

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“The Victory of our Faith Over the World”*

**July 6, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** 1 Thes 5:19-22

**Scripture Reading:** 1 John 2

**Introduction-**

**2Ki 6:15-18**

(15) When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant

said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

(16) He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

(17) Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

(18) And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Please strike this people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.

This is a very, very important subject before us this morning – perhaps the most important topic for the Christian. At the same time, it is very difficult for me to put it into words, so let's all give ourselves fully to hearing God's Word and asking Him to enable us to understand it.

Essentially, this is our topic:

1Jn 5:4-5

(4) For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. **And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.**

(5) Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Faith. We think that we understand it, but we do not. Yet Scripture tells us that faith is the very means by which we overcome the world.



You will recall that for the last few weeks we have been considering the doctrine of the Day of the Lord, and we set out on that subject because Paul mentions it so very often, as he did in 2 Cor 1:14. We are to live in the knowledge and certain hope of that day.

1Th 5:19-22

(19) Do not quench the Spirit.

(20) Do not despise prophecies,

(21) but test everything; hold fast what is good.

(22) Abstain from every form of evil.

And as we considered last week, we are opposed in our battle by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world is that enemy kingdom that sets itself against God's kingdom at every point. Its god is the devil. Its currency is lies and deception and fear. And this world is passing away and all that is in it. Those who live it, who are worldlings and earth-dwellers are going to perish with it. And so we were warned-

1Jn 2:15-17

(15) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

(16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

(17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Let me then state the thesis we want to grasp this morning –

*Faith is the means by which we overcome the world, by which we resolve to not love the world, by which we have eyes to see that the world is indeed passing away, that the Day of the Lord is coming, and by which we do the will of God. This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith – because it is by faith that we are justified in Christ.*

Let's think our way through Paul's words here in 1 Thes 5:19-22 -

- **Do not quench the Spirit.** Now normally we think that this means we should not sin and grieve the Holy Spirit, which certainly is true. However, in this context I suggest that not quenching the Spirit is directly connected with *the recognition of and reception of the Word of God as truth and the rejection of lies by which the enemy tries to deceive us.* In other words, as you will be hearing in the Sunday School study of Acts, *not quenching the Spirit means receiving God's Word as God's Word and rejecting man's word as nothing but man's word.*

- **Do not despise prophecies.** It is the Spirit, you see, by whom the Lord gives prophecies – ie, gives us His Word. The Spirit is the One who inspired and inerrantly directed the human authors of Scripture. Quenching the Spirit is to reject the Spirit's word (and in our day, that means Scripture) and embrace falsehood that claims to be from God. Despising prophecy, that is to say, despising God's Word is to quench the ministry of the Spirit.

- **Test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.** Do you see how this flows? Not quenching the Spirit, not despising the Spirit's Word, is effected then by *testing everything. That is to say, everything that comes our way claiming to be of and from God. We must be able to discern good from evil, hold to the good, and reject the evil.*

And I am suggesting to you that what this requires is this gift given us by God called *faith*. It is by *faith* that we recognize God's Word for what it is and by which we reject falsehoods. Where this faith is absent, Christ is absent. Eyes remain blinded and ears stopped.

Isaiah 6:8-10 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (9) And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'" (10) Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Isaiah 29:10-14 For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers). (11) And the vision of all this has become to you **like the words of a book that is sealed**. When men give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this," he says, "**I cannot, for it is sealed.**" (12) And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," he says, "I cannot read." (13) And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and **their fear of me is a commandment taught by men**, (14) therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the

wisdom of their wise men shall perish, **and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.**"

No eyes and ears of faith, you see. Thus no discernment, and thus the embracing of commandments taught by *men* and a rejection of the Word of God. And all of this, remember, by a people who were called God's people. People who claimed to worship him. Who "honored" Him with their mouths. Religious people. The "Christians" of that day. But there was no faith in them, thus no life in them, no obedience to the Lord.

Listen to the London Confession of Faith on this, and in particular notice paragraph 2 -

#### CHAPTER 14; OF SAVING FAITH

**Paragraph 1.** The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts,<sup>1</sup> and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word;<sup>2</sup> by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 4:13; Eph. 2:8

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 10:14,17

<sup>3</sup> Luke 17:5; 1 Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32

**Paragraph 2.** By this faith a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word for the authority of God himself,<sup>4</sup> and also apprehends an excellency therein above all other writings and all things in the world,<sup>5</sup> as it

bears forth the glory of God in his attributes, the excellency of Christ in his nature and offices, and the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in his workings and operations; and so is enabled to cast his soul upon the truth consequently believed;<sup>6</sup> and also acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding **obedience** to the commands,<sup>7</sup> **trembling** at the threatenings,<sup>8</sup> and **embracing the promises** of God for this life and that which is to come;<sup>9</sup> but the principle acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Acts 24:14

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 19:7-10, 69:72

<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim. 1:12

<sup>7</sup> John 15:14

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 116:2

<sup>9</sup> Heb. 11:13

<sup>10</sup> John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Gal:20; Acts 15:11

**Paragraph 3.** This faith, although it be in different stages, and may be weak or strong,<sup>11</sup> yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers;<sup>12</sup> and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory,<sup>13</sup> growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ,<sup>14</sup> who is both the author and finisher of our faith.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Heb. 5:13,14; Matt. 6:30; Rom. 4:19,20

<sup>12</sup> 2 Pet. 1:1

<sup>13</sup> Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:4,5

<sup>14</sup> Heb. 6:11,12; Col. 2:2

<sup>15</sup> Heb. 12:2

How do you respond to the Word of God? Do you obey its commands? Do you tremble at its threatening? Do you embrace and rest upon its promises? That is what genuine faith does. If you do, then you have eyes and ears of

faith to recognize God's Word. If you do not, then you lack that faith and you are in an unsaved condition.

Now, we can take great assurance and confidence in knowing all of this if we belong to Christ and have received His gift of faith, seeing its fruits in our lives. Likewise, anyone who claims to be a Christian yet who lacks the eyes and ears of faith, evidencing an inability to discern God's Word from man's word, should cease having any confidence that they are righteous before God.

Why is all of this so vital? Well, let me tell you from decades of experience now overseeing Christ's church. Our elders will tell you the same thing and many of you know these things to be true. How many times have we preached and taught the Word of God in this church – as I also did in two churches in Montana and one in Anchorage – and seen over and over again people who claim to be Christians, who claim they have come to faith in Christ, and yet who fail the tests of faith over and over again? Why is it that some (sometimes just a few) people “see” the Word of God as the Word of God while others dismiss it as “that guy's opinion” or less? Why do so many who claim to know Christ continue to walk in sin in spite of the threatening of God's Word

against such disobedience? Why? We know why. It is because there is no faith in them. They are not regenerate. They do not know Christ.

And this is why this subject is so crucially vital for all of us to see very plainly. Let's consider some real life examples.

I have many times pointed to the following Scripture as God's Word on how God's people are to relate to a professing Christian who is habitually and unrepentantly walking in sin:

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one.

There it is. God's word. God's command. It isn't hard to understand. We must not fellowship with a person who says they are a Christian if they insist on living in wickedness. By the way, "reviler" means a *verbally abusive person. One who reviles others. Who vilifies them.* We have had to put revilers out of this church in the past. And we have had to break fellowship with people who are guilty of sexual immorality and who refuse to

repent. And yet, every time we have had to follow this commandment of the Lord, there have been some who just don't seem to get it. They mark it up to "that's what the pastor and elders say" and then fail to obey the Lord's commandment.

Now, while that of course is very frustrating to us as the shepherds of the church, what this reveals is far more serious than just our frustration. What it reveals is, *a lack and absence of faith.* And that, evidenced repeatedly in a person, demonstrates an unregenerate heart. That is why there are church splits so often when God's Word is heeded and obeyed and applied:

1 John 2:19-21 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (20) But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (21) I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

What is it that divides? Faith. Faith vs unbelief. You had it in the wilderness:

Hebrews 3:7-19 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' (11) As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see

that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Unbelief. God swears by Himself that unbelievers will never enter His kingdom. Such are the ones who are overcome by the world and will perish with it. Our victory by which we overcome the world is – our faith.

We can give many other examples of this vacuum of faith in people who have duped themselves into believing they are justified in Christ. For example:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And yet, how many church members today practice or approve of these evils and insist that all is going to be well with them on the Day of the Lord? What are such people doing? They are looking at God's Word here (if you put it in front of them) and regarding it as nothing. Why? Because they are blind and deaf to the Word of God. They are faithless. Without faith....

Hebrews 11:1-6 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (2) For by it the people of old received their commendation. (3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (5) By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (6) And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

What a HUGE thing this subject of *faith* is in God's Word! Do you have it? Is it operative in you? Are you able, increasingly so even, to discern God's truth from man's error? Are you increasing in the knowledge of God and of His ways and will so that you are seeing them more clearly for what they are – the Word of God? This is

serious business. This is eternal business.

Recently as you know this church had to practice church discipline in obedience to and belief in God's Word. It is a sad affair. But those of us who have had to deal with that unrepentant individual who has claimed to be a Christian most all of their life, can tell you that over the years we have been very, very concerned. So much so that we even challenged this individual and exhorted them to examine themselves – but to no avail. What did we see? This person did not obey the commands of God's Word, did not tremble at the threatening of God's Word, and did not (and does not) embrace the promises of God as certain and true so as to turn from the love of the world and follow Christ in obedient faith. That is to say, what we saw is a lifelong pattern of a life void of faith.

Without faith, real faith given by Christ, it is *impossible* to please God. Impossible. Not just difficult. Impossible. That means that where there is no faith, there is no justification, no salvation, no entrance into the New Creation. Sobering, isn't it?

**But My Faith is soooo Weak**



Now, at this point – and perhaps it is a good thing – you may be, as even a true Christian, saying to yourself, “Boy, my faith is so often pathetically weak. And there have been times when I failed the test and didn’t take God for His promise. I had better get with it and get more faith or I may come up short on that Day.”

Let me direct you in light of this to the following words of Christ:

Luke 17:5-6 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (6) And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.



Now of course this passage of Scripture is so often just butchered by

the word-faith heresy people. They announce how marvelous it is that we can move mountains by faith – any obstacle in our lives. Just work up enough faith and that faith is powerful in and of itself you know. Ask God for a miracle and expect it of Him. That sort of nonsense.

But look at the Scripture again. What ERROR IS THE LORD ADDRESSING IN HIS DISCIPLES? It is obvious. They asked Him to increase their faith. That is to say, they thought that the issue was one of the *quantity of faith* when in fact our Lord’s answer to them demonstrates that it is not the *quantity* but the *quality*. The kind. If you have real faith, the faith that justifies, the faith that is given by God, then it need only be of the smallest amount because the OBJECT of that faith – Christ – is the Omnipotent Lord of the Universe!!

You see the very same thing – this *quality not quantity* – in the prayer of the Publican –

Luke 18:13-14 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (14) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be

humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

And again –

Mark 9:23-24 And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."  
(24) Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Again, not because of the greatness of OUR faith (which wrongly glorifies man, causes us to look to ourselves instead of to the Lord, and is immeasurable anyway) but because the object of real faith is Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Faith overcomes the world. It overcomes the flesh. It overcomes the devil. It enables us to obey Christ's commandments, no matter how difficult. It causes us to regard the threatening of God's Word with sober fear and respect and trembling. And it enables us to confidently embrace all of God's promises, particularly His promise to make us righteous in His Son Jesus Christ – by faith alone.

Do you have it? Is this faith evident in you? Look carefully at how you regard the Scriptures, the Word of God. The preaching and teaching of the Word of

God. Are you seeing it as the Word of God, or dismissing it as the mere word of man and instead embracing the opinions of men?

Over the years in this ministry, we have seen people who consistently refused to obey God's Word, who, like these Corinthians who were standing off from the Apostle Paul and the gospel he preached, persisted in regarding the Word of God as the word of man that could be disregarded. Where are those people today? Gone. Gone off to embrace the traditions of men instead of the life-giving word of God.

And then, as I trust is true of all of you – I hope it is true of all of you, or if it is not that your blind eyes are beginning to be opened to your need for Christ – I trust it is true that you are in the other company of people. That flock which really is the flock of Christ, possessing real faith, joining other believers who are one with you in seeing the truth of Christ's Word, the certainty of His promises, and the rapidly approaching Day of the Lord Jesus Christ when this perishing world and all who loved it will be no more.

**1Th 5:19-22**

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