come with the costs of more chaos, more church failures, and less control over the content of the Gospel message.

I was old and tired, and was more than happy to give up control. But I was scared for the welfare of my flock. Not my flock in Jerusalem, but for the world-wide flock of Christians. How would they flourish without the constant leadership of the apostles and Jerusalem leaders?

The Holy Spirit laughed when he heard my concern. When you hear Holy Spirit laugh, you know everything is well. He pointed out that the apostles and leaders were old and dying off anyway. They were scattered as they went to other countries spreading the Gospel. He showed me that the old way was finishing and a new way was beginning. Not only would the Church grow by converting non-Jews, but the leadership of the Church would move to local leaders guided through written letters and accounts which he, the Holy Spirit, would inspire. This was not Plan B, this was the progression of Plan A that had been in effect for eons.

Holy Spirit told me that I was to write a letter giving necessary counsel for all future churches and Christians. In one short scroll, I was to pass along everything I thought important. Being a practical, and not a highly educated man, I had no choice but to pass along the things I knew had been important to lives of the people in my flock. I wasn't qualified to address the new problems that would arise as Christianity spread, just the problems that I had been addressing as leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

As I started writing the letter, it became obvious that I had to write in generalities. I did not have the ability to address little details or to talk about things that were obvious. What should I include? What was important to write about, and what should be excluded? Where should I start?

One thing I knew from past experience was that most problems had a common root...and it could be described in one word: faith and faithfulness.

Wait a minute you say, that's two words. I said the secret is one word, and that is true. In the Hebrew language, the words faith and faithfulness were the same word. In other words, faith did not mean "mental assent" like many in your culture take it to be. Faith meant "acting in accordance with your belief."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> You can see that in your NIV versions of the Bible, where they interchange the words in various versions over time in verses such as Habakkuk 2:4, the original verse that says, "the righteous person will live by faith/faithfulness."

If that causes you a lot of angst, perhaps you should stop and ponder for a while why it does. Paul and I were not in disagreement about the subject of faith, we just defined faith differently than many in your culture.

When I wrote, “faith without works is dead,”<sup>2</sup> I was *not* making a complex theological argument. I was saying faith and faithfulness are the same thing, you cannot have one without the other. I was actually incredulous that people could think such a thing was possible.

I think a good analogy for faith and works is what I wrote about in my letter, you can find it in Chapter Two Verse Twenty-six “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Perhaps I could have been more politically correct by saying “lifeless” instead of “dead,” but the meaning would have been the same. Faith without works is lifeless.

Another reason many of you are misled about the meaning of faith is because of the way your Bibles are printed. The chapter headings many of you have were not in the original text. When you read the famous chapter of Hebrews 11, you might have seen it as the “Faith” chapter. However, it is much better described as “The Faith in Action” chapter.<sup>3</sup> The whole chapter is about how people of the Bible put their faith into action. None of them could have imagined a faith consisting only of mental assent.

What sorts of things could you, your family members, and church do to put your faith into action? In my little letter, I mention three types of things: those evidenced by *deeds*, those evidenced by *conduct*, and those evidenced by *speech*. Here are some of the things that I mention in my little letter:

For faith evidenced by deeds, I wrote: You believe that there is one God; that’s good: the demons also believe, and tremble. But won’t you know, vain man, that faith without works is dead? Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son on the altar? See how faith worked with his works, and by works his faith was perfected? And the scripture was fulfilled which said, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness:’ and he was call the Friend of God. You see then how a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, wasn’t 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.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> James 2:17

<sup>3</sup> As the NIV Bible currently does

<sup>4</sup> James 2:19-26

For faith evidenced by conduct, I wrote: But if you show favoritism, you commit sin, and are convicted of the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and breaks just one point, he is guilty of all.<sup>5</sup>

And for faith evidence by speech, I wrote several nuggets. Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger: for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.<sup>6</sup>

And the tongue is a fire, a world of evil: as one of our body members, the tongues corrupts the whole body, and sets on fire the course our lives, and itself is set on fire of hell. For every kind of animal, and bird, and snake, and things in the sea are tamed, and have been tamed by man. But no man can tame the tongue; it is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison.<sup>7</sup>

What sorts of things can you, your family, and your church do to express your faith by your deeds, conduct and speech? Here are some practical types of things:

- Believe that God will answer your prayers
- Don't just read the Scriptures, but do what they say
- Help widows and orphans
- Clothe and feed people who need it without regard to judging why they need it
- Pray for each other

As you can tell, I am no great theologian. Thankfully, that is not what Holy Spirit trained me to be nor needed for me to be. I just had to have the experiences and desire to guide my flock and all future Christians with a little practical wisdom by the use of the most powerful weapon ever devised...a letter.

---

<sup>5</sup> James 2:9-10

<sup>6</sup> James 1:19-20

<sup>7</sup> James 3:6-8