

PARACLETE

ADVOCATING FOR THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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FAITH – Threatening Extinction, Part 3

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In the previous two parts of this series on faith, I explained that a faith which will not become extinct is based on evidence, is reasonable, and has Jesus Christ as its object.

Here I want to explore the dynamic nature of faith which results in a transformed life and a certain eternal destiny. Jesus said, “I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10). He also said that “... apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Obviously, the power capable of transforming our lives must not be “natural,” that is, a result of human endeavor.



Jesus preaching to the multitude from a boat on the Sea of Gallilee, by Gustave Doré (public domain).

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus, he revealed two gifts of His ministry. First, Jesus came to “take away the sin of the world,” and second, to “baptize in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:29, 33). Regarding the latter gift, the apostle Paul identified this as the power that transforms: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

Though faith is not the power that transforms, it is certainly the conduit for Holy Spirit transformation. The apostle Paul said that “by grace you have been saved through faith...” (Ephesians 2:8); the apostle John said, “[T]his is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 John 5:4); the apostle Peter says that we “are protected by the power of God through faith...” (1 Peter 1:5); and biblical author Jude says to

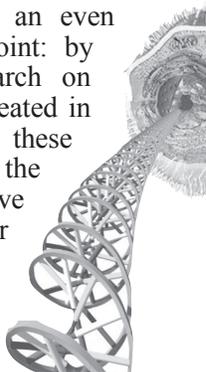
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FOR REFLECTION

“Divine” Advice

A team of scientists based in London deleted a gene from twenty-five human embryos using the gene editing CRISPR (an acronym for “clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats”). Within two weeks they were alarmed to discover numerous **unintended edits** which would likely lead to birth defects and even cancer later in life. **They were all killed immediately.** The news led a gene-editing expert from University of California at Berkeley to exclaim, “This is a restraining order for all genome editors to stay the living daylight away from human embryo editing!” Well said, but he and the others missed an even more important point: by experimental research on human embryos created in the image of God, these scientists sacrificed the lives of twenty-five children on the altar of science.

Source: *Answers Magazine*
Vol. 15, No. 4 (Oct-Dec,
2020), p. 27.



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IN THE NEWS

Yard Sale Bonanza

A 20,623% return on your investment, in less than a year?! That’s what a person in New Haven, CT, stumbled upon at a garage sale.

The \$35 purchase of a blue and white porcelain lotus bowl was later sold at auction by Sotheby’s for \$721,800. It turned out to be a rare (one of only seven known) and valuable fifteenth-century Chinese artifact from the Ming Dynasty.



Another Ming dynasty porcelain piece (ca. 1426–35) on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Public domain.)

Source: *World Magazine*, 04.10.21 Volume 36, Number 7, p. 18

A First

In a recent survey, the Pew Research Center reported that only 49% of millennials in the U.S. identify as Christian, making them the **first non-majority-Christian generation** in American history.

Source: *World Magazine*, 11.09.19 Volume 34, Number 21, p.11

One More Race

Kane Tanaka, currently the world’s oldest human at 118, is scheduled to carry the Olympic torch ahead of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo. Understandably, she will do most of her route in a wheelchair but is determined to walk at least part of it. Appropriately, the family gave her a new pair of sneakers at her last birthday. The title for the oldest person ever to live (not counting Bible characters) belonged to a French woman who lived to 122.



Olympic flame arrival ceremony in Tokyo. (Photo by Miyuki Meinaka, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>).

Source: *World Magazine*, 04.10.21
Volume 36, Number 7, p. 18

FAITH – Threatening Extinction

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build yourselves up “on your most holy faith...” (Jude 20).

I want to conclude this faith series with three transformations in my thinking which resulted from the Holy Spirit in my life. How thankful I am!

A Personal Relationship – not Religion

In my adolescent mind, church was about a set of behavioral rules. Christians followed the teachings of Jesus while disciples of Muhammad and Gandhi tried to live by the rules these leaders left behind. This was “religion.” Only after I was born again and received the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8) did I realize that Christians don’t think of themselves as following the teachings of Jesus, but rather Jesus Himself. The reason is simple – Jesus is alive! Muhammad and Gandhi are dead.

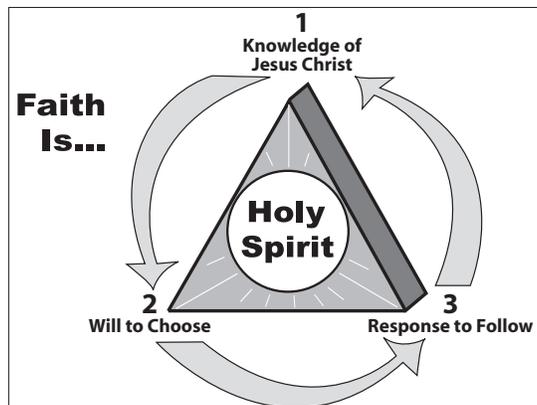
Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:37-39). The Spirit of God within a person? The naturalistic presuppositions of my scientific training caused me to view this with skepticism. But this teaching is everywhere in Scripture: John 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 1:13-14. On my knees with tears of repentance this truth was affirmed in my own experience. The result was a faith in which I experienced the gift of God’s presence changing me from within instead of one which controlled me by an external code of dos and don’ts.

A New Freedom – not Performance

As a new Christian I wondered how I could possibly maintain my faith. A serious look at what Jesus taught would “blow” even the most devout and disciplined person out of the water, so to speak: “...love your enemies...”; “...every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart...”; “...no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions...”; forgive one another “seventy times seven” times; “...you are to be perfect...”! How could anyone perform that?

They can’t. Trying to live like Jesus is not just difficult – it is impossible

(1 John 1:8). Performance for approval was not God’s solution for sinful people. The apostle Paul explains God’s plan (Romans 5:15-18): “the free gift of grace...through Jesus Christ...presents all men freely acquitted in the sight of God” and “presents all men righteous before God.” As I embraced Jesus through faith, I was forgiven (Romans 8:1). Meanwhile, His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit transformed my fallen nature and my desires from within (Philippians 2:13). Instead of trying to be good enough to earn God’s approval, by grace I was set free of guilt and sin to follow Him, motivated by gratefulness and joy.



The corners of a triangle can be used to represent the essential components of biblical faith. Based on this diagram, faith is “traveling the triangle.” I can only put my faith in Jesus if I know about Him. That knowledge (1) must be supported by historical evidence of His deity so I can be confident my faith in Him is valid. Even with the knowledge concerning Jesus, unless I make a choice concerning who Jesus is (2), there will be no faith. If there is no response (3) derived from the knowledge and the will, then there is no faith either. According to the Bible, to qualify as legitimate, faith must consist of all three components: knowledge, will, and response. As sinful humans, however, we lack the desire and the power to do this.

What if the Holy Spirit Himself is placed at the center to create a supernatural dimension? If, by His prompting, we respond and accept the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residency within us. He transforms our fallen nature and desires from within, and provides the power to travel the triangle.

A Certain Hope – not Apprehension

I grew up thinking that no one in this life could know whether they had been good enough to go to heaven. It was God’s job to tally the good and bad deeds after I died and issue His judg-

ment. It left me with a “I hope, I hope” apprehension.

It gradually dawned on me as a new Christian: How can my deeds be the deciding factor of going to heaven if my relationship with God is based on grace? God’s Word provided my answer:

...God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13, NIV). The apostle Paul said, “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

God has already revealed the basis on which I can know whether I’m going to heaven. Because of my faith in Jesus Christ I can know right now that is my eternal destiny.

Will Jesus Find Faith When He Comes?

We began this faith series with that provocative question from Jesus (Luke 18:8b). Was He implying that faith might become extinct? Surely apostasy (falling away) is a sign of the time before He comes again (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This need not happen for you, if you heed the key factor of faith survival.

After recounting an entire chapter of the historic heroes of faith (in chapter 11), the author of Hebrews directs his readers to the key of faith survival: “...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...” (12:1-2). Some translations say “pioneer” [source] and “finisher” [goal] of faith. In other words, He is the “vine” and we are the “branches” and “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Jesus is the source, the object, and the finisher of faith. Abide in Him and His love, let His words abide in you, and let His joy fill you (John 15:7, 9, 11) – then your faith will be a testimony to Him when He comes. 

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