

Romans 12

Sunday 12/6/2009

We are in our third lesson on Romans chapter 12. You should know by now that Romans chapter 12 is that great chapter that really deals with the practical side of Christianity. Remember, I liken it to the facts of life. When you get to a certain age, you learn what life is all about, how it recreates itself, and all the aspects of that. Well, Romans chapter 12 is that for you and for me with the Bible. So much of our Christian lives, I think we live in an illusion of the way we'd like things to be. Romans chapter 12 brings things into the context of what they really are: the reality of our situation as to our walk with God.

I urge you to mark these messages down as we come through these great verses. Use it as an outline in this chapter. Get the themes down of where we've come as we've come all the way through the book of Romans so far. You remember the first week we talked about how it really focused on you and I presenting our body as a living sacrifice. How God did not think that it was unreasonable for you and for me, once we become a child of God, to really turn everything over to the Lord. He says, "which is your reasonable service."

Then the second week we focused on not being conformed to this world. We talked about what a struggle that is for all of us. Some may struggle more than others, but there's never a time that we don't feel the tug and the pressure living in the world that we live in today, to not try to conform to the things of this world.

Last week we talked about, I think, probably the greatest aspect of this chapter: how to be transformed. He talks about being transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove that there is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. We talked about the fact that you and I have something to prove. We have something to prove to the lost world, that what we try to prove to them is the fact that what we have is what they need. Then we have something to prove to all the other Christians that we fellowship with.

The transformation of your life and my life. Of course, we need to show other Christians that what we really have, that it really works. We talked about the guarantee last week of the child of God, that you'll never faint from your walk or your work with the Lord.

Today we're going to move into verse 3 and we're going to look at two more great Bible facts that we need to understand to be all that God wants us to be and to fulfill all that God has for us. Now let's look at verse 3. Here's what he said:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Now, Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. We love you. We thank you, Lord, for all that you do for us today and all that you give us. We ask you, Father, to meet with us today and help those that are here, Lord, to go home today encouraged and strengthened in their walk with you. Lord, we ask you, Holy Spirit of God, take these things and speak to our hearts. Give us what we need. Forgive us where we failed. Put this under the blood and let us, Lord, stand

spotless before you today that we might be able to receive the thing that you have for us. We'll thank you and praise you in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. Thinking Soberly and Motive

Paul just got through telling us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, and now he says in this verse, "Don't get to the point in our life that we make or think more of ourselves than we really should." Last week we looked at the driving fact behind what we do, and that would be attitude. Today, this week, we're going to look at the other aspect of attitude, and that is motive: why we do the things that we do. Attitude and motive are the key to everything that we do.

You know as well as I do, and the Bible talks about this in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 1, if you've been a saved person any length of time in any church anywhere, you've seen examples of this, how the Bible says that much knowledge puffeth up. The problem that we get with young Christians many times, and this is why the structure of a New Testament local church is so vital, and a pastor who understands the process, is because I've seen it many, many times throughout the years of ministry, how a good young man—and it really isn't too much young ladies, every once in a while, I guess it's that male thing—but I've seen a young man get saved and start to get into the Bible, and suddenly, when he gets a little knowledge about the Bible, as Mel Sabaka used to say, "He learned just enough Bible to make him dangerous." It's a thing where he takes the knowledge that he has, and it doesn't have the right kind of effect, and it puffs him up instead of building him the way that God wants him to be. Of course, as I said, this is the key of the church: to help put you through the process that we don't get to the point that we think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

You get a little bit of knowledge without going through the process, and then pride comes up. I tell people all the time that we're like sponges. A sponge is an incredible tool. You can put it on a floor if you've got water on the floor, and you can pick up water with that sponge, and it just kind of absorbs. I've always looked at the sponge and thought, "That's the way God's people ought to be." You ought to absorb what is given out in the Bible. You ought to be like a sponge that soaks up everything that comes out. But you know as well as I do, and you ladies probably would know this more than us guys would, that there comes a time when a sponge becomes worthless. A sponge becomes worthless when it's picked up so much water that it can't absorb anymore. Then we all know what we've got to do at that point, and that is we've got to wring out that sponge. We've got to wring it out to get the water out and then pick up some more water.

I don't know of another example in all of life that shows you and me what we ought to be doing as Christians. You and I can only absorb so much. What happens many times with young Christians is that they get a lot of truth, they get a lot of knowledge, they get a lot of things about the Bible, but they never get into the process that helps them wring out what they have, and it leads to being puffed up, and it leads to problems in their lives. This is why he says that we are to think soberly. Soberly means to stop and think it through, to be sober about it, to be levelheaded about it, check your motive.

One of the things that I've tried to do ever since I really got into the ministry—and it's hard for anybody, but it's something that I saw that needed to be in my life—is always asking myself the motive behind what I do, because motive is everything, and motive goes along with attitude. We talked about attitude and action last week: how if you have the right attitude, it will produce the right action. If you have the wrong attitude about something, it will produce the wrong action. That's basically what motive is. Motive will be not just the action, but why you're doing what you're doing.

I teach you when you start to work with people in the ministry, and those of you who work with me with people, or you've been around me for any length of time, you've probably heard me say this a thousand times. It's something that I constantly have to remind you of, because, and myself many times, but it's something that you've got to learn in dealing with people. It was Bob Jones Sr., who was a great, great Methodist evangelist who later founded Bob Jones University, which later went into total apostasy. But Bob Jones Sr. was a great guy, and he was one of the last of the Philadelphia church age preachers. You can still get some of his sermons sometimes on the radio. He's been dead now for many, many, many, many years, but he had a lot of sayings that I've written down most of them over the years as I picked them up. He made a statement one time that I thought was one of the greatest statements. He says, "The more I'm around people, the better I like dogs." I thought to myself, "You know what, boy, there is no truer statement than that than dealing with people in the ministry."

I've told you many, many times, and it's probably the number one thing I try to drive into you when you start to work with people, is that don't take things personal. It seems to be in the ministry, because we're working in close proximity with people, when people let you down, or people don't follow through, or people get mad, or people whatever, or they don't make it, we have a tendency many times to take things like that personal. When people get upset, we have a tendency to take it personal. When they don't like something that you did, even though it may have been the right thing to do, we take that personal.

I told you over and over and over again that when you're dealing with people, you're now dealing with the most complex systematic structure that the world has ever seen. You've got to deal with people many times just like taking a big head of lettuce and peeling back one layer at a time. Every layer will have some problem that you've got to deal with, and you just peel it back till you get down to what they call is the heart of the lettuce, where it's really the good part of it. Sometimes that can be very hard, sometimes that can be impossible. Many times, and you know as well as I do, if you work on a given year—and this is not realistic, but let's just put it in—if you work in one year with 10 people, 10 couples, 10 people that come in here, and I say, "I want you to work," and you work with 10 people a year, realistically, probably one or two of those people out of that 10 are going to ever follow through with everything that you want to do. Because you're good people and because you have a desire to do what's right with God, you have a tendency to take that personal. There'll be people who will be upset with you because of the stand that you may have to take in ministry, and we have a tendency to take those things personal.

I always tell people, "You know what, when it comes to the ministry, the thing you better learn is you're not working at Ford or Sears or GM. You're working for God." The bottom line is, you never take it personal because it's His company you're working for. You've got to realize that you're just doing what He's called you to do, and if they have a problem with it, the problem isn't with you, it's with Him. That's hard. But you know what the other side of that is? I always teach you, "Don't take the bad things personal." Now listen to me, but let me give you another good bit of advice: "Don't take the good things personal either." Don't get caught up reading your old press releases of how great we are, because there's a tendency to, and this is where the balance comes in.

I could go preach. It isn't a week goes by that I don't probably get at least one or two phone calls about our website. I got a call two weeks ago from a blind lady right here in Kansas City. In fact, she's supposed to call me back, and I told her that if she wanted some ladies to come and pick her up for church, that we'd bring her over here. She called me up and just wanted to thank me because she can't get to church. She has really nobody, and I don't know how she got the website, I don't have any idea, but she called me up and she thanked me for the material that she was getting off of it. I had another guy down in Texas, wasn't it? Yeah, it was down in Texas, called me on a clear blue sky, had no idea about the website. Somebody had given him a couple of tapes, and I must have done back in the 80s someplace on church history, and he said there's about 150 people down there that are passing these tapes around, and he's got ruined or something that he wanted, and he finally tracked me down and said, in fact, when he called me, he went through the series of questions trying to find out, figure out if I was the right Bob Alexander. I hooked him up with John, and we sent everything down to him. That happens probably on a weekly basis, that somebody doesn't call.

I want to tell you, I praise the Lord that people get a blessing out of the website or whatever the sermons that they get. I really thank the Lord and I praise the Lord for that. But let me tell you something, if I had to preach this afternoon to 500 people who hated my guts—now it would be hard to find that many people—but if I had to find that many people, that they didn't call me, I want to go and preach to 500 people this afternoon who wanted to see me dead, who hated my guts. You know what? It wouldn't matter a bit to me one way or the other. You know why? Because I want to be the best Bible teacher, I want to be the best preacher for God, not for man. The Bible says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God." It wouldn't matter to me as long as God is pleased with what I do. That's all I'm concerned about. So not only do you have to be careful that you don't take the bad things personal, but you've got to be careful you don't take the good things too personal too.

I told you my famous, famous, famous story about the talking dog. Remember that story? When I was a little kid growing up, remember Jack Parr on the Jack Parr show late at night? Jack Parr was the way, way, way, way forerunner of Jay Leno. One night when I was a kid, 12 years old, he had a talking dog on, and this dog could actually talk. Now it wasn't this goofy stuff like you bring a dog on and you say, "What's on a tree?" and he goes, "Bark!" or "What's on top of the house?" and he goes, "Roof!" This dog could actually talk. You could carry on a conversation with it, and it just got overnight instantaneous. The guy that owned the dog made hundreds of

thousands, millions of dollars off this dog, and he made two appearances everywhere. Finally somebody from the New York Times or one of the big newspapers and one of the magazines wanted to interview this guy. So he goes over to this, by this time the guy's making millions of dollars off this dog, and he walks up to a house, it's a mansion, and the servants greet him, and he walks through, and the guy says, "Oh, he's out in the pool area with the dog." He found his way, went out there, this big common ground, there was a swimming pool for the dog. The dog's dog house was incredible, almost as big as your house or my house. He sat down, and he brought the dog over, and the guy said, "Why, I've got to ask you all these kind of questions." The guy went on and on and on, and finally he talked to the dog, and he was just amazed. The guy said, "What is the net worth of this dog?" The guy said, "I have been offered \$10 million for this dog. I will not take it." Which sounds low to me. I wouldn't take that much for you on a mind, and it can't talk, but anyway. By that time, the dog just started moving around and scratching and itching and rolling on his back and kicking his hind leg and his thing trying to scratch. The guy said, "I don't believe this. This dog's worth \$10 million, and he's got fleas." He looks back at this guy and says, "I've got to ask this question. This dog is worth \$10 million. You live in a palatial palace, and this \$10 million dog has got fleas on him. Can you explain that to me?" The guy looks at him, never hesitated. He says, "Yeah." He says, "That's so he never forgets that he's a dog."

You know what? You're saved, you're worth \$100 million. But you know what God does? God leaves some fleas on us, doesn't He? You know why He leaves fleas on us? Things that we just can't shake. Wouldn't it be nice if you got saved and every problem you had went away? Well, it does theoretically. But you know why God didn't take all the problems off of you at one time? Because we're just dogs. He never wants us to think that we're better than we are. We're to soberly look at who we are, especially in dealing with people, because it's the key to our motive and our attitude of what we do. You ought to be the best. You ought to strive every day to be the very best that God wants you to be for Him. That's all that matters. Yet we're all going to have some fleas. There will never be a time in our life on this side of eternity that we don't struggle with something. That's what we want to talk about today. We want to look at this great passage, and we want to see where he says here, and he's got two great concepts. This is the key to balancing attitude and motive. It's the key for you and me walking through life and going through all that we go through. Both of these words are found in this one verse, and it's simply the words grace and faith. I don't know if you know it or not, but on these two principles and concepts will hang all of what we are as God's people. These two are different, but they're connected together to form the balance of all that we are and we do for God.

II. Grace and Truth

Now let's talk about grace for a moment. The definitive passage on grace in the Bible is in the Gospel of John, John chapter 1, verse 17. You need to mark that down. The definitive passage in the Bible on grace is John chapter 1, verse 17. Here's what it says:

John 1:17

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Now that's the New Testament Christian or the New Testament church in a nutshell. As I say this many, many times, I've watched a lot of churches over the years, and I have certainly been connected to a lot of pastors over the years in relationships, and just seeing them and knowing them and preaching with them and whatever. I found that most churches, I found that most churches either have one or the other. I found that most pastors either have one or the other. I've also found through my course of life that most Christians just have one or the other. You see, you find some churches that have grace, but they have no truth. Then you have other churches that have truth, but they have no grace. The Bible defining verse in John chapter 1, verse 17 clearly sets apart the Old Testament under Moses' law from the New Testament under grace and truth, shows you that you have to have both.

You know why? I'll tell you why. You have to have both because truth is essential in your life and my life to show you how and when to use the grace that God gave you. You can have all the grace in the world, but if you don't have the truth to be able to show you how to use that grace, you're going to wind up in some problems. That's what happens with many churches. I know churches here today that absolutely believe the King James Bible is the Word of God, but they have absolutely no grace in dealing with somebody who may be struggling in life. I know churches that have all kinds of grace, but they don't have the truth of the Bible. You've got to have a balance of both. It just works that way.

You're going to find that I try to get you, as you grow through the process of spiritually growing—I don't know if you have noticed this or not—one of the things I try to do with you is that when I get you spiritually moving and growing, I try to get you working with people as quickly as I can. You ever notice, when I started a discipleship of the lessons that we use, I started those back in the late 70s. When I first started discipling people, I would do it in a room someplace or in my home or wherever, in a little conference room. I'd take about 10 people, and I would have maybe four or five classes throughout the week where I would take those people into small groups and I would teach them the basic concepts of the Bible. Well, we've seen how that has developed over the years. Then for a long time, it was one on one. I would take somebody that was an older Christian, somebody with a younger Christian, and I'd put the two of them together to teach the Bible. Then I had a format that once that person got disciplined, I added this dimension to it: once that person got disciplined, now I have the original disciple and the person who got disciplined. Then I give them together a new person that comes in that wants to be disciplined. Then the original disciple takes the one they just disciplined and takes a brand new person and then works with that person, not only to disciple the new person, but now to take that person they just finished discipling back through to help them learn how to teach somebody else.

There isn't a time in this week—and this is why I don't have a Sunday night service. I get clapped, collaborated all the time for not, by other pastors, for not having a Sunday night service. Then they want to know, "Well, what do you do? Do you have a Wednesday night service?" I said, "No." They'll say, "Well, you don't have a third Sunday night, you don't have a Wednesday night." I said, "No." I said, "We have a Bible study on Thursday night." He said, "Why do you have your Bible study on Thursday night?" I said, "So the people in your church that aren't getting fed the Bible can go to yours on Wednesday and then come to mine on Thursday and then

leave your church." There's a method behind everything I plan. But my goal is to get you involved teaching somebody the Bible. The reason for that is this: you don't learn how to have grace by reading and studying the Bible. You'll get the definitions of it and you'll get the academics of it, but you will never really understand what it is and how to use grace and truth till you have to apply it from your life to the life of somebody else.

It's like going to driver's ed. Did anybody ever really learn how to drive a car going to driver's ed classes? You don't learn how to drive a car until you get behind the wheel. You can take your, you can try to get your pilot's license all you want. You can go through ground school. You can get an instructor and you can go through everything. But you know what? You will never really be a pilot till he says, "Okay, you're on your own." He gets out of the plane and you've got to fly it way up in the high in the sky by yourself. You don't learn anything from a practical application from just reading. That's why you've got to take what you read and apply it to somebody else's life.

You know what? It's really hard to work with somebody who's got problems when you've got the same problem and you've not worked on yours. It's really tough, if you're any kind of honest person at all, it's really tough to deal with somebody with a problem when you've got the same problem and you're sitting there telling them how to fix their problem when you know yourself you haven't fixed it yourself. See what that does? Working with people makes you examine yourself. It makes you look in and see, "Are you the real deal? Can you tell somebody else to do this but you can't do it yourself?" You'll never learn grace. You'll never come to the point where you'll understand what grace is till you have to give it to somebody else that maybe you don't want to give it to. You'll never understand what grace is in your life till you have the ability to take it from your life one on one and give it to somebody else.

Grace is real simple to grasp and understand. Once I understand how wicked I am, how dumb I am, how stupid, stubborn I am, how unforgiving I am, how stupid I am, how prideful I am, how arrogant I am, how sinful I am, and how worthless I really am, and then come to the realization that in spite of all that, God loved me, He waited for me, He puts up with me, He overlooks the stupidity I have and I am, and He never gave up on me. That's long suffering. That's grace applied to you. You see, we're all good at taking God's grace and applying it to us, but the reality of life is taking that grace and applying it to somebody else. That's where it gets tough. That's where it's hard.

You know what? We all are quick to dismiss those that don't meet up to our standards. I mean, we look at somebody or somebody's situation and we're quick to dismiss them. But the truth of the matter is we don't stop and be sober about the concept and realize that we didn't look too hot the first time God laid eyes on us either. But He did. Now, that's what the Bible means when it says for a man not to look on himself more highly than he should.

I think this is probably the number one issue that most pastors have. Most pastors don't have any patience. They don't have any long suffering. Most pastors are respected because of their agenda, and their agenda is "ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching," money. Because they've got huge buildings that they have to pay for. Because they've got great programs and great salaries that they have to

maintain. They are forced by that alone to drive them to keep paying for it. So what they've got to do is that you only got so much focus and so much time, folks. When you've got a building payment that's what, \$60,000 a month? When you've got utilities that run, you know, \$12,000 a month? When you've got all of these things coming in, you don't have a lot of time to spend with the down and outers. You've got to go after the men of high esteem. Most pastors—and I'm, it's wrong, but I understand why they do it—if you're in a lower income and you don't have a lot going for you, you're just starting the scheme of things, because you can't pay the bills. That's a shame, but that's the way it is. I understand why that is.

The truth of the matter is we're all in the same boat. You're no better than me. I'm no better than you. I struggle with the same things that you do. Most pastors, and I know these things because I've been around pastors all of my life. The Church of Christ guy, he took a, I told you this Thursday night, he kind of took a cheap shot at me. When we went out to eat, they kind of set this thing up, and I didn't look at it. I mean, I recognized it as a cheap shot, but I didn't take it as a cheap shot. I didn't look at it as a compliment. He says, "I noticed something about your church." I said, "Yeah, what's that?" He said, "Well," he says, "you're really, you're really friends with all your people. They don't call you pastor. They call you Bob." Now I know where he's going because he has just finished a 20-minute dissertation of how he trains young men. The mindset is today that if I allow you to call me Bob instead of pastor, Pastor Bob, or Reverend, however you want to put it, then you don't respect me. Here's what pastors do: we're taught today as pastors that we're better than you.

I don't care. You go any church in this city, any church, and you ask the pastor, "Can I spend an hour a week with you and you teach me the Bible?" Just see what he says. Don't be satisfied, "Well, yeah, I can go down here and brother so and so." He didn't want to say, "No, no, no, no. I want the top dog. I want the head dog. I want the big enchilada. I want you because you are number one. You're the one who knows it all. You're the one that does it all. I don't want to learn from a second stringer. I want you as my pastor to spend one hour a week with me and teaching me the Bible." See how far you get. You know why? Because we're taught, we're taught not to do that. We're taught not to become one with the people because then you won't respect us. That's why in most churches, and I've seen this all my life, that's why in most churches, the pastor's best friends are other pastors like himself. He'll travel around the country and he'll go to Bible conferences and he'll hang out with them and they'll go to fellowship meetings together. Oh, I know the circuit, man. They all get down there and they all go out to eat, and he'll say something like this, "Man, it is just a breath of fresh air to get away from my stupid people and be with somebody. What a breath of fresh air this is."

You know what? As a pastor, and someday some of you boys may pastor, let me tell you something: your best friends, your best friends in this world will be the people in your church. They're the ones that God gave you. You're in the same boat together. Don't you ever think for five seconds, think on it soberly, you're any better than they are. We're all in this together. Now, that doesn't mean you don't deal with problems when they come up. That don't mean from time to time that you don't have to deal with some serious issues. The Bible makes it very clear over and over again that Satan will throw in a satanic implant to try to disrupt the work. You know

what? You've got to deal with those things. But it all comes with the territory. You've got to realize that grace is the ability to take people where they're at. Most pastors want to stand at the top of the stairs and yell down to the lowest landing, "Get up here where I'm at! Be like me!" Get up here and beat you and berate you all over the place that gets you to force you to get where they're at. Very few pastors will walk down those stairs and put their arm around you and walk you back up one step at a time. That's grace. Our patience and our long suffering is to be based on God's patience and long suffering to us.

You know what? It took me 19 years, 19 years of my life to figure it out, and then five or six more to get a handle on it after I figured it out. This is why the Bible says that all the law of the Old Testament is contained into two, called the royal law, the law of Christ.

1. Love God more than anything else in this world.
2. Love others as yourself.

In other words, cut them the same slack we cut ourselves. This is the great concept of grace.

III. Faith and Its Measure

Now let's talk about faith for a moment. I want you to notice what he says here. Let's read it again here. He says this:

Romans 12:3

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

You see, when you got saved at salvation, you got all the grace that God had. You got all the love. You got all the wisdom. You got everything that you needed that God gave you the moment you got saved. But grace comes at you, but faith is given out in a measure. Now, I want to explain this concept. I'm going to come through and walk you through something first. Then I'm going to come back and show you how it works. I think it'll be more easy for you to grasp.

Now, take your Bibles and turn over to Hebrews chapter 11. This will be old hat to you folks in Institute because we just came through this in our last Bible Institute. Now, I want to read for you here the first 13 verses, and I'd like for you to follow along with me. You can have a Bible, look on with somebody that is next to you. If you don't know them, then just move over and take it out of their hands and just say, "I want to look at this." If she's pretty, smile and say, "Hey, do you mind if I look on with you?" And when she says, "Hit the road, Toad," then you'll know what to do anyway. But anyway, Hebrews chapter 11. Now, here it comes. Now, watch this. We're going to talk about faith now.

Hebrews 11:1-13

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

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.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

IV. God's Hall of Fame and Grace

You know, this great chapter has been rightly called God's great Hall of Fame. There's a number of things in it, and we talked about this in Bible Institute. We went through it in great detail. There's a number of things in this great chapter that I just want to touch on before we write into it. First of all, you'll notice that there's 17 people in here. We only looked at a couple of them. There are 17 people in Hebrews chapter 11 that God makes honorable mention of, and he says about every one of them that they lived in faith. They did by faith everything that they did. They did exactly the way that God wanted them to do it.

You know the truth of the matter is, when you know the stories of the people in here, that's not true. Samson is in here. Samson? The he-man with the she-weakness? Samson? The Samson who the first word out of his mouth, "I saw a woman." Boy, did he? Saw several of them. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. I mean, you go, Jephthah? Jephthah. The

guy that offered his own daughter up because of the fact that he made a stupid vow, he's in there. Abraham. Well, Abraham, Abraham didn't do what was right all of his life. How about Noah? Noah got drunk as soon as he got out of the ark. My point is this: you know why God doesn't list any of the failures in these guys' life and only list the good things? Because this is written after Christ died on the cross. When Christ died on the cross, He erased all of the things that we've done and absolved them in the cross. You know what that is? That's grace. Isn't it an amazing thing that God will absolve all the bad things that you and I have done, even the things we haven't done yet in the cross? That if God would write a book about you and me, He wouldn't list one bad thing about us? And yet if we'd write a book about somebody, come on, we put all the dirty stuff in, and we know. It's called grace. It's called grace.

V. The Nature of Faith

Now I don't know if you catch it or not, and quickly I'm going to do this. Verses 1, 2, 3, define what faith is. You know that's a mystery to most people. It blows my mind how many times I hear somebody say, "Well, you just believe that Bible and God because you take it by faith." Many of God's people, they're so ignorant of the Bible, they fall for that attack. I want to tell you something. I don't believe this Bible is the word of God, and I don't believe what I believe about God in some blind concept of faith. What I believe about this Bible and God, I can prove scientifically beyond any shadow of scientific doubt that any scientist on this planet, if he's honest, would have to accept the truth based on the facts and look at what he believes and throw it out the window. You think God wrote a book that could not be proven? You think that God is a being that we just walk around and everybody, as the world says, "Well, you just believe God because you believe it by blind faith." Blind faith?

You know why I know that Jesus Christ is who He says He is? You know why I know why God is who He says He is? I'll tell you why: because every unsaved man and woman out there wants to use His name as a cuss word. You ever hear anybody get cussed out in Buddha? Anybody ever use Confucius? How about Joe Smith? How about Alexander Campbell? That would be a good one for you Thursday night. Why would an unsaved man want to add weight and authority and let you think he's authoritative? Why does he call and use the name of Jesus Christ and God? I'll tell you why: because the Bible, the B-I-B-L-E, the Bible says there's no other name given among men. That's why. That's why. I don't believe it by blind faith.

Most of you told me I had testimony of how I came back to God and how that I was an evolutionist and believed all of the things that the world does. One day, long story short, some old Bible believing guy got a hold of me in a cafeteria at Kent State University and showed to me how there were 48 prophecies in the Old Testament. They were written between 600 and 1000 years before Christ was born. They showed me that the mathematical probability against 48 prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ coming to pass on every jot, at every tittle, right on the money, the chances against that happening were 10 to the 157th power. That's 10 with 157 zeros after it. Anybody know who the great French mathematician, Dupre, is? Who lived back in the early 1900s. You know what he said? He said that there are not more than 10 with 50 zeros after it, electrons in our universe. You know what he also said? He said if the chances of something

were more than the electrons in the universe, that would never happen because you cannot have an actual event that contains more electrons than exist in our universe. You know what that tells me? That tells me the chances against that Bible and God and the principles were more than the electrons in the universe, almost half as many again, and yet on every day, on every day, everything came true right on the money. By the way, you know what the chances of evolution are, according to Dupre? The chances of evolution are 10 with 40,000 zeros after it, against. I don't accept the Bible by truth. You know what the largest number is? The largest number is a centillion. A centillion has 303 zeros after it. They quit counting after that because, you know, what was the point? Your Bible and the chances against your Bible being right are half of the highest number on this planet. You know what? You can take the head of a pin and you can get 100 million electrons on the head of a pin. You realize how big 10 to the 157th power is? With a universe with millions of galaxies and stars and billions of stars and everything, only goes 10 to the 50th? You've got some book. I don't accept it by blind faith. My faith is not blind. My faith is based on scientific thought. Every unsaved man and every unsaved woman attest to what I believe every day.

You know, you want a verse for where you're at and what you believe? Hebrews chapter 13, verse 8:

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

I don't accept Him by blind faith. I've seen what He's done in history. So I know what He's done in history. I know where He's going in the future. No, I've played after my life. You know how I know God's going to take care of me tomorrow? Because He took care of me yesterday. You know, I know God's going to take care of me five years from now? Because He took care of me the last five years, the last 10 years, the last 15 years, the last 20 years. I don't have any doubt. I don't step out by blind faith and trust God. There's a track record of Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and forever. If He was good yesterday, He's good today. If He was good yesterday, He's okay for tomorrow.

You call me tonight about eight o'clock. Here's what I'll be. "Hi. Yeah. What do you need? We got a problem? Oh, yeah. Okay. I'm just really worried. I just go, 'What's the matter, brother Bob?' I just can't talk to you right now. I just, I'm really struggling. I just, I just, I just, I just, I just, I'm worried to death about death. Well, what is it? What is it? Well, you know what? I'm, it's getting, the sun just went down. It's really dark out. It's cold out. And I'm just not sure the sun is coming up in the morning. And I'm really worried about it." I mean, I don't know what to tell you. You know what I'd say to you? You ought to say to me, you say, "Bob, why are you worrying about the sun not coming up tomorrow? In the last history of man, which has been 6,000 years, it's come up every day. Chances are pretty good based on the track records of 7,000 years that it's going to be up tomorrow." Well, your chances of God will be there for you tomorrow. It's good on a track record that He's been there for 7,000 years. Blind faith? Get out of here. Don't you pull that on me.

VI. Developing Faith and Grace

Years ago, I heard old Mel Sabaka, my father in the Lord, preach a message out of Hebrews chapter 11. Probably one of the greatest messages I ever heard. I've got the outline in my Bible. I probably preached it many, many times over my years. My philosophy is any good message is worth stealing. So go ahead. But he said this: he said, "The more you'll develop your faith." Now, listen to me. "The more you develop your faith." Faith is given by measure now. "The more you develop your faith, the greater your capacity of God's grace will be." He took a message out of Hebrews chapter 11, and he took it out of the first four guys here. He took these four guys and he showed back then, and I've used it many, many times in my own personal life, he showed the seven areas that we need to have faith in to get our grace to where it needs to be. Remember now, grace and faith. You've got to have them both. You can't have one or the other. We've come to the place now in the book of Romans where we're looking now that if you're going to have faith, you've got to have grace. Or you're going to be somebody who's got the truth, but you don't have any grace, or somebody's got the grace, but don't have any truth.

Now, this passage lays out four areas of our faith that are absolutely necessary and connected with grace. I gave you these in Bible Institute, so I'll give you a little more information today than we did back then, but there's four areas.

➤ Don't Be Afraid to Give God Your Best

Now, look at verse four. Here was the first one he preached. I remember this. This had to be 30 years ago, and I remember it like it was yesterday. He said in verse four, "By faith." Every one of these starts out by faith because faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. But then he says, "For by it the elders obtained a good report." Now watch:

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

He read that passage and he said this, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." He said this, "You know what, ladies and gentlemen," he says, "the first area that you need to develop your faith in is simply this: Don't be afraid to give God the very best that you have." You know why he said that? I'll tell you why he said that: because you and me are famous for giving God what's left over in our lives. As much as we don't like to say that, we don't like to deal with the reality of it. I know that there's lots of new Christians here and you're just finding your way along and you're doing just fine. But I'm talking about us, the older ones. He says, "Don't be afraid to by faith give God the very best that you have." Because you know what? God saved us for a purpose. God saved us for a reason. We give God what's left of our lives after we take the best for ourselves. That's just what we do. You'll decide whether to come to church or not based on what you want to do first. You know that's true. I'm the same way. There's no condemnation on you or anybody else. It's just the way we are. We'll look at our schedule. We're going to go to church unless we've got something else we want to do that's more important. We'll look at Thursday night Bible study and say, "Well, yeah, we're going unless so and so is having a

this thing or I'm going to here or going to that." We look at working with somebody or getting to the point where you're really growing in the Word of God or learning the Bible, and as long as it doesn't conflict with your ball schedule, with what you want to do with your life or your social life, then you're up for it. He says, "Don't be afraid to give God the very best you have." God doesn't want what's left in your life. He doesn't want after you take everything, all the good out, and do all the time in your life. He doesn't want the last 15 minutes of your day after you crammed it full of everything that you and I wanted to do.

But I'll tell you, the last part of that verse is pretty sobering to me. We were told today to look at these things soberly. He says, "God testifying of his gifts and by it being dead yet speaketh." Let me ask you a question. I ask myself this all the time. We're all going to die someday. If Jesus doesn't come, will you continue to speak about God after you're dead? How does that happen? In the people you invested your life and gave them the grace through faith while you were still alive. I mentioned old Bob Jones Sr. I also mentioned you can find some radio programs where they still put him on. Dr. DeHaan. Remember Dr. DeHaan? Great Bible teacher. Died what, 30 years ago? Oliver Greene. Died what, 35 years ago? You can still find those men preaching on the radio. J. Vernon McGee. You can still hear those guys preaching on the radio 25 years after they're dead. See the question you've got to ask yourself as he asked there, when you give the very best you have, it doesn't end with when you die. God still uses you after you're dead. Incredible concept. After you and I are dead 5, 10 years, will anybody remember? What legacy will you and I leave around in somebody else's life?

You know what, why God allows you to have children? Very simple. God allows you to have children so that you leave a legacy behind you of people who you're almost guaranteed will carry on and speak for you after you're dead. Sobering thought. Sobering thought. We look at the thing and somebody says, "Well, why would I want to work with somebody? Why would I want to disciple somebody?" Why would I not? Because investing in your life and taking your life and investing in somebody else's life is how you keep this thing moving on. But you're not satisfied with just giving God the very best you have now. You want it to continue on after you leave. I think that's a great concept. Will you speak even though you're dead? What do we leave behind? Don't be afraid to give God the very best that you have.

> Don't Be Afraid to Walk with God When Nobody Else Does

Then the second character, Genesis chapter 5, verse 21, excuse me, verse 5, I'm sorry, by faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death and was not found because God had translated him. But before his translation, he had this testimony that he pleased God. But without faith 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. Now this one, Mel preached and he talked about Enoch for a few minutes and he said this, he said, "You know what?" He said, "When we looked at Abel, I told you, don't be afraid to give God the very best you have when nobody else will." He said, "Now I want to talk about Enoch for just a few moments and I want to tell you this by faith, don't be afraid to walk with God when nobody else does."

You know, we live in a world where Christians, unsaved people, whoever, they really don't want to walk with God. We say we do, but it's just like the first one. We give God what's left in our life. We want our walk with God on our terms also. It doesn't work that way. This is the reality of it. It doesn't work that way. You go back to Genesis chapter 5, it's only about three or four verses back there about Enoch, verses 21 to 24, and it says this:

Genesis 5:21-24

And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Now the word translation here simply means that God came down and took him off this planet and took him to be with Him. I mean, the only man in the Bible that never dies. I mean, Elijah went up to heaven, but he comes back and dies in the tribulation. But Enoch is the only man in the Bible who will never die. He's a picture of your life and my life on the aspect that if Jesus comes before you die physically, we'll never die. He's a picture of the rapture. So he's translated out. Yet when you go back in Genesis chapter 5, what a great story. It says Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah for 300 years. I can't imagine walking with God for 300 years. I can't even grasp the concept of a man walking with God for 300 years where every aspect, the fellowship that you can have with God, I can't even get to it. I can't even grasp it. Yet when you read that back there, it says that Enoch was 65 years old when he begat Methuselah. Then it says this, "And after he begat Methuselah, he walked with God for 300 years." There's something about the birth of Methuselah. The indication is, ladies and gentlemen, that he didn't walk with God before Methuselah was born. See? That's the indication.

Do you know what the name Methuselah means? It means, "When he is gone, judgment shall come." You know what it's like? It's almost like that he walked and did his own thing like we do, or did. Then God gave him that boy. God says, "Name him Methuselah." Enoch said, "Why?" He said, "Because when he's dead, My judgment is going to fall. I'm going to wipe out the earth." Do you know that when you go back into genealogies and you count up the years of Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, you realize that the flood came? The flood came on the exact day that Methuselah died? It was true. When he was gone, judgment came. The day he died, God's judgment came. It's like a day in your life and my life when God said to you and me, "Hey, My judgment's coming, you better get saved." Then you and I trusted the Lord Jesus Christ just like he did. Then we began to walk.

Let me just say this to you today. Now, I love you. We're all in this thing together. We're all struggling the same way. I've already told you I'm no better than you are. You're no better than me or the person next to you. But let me just say this to you: don't be afraid to give God the very best you have, but at the same time, don't be afraid to walk with God when nobody else will. Don't care what your friends, Christian friends, unsaved friends think. Don't be afraid to take a

stand. Don't be afraid to, it doesn't mean you have to be nasty about it. It just means that you, that you, you talk about a guy who never conformed to this world. You realize in Enoch's time, it's right before Noah's time when the Bible says the whole world was in sin. He literally walked by himself. Yet verse 6 says, "Do you think you please God?" Do you? Do I think I please God? Do I?

Hebrews 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.

You see the key to faith? The key to faith walking with God is diligently seeking Him. Not on your own time, not when you can cram it in, not at the end of the day, not giving God what's left over, diligently seeking Him. You can't please Him without faith. We go through there and we talk about the fact, "Oh, I please God by this, I please God by that." You only please God by one thing. God is not pleased by how much money you give. He's not pleased by how much you show up for church. He's not pleased with all that. He's only pleased by one thing, and all everything else contained in that is how much faith do you have. Because faith and grace are the two key components. See, He gave you grace, but faith, we'll see it in a moment, faith you got by measure.

➤ Don't Be Afraid to Work for God When Nobody Else Does

Let's look at the next one. Verse 7, Noah.

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

You see, Mel said, "Don't be afraid to worship and give God the very best you have when nobody else does." He said, "By faith, don't be afraid to walk for God when nobody else does." Then when he came to Noah, he said this, "By faith, don't be afraid to work for God when nobody else does." You know the sobering thing of Noah, the story here? You go back to Genesis chapter 6, Noah labored for 120 years with no converts. He labored for 120 years in a world that was without God, in a world that hated God, and yet I'm sure that they were just as religious as our world is today, but without God. You see, God has a work for you and for me. But it's going to take faith to get that work done.

I looked at, you know, people hear me talk about Mel Sabaka so much, and many of you know him because you met him. I suspect he'll probably be gone in the next year or so. He's got Parkinson's disease, can't get around very well, almost 90 years old. But you know what? There's not a day in my life that I just go by that I don't think of what he put into my life. Many of the things that I do with you, the spending time every week if you want to go through the Bible together, helping you through whatever you're struggling with, those very things where I give the grace that I give, I learned because he gave that grace to me. He was my model, my pattern. I

have no problem saying that he was the Apostle Paul of my life. In many ways, I was the Timothy in his life, much like I look at many of you young men and young ladies, that that's my job. He made it very clear, very clear, I heard him say so many things. He used to say and ask preacher's questions, "Do you have a work for God? Or do you have a work of God?" See, there's a difference.

Now that came from a man who wasn't just saying it because we say a lot of things we can't live up to. I'm probably guilty of it myself. When I watched a man, I'm 59, soon to be 60. I'm 59. Not holding up very well, but I'm 59. At 56 years of age, when most of us look at retiring or have ambitions that way, certainly our life is winding down. At 56, 57 years of age, I watched this man who had a firm ministry that was turning out young men and young ladies that was sending him all over the world. I watched a man who had a career of 25, 26, almost 30 years in one church doing the work of God where he had paid for the field, bought the field, and brother had the thing going. When most guys are looking at winding down, you know what he did? At 57 years of age, he resigned his church and he went to New York City where he didn't know a soul. He started a church right down on Staten Island in the most unbelievable, the most incredible circumstances where you just don't go and build a church. You know why? Because he wasn't afraid to work for God when nobody else will. I looked at that example in my life and I say to myself, "How can I ever, how can I ever, ever just not let that affect me?" When he's dead and gone, he will speak to me every day of his life by the life that he lived because he was not afraid to work by faith for God when nobody else wanted to. Oh, there's some great lessons. There's some incredible lessons.

Talked to a young guy a couple of weeks ago, months ago, now, nice kid, but a wannabe. He said, "Oh, I'm starting a church." I said, "Are you?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "That's nice." He said, "Yeah," he said, "we've got, we had our first couple of meetings here and, you know, we got, we're going to really start a church." I said, "Okay." I said, "I said, you got, you got your structure all set? You got your 501c and all that stuff you got to have?" I said, "You got, you know, you got to set up for the people to give their offerings and, and you don't want to put a structure together, your corporation, whatever you got to do for the state of Missouri." He says, "Oh, we're not there yet." He says, "We're going to wait to see if it goes before we do all that." I looked at him and I said, "Did God order this church or are you ordering it?"

Now, look, folks, it's real simple, but you were afraid to do a work today. The bottom line is if God called you to start it, then that's it. I mean, six years ago when I started this church, the thought of not making it go never entered my mind because I never looked at how many people I would have come. I never, I never worried about that. I realized that that was God's business. My job, my job was to do a work, and I never fought for and it thought, I just, I couldn't, I can't get there. The thought never came into my head. It won't go. Let's just try to see just wires cold. I never thought that way. It was, "You know what? This is what God wants. This is what God ordered. God always pays for what He's ordered. Let's do it." But we're afraid to work for God today. So we say, "Well," and we do that. We do the same thing. No reflection on this kid. But we do the same thing. We kind of were like Gideon, you know, remember Gideon in the Bible? What did he do? What's he famous for? Throwing out the fleece. You know, Gideon, you always

hear your son is going stories about Gideon throwing out. You know that Gideon throwing out the fleece was an act of unfaithfulness on his part. He threw out the fleece because of the fact that he couldn't believe what God already told him he was going to do. Then if you study his life at the end, he winds up getting into Baal worship. This great Gideon with 300 destroyed a million Midianites. Why? Because as good as he was, he just could not believe that God said, "I'm going to deliver those Midianites into your hand." He had to say, "Well, show me one, show me two, show me three. Okay. I'm pretty sure now, now I'm going to go step out." Hey, God's word is all you need. If He said it, He'll bring it to pass. You don't need to throw out a fleece. "God, show me a sign. Give me a sign." The devil will give you a sign. God don't give you a sign. He gave you a book. You know what the problem is? We're afraid to work. We're afraid to step out in a work because we don't have that faith with God we'd like to have. 57 years old, no money in the bank. You know what he did? It ain't like he saved up money all of his life. So he gave every dime he had away. You know what he used to tell me? I called him on the phone. I was worried about it. I used to call him on the phone and I said, "Well, how are you doing today?" He said, "Oh, it's great." He says, "You know what? There's nothing like going down to the mailbox and opening up the mail to see what God is, what God did for you today." Incredible. You know why? Because he wasn't afraid to work.

➤ Don't Be Afraid to Wander for God When No One Else Will

Then we have Abraham, verse 8. He said, when he looked at Abel, he said, "By faith, don't be afraid to give God the very best you have." He says, "When you look at Enoch, by faith, don't be afraid to walk with God when nobody else will." Then he said, when it comes down to Noah, he said, "By faith, don't be afraid to work for God when nobody else will." Then he said of Abraham in verse 8:

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

"By faith, don't be afraid to wander for God when no one else will." You know what? God called Abraham out to a land that he knew nothing about. I think the life of Abraham is probably the greatest example in the Bible of your life and my life of learning this thing about grace and faith. Abraham starts out his life. He can't trust God for anything. God says, "Get out of Ur of the Chaldees and take, leave everybody there and go." He takes Lot. How did that work out for him? He goes down there and a famine gets in the land and he loses faith. So he goes down into Egypt. He gets down into Egypt and Pharaoh says, "Whoa, you got a good looking wife there." He's all, "She's not my wife," because he's afraid. See that if I said, "She's my wife," he'll kill me and then he can take her. So what does he do? He's afraid just like you and I are afraid. So he said, "Oh, she's my sister." But you see, it was the Christian brand of lying. You know what the Christian brand of lying is? Somebody raise your hand, tell me what the Christian brand of lying is. You don't know? Oh, I know why you don't know because none of you ever do it. How foolish of me to ask. You know what the Christian brand of lying is? It was Abraham. It's half truths. She was his half sister. See Christians think it's wrong to lie, but it's okay to lie halfway.

Don't be afraid to wander for God when nobody else does. God's got something He wants you to do. He's got someplace He wants you to go. I don't know where it's at, but I know this. I know this. The life of Abraham is a great study. He starts out hardly being able to believe God for anything. He tells the half lies. When he comes to the place, once God did say, "I'm going to give you the promised seed," what did he do? He lost faith in God, went and got Hagar. We know how that story worked out. His life is one that it winds up going through the struggles of not being able to trust God by faith for anything all the way to those life where he offers up Isaac in chapter 22, where he can trust God for everything. You know what you got from point A to point B? Your life and my life. You want to know how to get to that point? Look at his life. You want to know how to walk for God? Look at Enoch's life. You want to learn how to work for God? Study Noah's life. You want to learn how to give the very best to God? Study Abel's life. And you want to learn how to wander for God? Study Abraham's life. The key to any relationship, and you know this, the key to any relationship is going to be your faith and your trust in that person. That's why God winds up calling him the friend of God.

VII. Growing in Faith and Spiritual Maturity

Now, growing in faith in these four areas of life, here's how it works. Remember, now I said, when you got saved, God gives you grace. But faith comes in a measure. Let me show you how it works. This is where we're at. Everybody in this room, under the sound of my voice, if you're saved this morning, you can put yourself someplace in here that only you can do.

Here's how it works. God provides the grace for us to be saved, but it takes faith for us to get saved. Both elements. That's why Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8 says:

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

See? It takes faith to get saved. Faith is the key to our relationship with God, but at salvation, God just gave enough faith for you and me to trust Him to get saved, a measure. When you got saved, you and I had major issues in our life. If you're smart when you win somebody to Christ, you don't try to delve into those issues. You don't try to tell them what could happen way out here because they're not ready for that yet. You see, grace comes to you and me, but faith comes at a measure. When you got saved, God just gave you enough of faith to trust Him for salvation. He didn't give you enough faith to trust Him for all the big things you've got to do in your life. He didn't give you enough faith to trust you for maybe getting your kid saved or the job you're about to lose, or maybe you just lost that job. You see, we can't trust God for the big things yet. Maybe you have a trouble with smoking and you're beat up because of the fact, "Well, I just got saved and I ought to be able to kick that." No, no, no. He gave you enough faith to get saved, but He didn't give you enough faith at that point to go with other big things in your life. Why? I'm going to show you why.

You know what's true of your life and my life? We live in bad economic times. You can turn on the television, listen to any radio program, and everybody's got an idea what you ought to invest in. You can listen to this guy who'll say, "Well, you need to buy gold." Somebody else will say,

"Well, you need to go ahead and just buy good blue chip stock." Somebody else says, "Well, forget the gold, forget the stock, buy guns, you know, buy this, buy food, buy." Everybody's got their survival thing. Everybody. Everybody's got their plan by which you're to invest in. The truth of the matter is we are, as Christians, are such a weak people. Many times, even though we sometimes put ourselves in the situations we're in, that doesn't take away the fact that when we want to exercise our own power, we can exercise that faith and grow. God will walk us through whatever we're in to get us where He wants us to be. You know why we can't take that first step? We never developed our faith.

You know why some of you don't give anything to God financially? This is not a sermon about money, but just a fact. You know why some of you don't give a dime to God? Because you think you can't afford to. You haven't learned yet that you can't afford not to. You haven't learned yet to the point where you and I know what your plan is. Hey, I hear it all the time. "Well, you know what? At the end of the month, we got the bills here. We got the bills here. We got." At some point in your life, at some point in your life, whether it's finances or whether it's your job or whether it's your kids or whatever, at some point in your life, you're going to have to say, "I'm going to step out by faith." You say, "Well, I'm in a deadbeat job." Maybe you're in a deadbeat job because you're not willing to step out and trust God first. You already saw the verse, "Without faith, it's impossible to please Him." Faith is the essence by which you grow. When we talk about spiritual maturity, when we talk about being mature spiritually, we're not talking about muscles or studying the Bible. We're talking about how much can you trust God with what you have and then what you can trust Him with what you don't have. That's where it gets tough.

I can't imagine going out to the mailbox. You know what? When he bought his first church, he was so excited about it. I went to Staten Island about that time and I wanted to see it. He bought a broken down Roman Catholic Chapel. He's all excited. He said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm tearing out the kneeling pews. We don't need them. We're going to make this thing into a church." I went up to see it. I couldn't believe it. The basement was full of water. I was like, "I don't want to make this thing. I don't want to make this thing." He had a lot of water, had holes in the roof. He had more pigeons in it than he had people. It was a wreck. I said, "How much did this cost?" Thinking, "\$29.95." "\$4 million." That's property in New York City. Of course, you understand. A trash guy picks up trash, makes \$200,000 here. You make a lot of money, but you pay a lot of things for everything. I walked in there and I thought, "You have lost your mind. You have absolutely lost your mind. The only thing I see good about this, that there is a swimming pool in the basement." I went back about four years later. That thing was transformed into the most beautiful church I'd ever seen in my life. You know why? Because he had the faith to see something that God gave him that I didn't have the faith to see. That's why. He had the faith to step out on his own. Call me and say, I say, "How you doing?" "Oh, great. How's everything going?" "Fine." I asked him. I said, "You got a building?" "Yeah." "How much you pay for it?" "\$2 million, \$3 million, whatever it was." I said, "You got that much money?" He said, "No." I said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "That's God's business, not mine." And he meant it. He meant it. You know what? God took him out of his faith and God paid for everything he did. That church today has run about 600 people up there. 600 people in a place

where everybody said, "You're nuts." Because he wasn't afraid to wander for God when nobody else would. He's stepping out by faith.

You can't come to the plate. When you begin your giving the very best you have, when you begin to walk with God when nobody else will, when you begin to work for God when nobody else... When you begin to wander for God, you see, when you go up that spiritual level, then you come to the point where you learn on every level a different level of trusting God. You begin to... You know, in the time that we live in, it's bad for you. It's bad as it looks. It gives you a perspective that "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." It gives you a perspective of everything of where you're at. It gives you a perspective to realize that whatever God has ordered, God's going to pay for. I try to live my life this way. I don't always do it. But it's the one thing I always think of in my life, in my relationship with God. You heard me say a little while ago when all the Church of Christ people are coming to me. I love being outnumbered. I love being the low guy on the thing when the whole world's against you. I love it. I mean, I don't know what to tell you. In my Christian walk with God, here's how I like to live my life. I don't always do it. I feel bad when I don't. Sometimes I weep when I don't. But here's how I like living it. I like living my life like a guy way out on a branch of the church. I love being on the branch of a tree, of a dead tree and hanging on for everything in life and 10,000 feet to fall and feeling that thing start to give way and look back at the space of that tree and see God and think, "Oh, my problems are over." The only problem is God has a hacksaw in His hand and a smile on His face. Not being afraid to give Him the very best you have. Not being afraid to work for Him when nobody else does. Not being afraid to wander for Him when nobody else does. Not to be afraid to walk with Him when nobody else does. This is why it only comes by taking the measure of faith and then growing through it.

Hebrews chapter 5, verses 12 through 14 says:

Hebrews 5:12-14

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Now here's how it works. He says that you ought to be teachers. He says that yet in some cases when you ought to be teachers, you're still struggling with the very first basic principles of the Bible. He says you're still fooling around with the milk when you ought to be into the meat. The Bible is doctrine. I gave you last week that, you know, the model for that is about three and a half years in the Bible. We have grace and we have faith, the process of growing in these areas. Grace is God's ability to use the truth that He gives you and build your faith in God as you grow spiritually. He says, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age," spiritual maturity, "even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

God gave you grace to get saved and He saved you. At the time of salvation, He gave you a measure of faith just enough that you could trust Him for salvation. That's why God didn't call you to go out and be a missionary the day after you got saved. That's why God didn't call you into the ministry the day after you got saved. That's why God, the moment you get up off your knees, God didn't come down and say, "You need to go to the mission field." He didn't tell you that. Some man may have told you that. No, no, He didn't. He only gave you faith in a measure. Now, what do you do? I'll tell you what you do. Philippians chapter 4:

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Every new Bible in the market takes out "which" and puts in "who." It's not God that comes down and strengthens you. That's the idea. That's the lay of the sea and mindset. "Oh, God will come down and give you the strength." No, He won't. It doesn't say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." It says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." It's not God that strengthens you. It's the things that you do for God that God takes and strengthens you. God gives you a measure of faith. You know what you do? You start to exercise it. That's why I push you. That's why I get you to the point where you put you in these discipleship groups where you can learn something. Where you can maybe just sit there and give your testimony the first time around. Where you can maybe open up and talk about how you got saved. Start doing something for God, exercising those senses, taking the faith that God has given you and exercising it, stretching it. God gave you the grace when He saved you, but He also gave you the measure of faith to get saved. Now you take that measure of faith and you exercise it by the things that you do, the reason of use. The ability to teach, the ability to understand the Bible, be skillful, and the bottom line is to discern what is right and wrong. Comes from you taking that faith that God gave you and exercising that faith, stepping out to trust God, giving God the very best you have when nobody else will. Walking with God when the person next to you won't. Doing a work for God when nobody else wants to. Going wherever God wants you to go and doing those things that God has called you to do by faith. Letting God grow you through it. The process of God giving you grace. But He gives you faith by measure. Using it, exercising it to learn how to give that faith and grow that faith.

Your spiritual maturity, your relationship with God, when we talk about somebody being spiritually mature, somebody getting to the point where you really are spiritually mature, we're simply talking about somebody who doesn't know all the Bible, somebody that not necessarily could teach a Bible study or preach a good sermon. We're talking about somebody who has exercised his or her faith to the point that they can step out by faith and do whatever God's called them to do. That's spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity doesn't have any to believe in anything. Spiritual maturity has you stepping out and doing what nobody else will do by faith based on the grace that God gave you.

You know, this is where our church is at. This is why we need to make some hard line decisions. Some hard line choices. We need to have a defining moment in our life. Everybody needs one. I'm telling you this is, and I've got so many things I want to say today, but I'm going to shut up

because I'm going to blow it if I don't. I just want to tell you, be here New Year's Eve. This is your church and you're interested in what I've talked about this morning. Maybe not even a member. You've got somebody out there that, you know, looking for a church or looking for someplace to get grounded in the Word of God, bring them that night. Got somebody unsaved. Bring them. It'll be the greatest single Bible study we ever took in our lives. It's going to come right down in it and bring this thing right into 2010 and understand where we've got to do and what we've got to do. There'll be some major revisions, but that's what needs to be. We'll talk about it when we get there. You can sign up when we're dismissed here today for that. All the guys that are going to be here for a meet with the Church of Christ guys. They need to see you up here very quickly.