

The Relationship Between Faith And Wisdom

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I was thinking a while back on the subject of faith and wisdom. Sometimes in our lives, they seem to come into conflict—faith and wisdom. I remember back, as do those of you with a Worldwide Church of God background. We all know that there were opportunities to go on these giant radio stations and television stations. Yet, there wasn't always the money available and there was the cry, "Well, we have to step out on faith. God will provide." At the same time others said, "We'd better be careful. Maybe we should rethink this."

Then sometimes it hits closer to home, wisdom and faith, in this alleged conflict. Or maybe on the surface it seems that way. There is none, as we're going to see, but as an example, Sabbath services. We cancelled Sabbath Services here a year ago and there was a group of people (not with us) who criticized us for lacking faith because we looked at the weather forecast which said there was a blizzard coming. Those people said, "Where is your faith? God will protect you." Then, of course, there were some of us who said that it didn't seem real wise to go out in the middle of a blizzard. So, faith and wisdom seemed to come into conflict here.

So the question arises: Where do we draw the line between faith and wisdom? What is the proper relationship between faith and wisdom? That's the title of the sermon.

The Relationship Between Faith And Wisdom

We're going to look into that today to see if we can find out where that line is and where the balance is between us having faith and at the same time having wisdom. To set the stage for this what we want to do is to give a brief overview of both faith and wisdom.

1. We're going to look at faith just very briefly.

You could make a series of sermons on it, but we're just going to hit the high spots. We know the biblical definition of faith is in found in Hebrews 11:1. Let's go over there to look at the meaning of the Greek words to give us a better idea (or a refresher for those of you who have been around for decades) of the words so we can have a better concept of faith when we discuss faith. Hebrews 11:1, we'll read it out of the King James, which unless noted otherwise all the scriptures are from the King James. This is a very clear definition.

Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is ... (KJV)

So our antennas should go up and it says:

1b) the substance of things hoped for, ... (KJV)

And then it says:

1 continued) ... the evidence of things not seen. (KJV)

So we're going to look at these three words, "faith," "substance," and "evidence." They are very closely related in meaning, as well they should be.

The Greek word for "faith" is Strong's #4102, and it means *assurance, persuasion, or belief*. So, when we're told here "Faith is, we could say "Our assurance, our persuasion, or our belief is."

The verse goes on to say, "The substance of things that are hoped for." The Greek word for "substance" is Strong's #5287 and it simply means *confidence*. Faith is the confidence of the things we hope for, the confidence that we will receive what we hope for; it will come to pass.

Then it goes on to say, "The evidence of things that are not seen." The Greek word for evidence is Strong's #1650 and it means *proof, or conviction*. So, what this tells us is that faith is the absolute proof of things you cannot see. It is the conviction of things we can't see, yet that they will come to pass.

The NIV translates verse 1 as:

Hebrews 11:1. *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (NIV)*

That is a very good translation there.

The New Living Translation says this:

Hebrews 11:1. *What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen; it is the evidence of things we cannot yet see. (NLT)*

Faith is evidence that someday we will see them.

Let me give you a simple example of faith. This was back when our son Britt, who is 44 now, and this was back when he was probably 4. It was in the fall and we lived in Massachusetts. They have a lot of farms where you can buy produce at the harvest season. There are a lot of apples that are harvested in Massachusetts. So, we went to a farm and they had tours with all the stalks of corn and everything, very New "Englandy" fall, a beautiful day.

We were walking around this farm. Adjacent to the big barn was this platform. It was probably seven or eight feet off the ground. Probably more like seven, I suppose. Being a four-year-old, and as they do, our son jumped up the steps and went on this

platform. He was looking down at me, which he really liked. Of course, I was down here and he was up there.

He got to the back of the platform, all the way with his back against the outside wall of the barn and he got this look in his face and I knew exactly what was going to happen. He took off running the full length of the platform and just leaped into space. He was like superman with a cape going. He was just going off. He had his hands out like this and his legs spread with this giant grin on his face. And he just had absolute faith that his daddy was going to catch him. There was no question. He wasn't worried in the slightest. Despite the fact that I did not totally share his optimism, I managed to catch him. It wasn't a very elegant thing, but managed to catch him.

It's this simple childlike trust that what we don't see yet is going to happen and we're going to see some other things that what God says is true. In fact, it's this childlike trust that God exists.

We have to remember that in order to please God we have to have faith. If we don't have faith, we're not pleasing to God. Let's go to Hebrews 11:6, which says very plainly:

Hebrews 11:6. *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that [comes] to God must believe that he is, ... (KJV)*

That's the faith part.

6b) ... and that he is a rewarder of [those] that diligently seek him. (KJV)

We're going to expand on this later, but it's simple faith that God exists and that He is going to reward us at the end of the day if we please Him.

Now, what should we have faith in? There is a very simple answer and it is right here. Believe that He exists. And that, I'll interject, the Bible is His word, complete word, totally breathed by Him. And, then, finally in the latter part of verse 6, that God and Christ will keep Their promises to us, one of which is our reward. So, that God and Christ exist, that the Bible is Their word, and that They will just simply keep Their promises to us—childlike faith in that.

So, then that prompts the question: What are the promises? There are many, many, many promises, but we're going to look at three scriptures that give us the crux of the promises. Look at Isaiah 41:8. We'll begin in verse 8 and go through verse 10. Now, Isaiah 41 is talking to physical Israel, but we have to keep in mind that we are spiritual Israel and these scriptures apply to us in a spiritual way as they apply to Israel in a physical way. Isaiah 41:8, notice what it says. And we can put our name here in a spiritual way.

Isaiah 41:8. *But [you], Israel, [are] my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. (KJV)*

That all applies to us spiritually.

9) *[You] whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called [you] from the chief men thereof, ... (KJV)*

And we've all had that calling. We should be so thankful for our calling, but it's a spiritual calling.

9b) *...and [God] said unto [you], [You are] my servant; I have chosen [you], and not cast [you] away. (KJV)*

Those are promises. Those are facts. Verse 10, therefore, because of the calling and because God hasn't cast us away:

10) *Fear [you] not; for I am with [you]: be not dismayed; for I am [your] God: I will strengthen [you; yes], I will help [you]; ... I will uphold [you] with the right hand of my righteousness. (KJV)*

Boy, this last verse is just full of promises! "I am with you. I'm your God. I'll help you. I'll uphold you." Those are the promises that we, as little children of God, have faith in.

Let's go to the New Testament, Hebrews 13:5. We were in chapter 11 earlier but there is a theme there and we're going to pick it up in Hebrews 13. We'll read verses 5 and 6. Paul is talking to the Jews of the day who were converted and to us also.

Hebrews 13:5. *Let your [conduct] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as [you] have: for he [has] said, I will never leave [you], nor forsake [you]. (KJV)*

Carrying on from Isaiah 41.

6) *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (KJV)*

There are people with their lives on the line because of health problems. When you look at these scriptures, "The Lord is going to take care of me. The Lord is my helper." So that is another set of promises.

Then finally in 2 Timothy 2:10 is the ultimate promise that we as little children have absolute unwavering faith in. Paul says about himself to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:10. *Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, ... (KJV)*

Because he is a servant of God's people, and here is Paul's reason for enduring all these things.

10b) ... that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (KJV)

That is the ultimate promise that has been given to us and faith is having simple childlike trust that we will ultimately see that promise fulfilled.

The other thing that we want to just cover briefly is that faith is demonstrated by our deeds, what we do. Of course, if any of you came from a Protestant background, this is a big controversy in the Protestant world that you can have faith without deeds, but the Bible addresses that. Let's start off in Galatians 3:11. As a reference, you can also go to Romans 1:17 as they say the same thing. In Galatians 3:11, Paul says it very plainly—very, very clearly. Notice what he says.

Galatians 3:11. *But that no man [mankind, human] is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall ... (KJV)*

Have faith? No.

11b) ... the just shall live by faith. (KJV)

It's how they live, how they conduct their lives. So we demonstrate our faith by how we live. We won't turn there but in the very familiar scripture of 2 Corinthians 5:7 we're told:

2 Corinthians 5:7. *(For we walk by faith, not by sight:) (KJV)*

But the key is that it's a walk. We walk by faith. Faith is part of the walk. Faith is what helps us make the walk and stick to the walk and stick on the path. So, we can't get away from the fact that the Bible is very, very clear that faith is demonstrated by our deeds.

Now let's go see what the apostle James said in James 2. We're going to begin reading in verse 14. And he laid this out very plainly. It just blows my mind that those people who say "You can have faith without works," they obviously don't read all the Bible or they don't believe all the Bible. James 2:14, he poses the question:

James 2:14. *What [does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he [has] faith, and [he doesn't have works?]] can faith save him?*

Just by having faith—meaning that we can do anything we want as long as we have faith.

*15) If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
16) And one of you [says] unto them, Depart in peace, ... (KJV)*

“Go eat some cake,” is the common phrase.

16b) ... be [you] warmed and filled; notwithstanding [you] give them not those things which are needful to the body; what .. profit [is it]? (KJV)

What does it do? Then he makes the key statement in verse 17.

17) Even so faith, if it [has] not works, is dead, being alone. (KJV)

Faith has to be backed up by works. Then he goes on with another example in verse 18.

18) [Yes], a man may say, [You have] faith, and I have works: show me [your] faith [apart from your] works, and [James says] I will show [you] my faith by my works.

19) [You] believe that there is one God; [you do] well: [What's the big deal?] the [demons believe that], and [they] tremble.

20) But [will you] know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (KJV)

He says, “Don’t you see now when the knife was coming down, in Abraham’s mind, his son was dead.” He was stopped at the last minute, but in his mind, he would have followed through with it.

22) See [you] how [that] faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? (KJV)

In other words, the deed demonstrated the faith. Our words, our deeds demonstrate our faith.

23) And the scripture was fulfilled which [says], Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: [for] he was called the Friend of God. (KJV)

Because Abraham demonstrated his faith by his works. If we want to be the friend of God and called a friend of God, we need to follow that example.

24) [You] see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

25) Likewise also [it] was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? (KJV)

She had the faith that these men were from God and that Israel was God’s nation. So she hid them first and, then, lowered them down the wall in a basket, and that demonstrated her faith. James is bringing that out.

26) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (KJV)

So, in summing up this first point, we have to realize that faith is a simple childlike trust that God is there; the Bible is His Word; and that we need to demonstrate our faith by our actions, by our thoughts, by our words. We demonstrate those by the simple trust, the simple belief, the confidence that God's promises are real and they are coming to pass. So, that's faith.

2. The second point we want to have is a brief overview of wisdom.

Let's go to the most commonly used scripture, Proverbs 9:10. This, again like Hebrews 11, this tells us what wisdom is. This tells us though what "the beginning" of wisdom is.

***Proverbs 9:10.** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (KJV)*

Now keep that in mind, too, because it comes into play in just a second.

The Hebrew word for "wisdom" is Strong's #2451. Baker and Carpenter's The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament says it means "*wisdom, skill, experience, or shrewdness.*" So, we'll see that part of wisdom is to have skill in what we do and what we say. To have experience, we learn; we gain wisdom through experience and through shrewdness, being very careful about how we phrase our words and how we walk the path that God has given us.

Let's also note that in Webster's College Dictionary under the word "wisdom," it says a *wise course of action*. Wisdom is choosing a wise course of action. So, when we think of wisdom, we need to think of the word "wisdom" as active. It means we are doing something with the wisdom. It is a wise course of doing what we need to do, of action.

Now what happens is we start with knowledge as little kids. Little kids gain knowledge about all the things around them and they learn. They learn language. They learn to communicate. They learn the names of things and all of that. And we go from there.

But the key is knowledge can either be true or false. Knowledge is knowledge. And we all know we've had false knowledge. We've been taught false knowledge, but there is true knowledge. So knowledge, in and of itself, is not the key because then we progress from knowledge to understanding. We read there in Proverbs 9:10 that it says "The knowledge of the holy is understanding." So, understanding is knowing truth from falsehood, knowing the godly from the ungodly, knowing the good from the evil. That is understanding. And we progress our whole lives in separating the good from the bad. When we know what God's mind is, that is wisdom. It is understanding and it leads to wisdom because remember? Wisdom is active. Wisdom is the correct application of

understanding. Understanding is knowing right from wrong, good from evil, truth from falsehood. So, wisdom is correctly applying that knowledge. Wisdom is active.

Back to the example of Britt jumping off this dock. The wisdom in that is whether you should jump off the dock or not. That's the wisdom. The wisdom is to realize your dad is an imperfect human being and might not catch you. That's the wisdom. We don't get that wisdom until we mature later on in life when we realize our parents are fallible; they are human beings. We love them and, yes, they do have wisdom, but they're not God. They're not perfect.

So, we see that wisdom is the correct application of understanding. One of the best examples, one of the greatest examples in the Bible is that very thing—the application of understanding. We find that in 1 Kings 3. This is the account of Solomon and the two harlots who were mothers. 1 Kings 3, we'll begin in verse 16. Solomon hadn't been on the throne very long. The people around him were obviously looking to see if this guy had the “right stuff.” These two harlots came up with a problem and he was interviewing them, trying to gain knowledge, then gain understanding, and then issue wisdom.

1 Kings 3:16. *Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.*

17) And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house [lived under the same roof]; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

18) And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman [pointing at the other one] was delivered also [of her baby]: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house [nobody else, just the] two [of us] in the house.

19) And this woman's child died in the night; because ... (KJV)

“She overlaid it,” the King James says. She fell asleep, rolled over on it, probably suffocated the little baby in the night.

20) And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while [your] [handmaiden] slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

21) And when I rose in the morning to [nurse] my child, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I [bore]. (KJV)

Women have a sense of this and she said, “This isn't the baby that I went to sleep with.” And the other woman said just the opposite.

22) ... No; but the living [son] is my son, and the dead [son] is [your] son. And this said, No; but the dead [son] is [your] son, and the living [son] is my son. Thus they [spoke] before the king.

This is a typical thing a judge has to look at is the “he said-she said.” He’s looking at two people in conflict and they both tell completely different stories. So, this is knowledge. This woman is saying this. This woman is saying that. That’s just knowledge. We don’t know what the truth is yet, but that’s knowledge.

23) Then said the king, [This] one [says], This is my son that [lives] and [your] son is the dead: and the other [says, No]; but [your] son is dead, and my son is the living. (KJV)

So, how do you solve that conundrum? How do you solve that problem? Here’s where understanding and wisdom come into play to separate truth from fiction.

24) And the king said, Bring me a sword.... (KJV)

Which, I’m sure, shocked everybody because they didn’t know what he was going to do.

24b) ... And they brought a sword before the king.

25) And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. (KJV)

Can you imagine how the wind was sucked out of the room by all of the shrieks, particularly of the women around, thinking that this new king, David’s son, would do this thing? Or even think about this thing.

26) Then [spoke] the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and [don’t in any way] slay it.... (KJV)

Now we’re getting to the crux of the matter. Now we’re getting to understanding.

26b) ... But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor [yours], but divide it. (KJV)

The king had the answer. He had the understanding now.

27) Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no [way kill] it: she is the mother thereof. (KJV)

Now he had understanding of the situation. We’ll get into that in just a second.

28) And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that ... (KJV)

Notice this!

28b) ... the wisdom of God [or the wisdom from God] was in him, to do judgment. (KJV)

Now in verse 23 was knowledge. The king understood that this woman is saying this and this woman is saying that. They are exactly the opposite. That's just simple knowledge. The understanding was of a mother's love for her child. That is the understanding. He knows that the real mother's love for that child is going to supersede anything, even her losing the child, because she wants that child to live. That was Solomon's great understanding. Then, the wisdom is hatching a plan to bring that out. How do you bring that out? "I know a mother is not going to kill her son, but what kind of plan can I have to prove that?" And the drawing out of the sword was the application of understanding, which is wisdom. So, let's understand in closing up this second point that wisdom is the application of—the living of—a Christ-like mind, which is knowing truth from evil, which is knowing good from bad.

Again we're talking about faith and wisdom and the fact that some people don't know where to draw the line.

3. The third point we have to realize is that both are a gift from God—both faith and wisdom.

So, let's talk about wisdom first. Wisdom is a gift. We just read in verse 28, the latter part of 1 Kings 3:28, "they saw that the wisdom of God was in him." That was a gift. It was an absolute gift. Let's go to James 3 and begin in verse 13. If we want a gift from God, we are told here that we have to ask. We must ask. I can't tell you the number of times I've moaned and cried and all that about something that went wrong or something I didn't do right. And you know, I look back and if I just had simply asked, it would have solved a lot of trouble, would have alleviated a lot of pain.

James 3:13. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good [conduct] his works with meekness of wisdom. (KJV)

It's interesting he used the words "meekness of wisdom" because if you understand that wisdom comes from God, it's not something we develop. It's not something we manufacture inside ourselves. We can't puff ourselves up and say, "Look at my wisdom." It isn't our wisdom. It's God's wisdom.

14) But if [you] have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and [don't] lie against the truth.

15) This wisdom [of envy and strife] descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. (KJV)

It comes from Satan. It comes from demons.

16) For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. (KJV)

"But", here we get to the crux of the matter.

17) ... *the wisdom that is from above [from God] is first pure ... peaceable, gentle ... (KJV)*

“Easy to be entreated,” the King James says. The New Living says, “Willing to yield to others,” not insisting on one’s own way all the time.

17b) ... *full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (KJV)*

You could plug in almost all of the fruits of the spirit right here. Wisdom is that. This wisdom comes from God above. Look at chapter 1 verse 5 of James. Talking about wisdom, he says:

James 1:5. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that [gives] to all men liberally [of wisdom], and [upbraids] not; and it shall be given [you]. (KJV)*

It is a promise. Faith comes in here too—faith that God will give us wisdom.

Now, we just read the account of Solomon. Did Solomon ask for wisdom? Let’s go back to 1 Kings 3 again and look at verse 5. When you put that whole chapter together, Solomon asks; then, it is given; then, it is demonstrated to the whole nation.

1 Kings 3:5. *In Gibeon the [Eternal] appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give [you]. (KJV)*

In verse 9, we’ll get the answer. Solomon is saying:

9) *Give therefore [your] servant an understanding heart to judge [your] people, ... (KJV)*

Give me the ability to know truth from evil, truth from falsehood, good from bad. And this is the reason, not to puff up himself, but:

9b) ... *that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this [your] so great a people?*

10) *And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. (KJV)*

So we see here that wisdom is a gift. It is an absolute gift. Now we’re going to see that faith is a gift. This is the third point: both wisdom and faith are a gift from God.

Now, we won’t turn there but we know Galatians 5:22 lists the fruits of the spirit and faith is one of those—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith. Faith is one of those. It is a fruit of the spirit, but, as we’re going to see in just a minute, that spirit comes not from us.

If we want faith—we talked about that here a couple of sermons ago—the fact is that what we want is not faith that we develop, what a human being can generate. What we want is the faith of Jesus Christ to be put inside us. Galatians 2:16 says this very clearly. You have to use the King James because the other translations get it wrong. They simply get it wrong. If you use the words “faith in Christ,” that’s a human faith. If you use the words “faith of Christ,” that is the faith that Christ had when He walked this earth. It’s a totally different thing.

Galatians 2:16. *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (KJV)*

Now, the faith of Christ comes by and through the gift of the holy spirit. Let’s go to Acts 2:38. After Peter had preached to these people where he said, “You’re responsible for killing Jesus Christ. You’re responsible for putting Him to death,” they said they were convicted of it and they were convinced that they were guilty. So, they said to the apostles and to Peter, “What do we do? What on earth do we do?” Peter responded:

Acts 2:38. *[And he] said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of [your] sins [which we have done], and [you] shall receive the gift of the holy [spirit]. (KJV)*

And when we receive the gift, that gift of the holy spirit imparts faith. Not our faith, not the faith that a human can develop, but the faith of Jesus Christ. So, the message here in the third point is that both are a gift and we must seek both. Not one. Not the other. We must seek both. Let’s understand that. Let’s go to Matthew 7. We must seek both faith and wisdom. They are gifts if we ask. Matthew 7 beginning in verse 7, it is key that this is Christ’s very first sermon and He’s going through these essential points.

Matthew 7:7. *Ask, and [it’s going to be] given [to] you; seek, and [you will] find [it]; knock [on the door], and [the door will] be opened unto you:
8) For every one that [asks receives]; and he that [seeks finds]; and to him that [knocks] it shall be opened. (KJV)*

You have to put all the scriptures together, here a little and there a little. The obvious understanding is that you have to asking for something that is right and good and according to God’s law. Also, you have to ask for something that is according to God’s will for you at that time in your life. That is tempered by that. Not just “Give me a new corvette.” That’s not going to happen because it wouldn’t be the right thing to do.

9) *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son [asks bread, is he going to] give him a stone?*

10) *Or if he [asks for] a fish, [he’s going to] give him a [snake]?*

11) *If [you] then, being evil [humans], know how to give good gifts unto your children ... (KJV)*

And this is the key.

11b) ... how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to [His children who] ask him [to His kids, to His children]? (KJV)

We have to ask the question: How could God refuse a sincere request of one of His children to have faith and to have wisdom? If we're on our knees and we're begging God sincerely, "Please give me wisdom. Please give me faith," would God not do that? Of course, He would. If we could give that to our children, faith and wisdom, just pour it into their heads through the holy spirit, we would also do that. But the request has to come from an obedient sincere child, which, hopefully, we all are. We're obedient. We're sincere in our asking. Not because we want to puff up and call attention to ourselves because "Look at the faith that I've got! I can heal this person," or whatever or "Look at the wisdom I've got! I can outsmart all these people." No. We want the faith and the wisdom because it glorifies God; because it helps us serve our families, our mates, our children and our brothers and sisters in the church. So that request has to have right motivation too. So that ends the third point that both faith and wisdom are a gift and we have to ask.

Now we're getting to the crux of the matter.

4. Faith and wisdom should work together.

It's not an either/or situation such as either you have faith or you have wisdom or you exercise faith or you exercise wisdom. No, it's not an either/or situation. They cooperate with each other. They work together, faith and wisdom. As God's people, we must have childlike faith, childlike trust in the Father and the Son. Once we know something is according to His will, then we can have absolute faith in that. And we're going to see where wisdom comes into that equation here in just a second.

That earlier example of our son jumping off that dock is a small example, but faith combined with wisdom gives the best possible result. It's good to have faith in your dad, but you have to have faith in your dad within his limitations. We need to understand that. That's where wisdom comes in. You can have faith but wisdom and faith have to cooperate together.

There is a time to step out on faith. Absolutely! No questions asked. There is a time to step out on faith even against tremendous odds. And my first year in the church I had to face that. I was an officer in the Air Force. I was reading (devouring) all of the booklets, as we all did, and the correspondence courses and all of that. There was a booklet on military service and war. I was a career officer. I read that booklet. And I studied it again and I read it again. The only conclusion you can draw is military service is wrong. I shouldn't be there doing this thing. It's clearly wrong to stay in the military.

Now, what other options do you have? You could ask the Air Force to “Set me aside over here. Put a bubble over me until my four years is out and, then, you can release me.” That doesn’t happen in the military. It just doesn’t. So, there were no options available. The only thing you can do is just do it and step out on faith and trust God to take care of you during the process. All of us are put into situations like that where we just have to step out on faith. There are no other options. If we’re going to be obedient, we have to step out on faith.

Then, however, there is a time to use wisdom—cancel services when a blizzard is forecast. Who in their right mind would put children and the elderly in harm’s way knowing in advance this gigantic blizzard is going to come? Who in their right mind would want to do that? That is wisdom that serves and protects other people.

Getting back to the example of the Worldwide Church of God and spending money. Many times they said, “We’re going to step out on faith. God will provide.” What was the fruit of that? A financial crisis and, then, letters going out asking the brethren to bail out the lack of wisdom spending more money than you have. That was the fruit. So, we need to learn from that.

I had a personal experience with another group shortly after leaving Worldwide. I went to a ministerial conference that they held. (I’m not going to name groups and people or anything.) Dorothy and I were there and the second evening of the conference, I think it was, we had dinner with their chief financial officer. We were just getting to know people. We didn’t know all these folks really. We were sitting around at dinner and there were probably eight of us there, four couples.

The CFO was mentioning, “We have this tremendous opportunity to go on this major cable TV network.” This was back in the ‘90s. He was talking about all of the stations and the times, all the good details of this thing. So, I said, “Okay, but do we have the money?” I didn’t know. I was just asking a dumb question. “Do we have the money?” And he says, “No, we don’t but we have to step out on faith and trust God to give us the money when we step out on faith.”

Well, a year later they folded. They were gone because they didn’t use wisdom. They didn’t combine wisdom with faith. I learned a big lesson from that, as far as church is concerned; don’t spend money you don’t have! We follow that here in Pacific Church of God. We had a conference in February and we talked very plainly about that. We’re not going to spend money we don’t have. It’s just not going to happen because, yes, we have faith that God is going to take care of us, but we also need to use wisdom that we’re not going to tell God what to spend money on that we don’t have. So let God show us what He wants us to spend the money on. And if He wants us to spend more, let Him give us more money. Then, we’ll spend it, but we’re not going to spend it before we get it thinking we know better than God. That’s just again, it’s the exercise of wisdom.

So we see here if you put faith and wisdom together they should complement each other. Wisdom tempers unrealistic faith. This is a key point: wisdom tempers unrealistic faith. Yet, faith motivates us to follow God in desperate situations. Faith motivates us to follow God when things look desperate. There is no hope. It's just overwhelming and that's where faith comes in that we will follow God no matter what.

Now let's go to a Biblical example of both wisdom and faith. I gave a whole sermon on that last time about Abigail. So, let's apply what Abigail did with the understanding that this woman used both faith and wisdom. Let's go to 1 Samuel 25. We're just going to hit a couple of scriptures, just to bring out the point.

David is coming to kill all the males of Nabal because Nabal insulted David, wouldn't give David of his abundance. David had been a wall against predators, against other evil people, protected Nabal's possessions, his men, his shepherders, and his sheep. So, David heard that Nabal just thumbed his nose at him. David's red hair and anger got the best of him. He took out his sword and they were marching down to kill these folks—all the men. 1 Samuel 25:17, David is on the way.

1 Samuel 25:17. *Now therefore ... (KJV)*

The servants—who understood this situation—were talking to Abigail and saying this to her.

1 Samuel 25:17. *Now therefore know and consider what [you will] do; .. (KJV)*

She had a decision. "What am I going to do?"

17b) ... for evil is determined against our master, and against all [of] his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man [can't even] speak to him [can't reason with this guy]. (KJV)

Notice what she did. She took action. Wisdom is taking action—putting understanding into action.

18) Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and [put] them on [the donkeys]. (KJV)

And in the beginning of verse 19, she headed out and told her servants to "Go ahead, because I'm coming after you." Her wisdom was she used her husband's wealth to placate David's anger. That was wisdom. "What do I have at my disposal that I can solve this problem with?" And she came up with this plan. That was the exercise of wisdom.

23) And when Abigail saw David, she [hurried, she jumped off the donkey, she], fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, (KJV)

She put her forehead in the dust as a sign of humility.

26) Now therefore, [She is saying this to David.] my lord, as the Lord [lives], and as [your life lives], seeing ... (KJV)

Now notice what she says here.

26b) .. the Lord [has withheld you] from coming to shed blood, and from avenging [yourself] with [your] own hand, ... (KJV)

Now David hasn't said a word. He hasn't said a word to her. He could walk up and take her head off. But the fact is that she is saying here without any doubt, "God has withheld you from taking innocent blood." That is faith. She knew she was doing the right thing. She knew this was pleasing to God and she knew that God was going to back her up. David hadn't said a thing at that point and then, in verse 32, notice what he said.

32) And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, ... (KJV)

Notice what he says.

32b) ... which sent [you] ... (KJV)

You see God put it in his mind that this woman is coming from God. This isn't from just her. It's coming from God. She's being pleasing to God and obedient to God.

32 continued) ... which sent [you] this day to meet me:

33) And blessed be [your] advice, and blessed be [you], which [have] kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with [my] own hand. (KJV)

God engineered this whole thing. Abigail had wisdom to know what to do to placate David. Yet, she had faith that God was going to take care of her. She didn't know how just like Abraham with the knife coming down. He didn't know how it was all going to end up, but he had faith that God was going to take care of it.

Here is the key. We're talking about wisdom and faith cooperating. God watches us to see what decisions we're going to make in our lives. Sometimes, as we all know, decisions we have to make at the time we have to make them aren't always crystal clear. It's not absolutely clear "This is the best choice," or "That is the best choice" It's just not. "I'm sick with this disease. Do I have this medical procedure or do I attempt to deal with it through natural means? What do I do?" We don't have a Urim and Thummin and the lights aren't going off. We don't know which one to do.

But here is the key. God waits for us to decide as best we can under the circumstances. God wants us to use the wisdom we have and the faith we have in making a decision. He watches us to see what we are going to do. Then, He uses our decision to teach us what we need to learn—no matter which way we go. He uses the decision we make and He uses whatever wisdom we have in coming to that decision, whatever faith we have in coming to that decision, He uses that at the end of the day (no matter which way we go) to teach us what we need to learn.

Let's give an example. Let's say a wife has a beef against her husband. It could be real or it could be imagined, but she has a problem with her husband. So, the wife has a decision to make. "Do I speak up about it or do I not? Do I just bury it and say nothing, let it pass by or do I speak up about it?" That's a decision. And faith and wisdom come into play in making those decisions.

Then, carrying on with this story, "If I speak up, when do I speak up? And if I speak up, what do I say? How do I phrase it? How do I present it." Those are other decisions that need to be made.

So, let's say that she chooses to speak up and she chooses very carefully like Abigail the right time coupled with the right words, very carefully. She asks God for wisdom, picks the right time, says the right words. And the husband is relaxed. He's in a receiving mood. She very humbly explains that this hurt her feelings or this set her back some way. And the husband says, "You know, you're right." Or the husband could say, "I didn't mean it that way. Here's what I meant," and now the wife understands. But the bottom line is it all worked out and they're happy again. And the thing that caused the upset is now gone.

Now, conversely let's say she chooses the wrong time. Let's say he walks in the door after he didn't get any sleep the night before. He had a really bad day at work and he's not very happy. And she chooses that time to bring up the problem. Then, she uses the wrong words. She gets emotional. She allows her anger or her bitterness to come up and she just lights into him the minute he steps foot through the door. And, then, if you do that, of course, you have the predictable results. The husband is short on sleep. He's not very happy. He's not in a peacemaking mind and you get a predictable reaction. Not that his reaction is correct or right in God's eyes, but humanly that's the predictable action. So, after she explodes with him and he explodes back to her, now you have a bigger problem than the one you originally started with.

So there are various decisions and various courses of action. The point I'm trying to make is either way God could be and will be with the wife in what she does. If she chooses to bury it and not say a word, then God will give her peace. He will give her forgiveness and understanding and it will truly be buried if it's something that's small enough that should be buried. On the other hand, if she chooses the right words, the right time, then the best way to handle a problem is reinforced because it all worked out well. So, next time she'll learn from that and keep doing it. On the other hand, if she

chooses the wrong time and the wrong words and they have this gigantic blow up with the end being worse than the beginning, she learns what not to do. She learns that if this comes again, "I'm not going to handle it this way. This is dumb. I'm making the problem worse than when we started."

The reality is wise decisions make life less painful. Like the Worldwide Church of God spending too much money and then beating the brethren up to bail them out. Wise decisions are less painful, but the fact is that even if we make wrong decisions, it can turn out well because we grow in wisdom; we grow in experience; we grow in understanding of the things that should be done and should not be done. And during the whole time, God is with us. Just because we make a wrong decision doesn't mean that God rejects us or hates us or kicks us to the curb. It's a learning experience for us that He will teach us over time. So over time God wants us to grow in faith and in wisdom and in the ability to put the two together so they cooperate.

5. This last point is very crucial: We are not to put God to the test.

This is especially true about faith. We are not to put God to the test. Let's go to Deuteronomy 6 and look at verse 16. Israel was the poster child for putting God to the test. Israel took every opportunity to put God to the test. Remember Deuteronomy is Moses looking back shortly before his death, recounting everything that happened. There is a lot of wisdom here. He's trying to prepare them to go across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses says:

Deuteronomy 6:16. *[You] shall not tempt the Lord your God, as [you] tempted him in Massah. (KJV)*

What was Massah? In Exodus 17:7, it says they were thirsty. They were complaining and they were basically saying to God, "Is the Lord among us or not?" That's what Exodus 17:7 says. Basically, they were saying, "How can we be following God who makes us thirsty?" Or later on, "How can we be following God who doesn't give us any meat to eat but this stupid manna? How can there be a loving God?" So, they're putting God to the test.

The word "tempt" here in the Hebrew is Strong's #5254 and it just means *to test*. Put Him to the test, make Him prove to us that He is God. Now how silly is that? God doesn't have to prove anything to us? But we can test God when we say, in the case of canceling services, with this reasoning. "Okay, God you want us to attend services. Right? Right. If I step out on faith, you will protect me. Right? Right. And even though there is a blizzard outside and the State Patrol says we shouldn't even be walking outside and they advise us not to drive, I'm going to go out and I'm going to put You to the test." In essence, it's like daring God to protect us because "If you don't protect me, I'll know you're not God." That's what Israel was doing to God. They said the same thing. How can there be a God when we're hungry and thirsty. You must prove to us that You are God by giving us water and giving us food." We're putting God to the test

where He has to prove something to us or we won't believe Him. That is really thin ice to get on.

Now I know a few who have done that in the church. They didn't use wisdom and blindly trusted in God to their own peril. I know a man—I won't mention his name, but it's in the northwest here. He wanted to go to another church. He was an elder and he was supposed to speak. There was this raging blizzard going on outside between where he lived and where this other church was. He just said, "Ah, God's going to take care of me. He wants me to be there. Right? He understands I'm going to be there. He's going to get me through," even though the State Police, the weather department were saying don't get out on the road between here and here. Sure enough he did, went sailing around one snow plow and plowed into another snow plow. Just crumpled this poor little car and he had three other people with him!

Now God has mercy. No one was hurt. Nobody had to go to the hospital but this poor little Japanese car looked like a wadded up piece of tinfoil. So, God sometimes protects us from our own stupidity, but the fact is that we have to use wisdom. He dared God to keep him safe.

Another man I know going back into New England and years ago. He didn't buy house insurance, fire insurance because he said, "Why should I pay men money? God is going to take care of me. God's going to protect me. God won't allow my house to burn down. Guess what? His house burned down. He got very bitter at God. And he left the church over this whole thing because He was telling God what God was going to do. He was telling God that God was going to do this because he demanded God do that. We can't put God to the test. It would be like me riding my motorcycle in a lightning storm thinking "I know God's going to take care of me." I don't see that in the Bible, don't see it at all.

God never promises to protect us from our lack of wisdom. Galatians 6:7, you know what it says. "Whatsoever a man sows, that is what he's going to reap." If we sow stupidity, we're going to reap the consequences. If we sow wisdom, we're going to reap the consequences.

Now let's look at Christ's example in Luke 4. We'll begin in verse 9. Christ also said you can't put God to the test. It's wrong. You can't do that. Luke 4 beginning in verse 9, this is the account where Christ had fasted for forty days and forty nights. Satan had taken Him to Jerusalem.

Luke 4:9. *And he [Satan] brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If [You are] the Son of God, [throw yourself] down from [here]:*

10) For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over [You], to keep [you]:

11) And in their hands they shall bear [you] up, lest at any time [You] dash [Your] foot against a stone. (KJV)

This is just like going out into the blizzard. It's the same principle. Now, Christ had to power to jump off and be saved, but notice what he said in verse 12.

12) And Jesus [answered and] said unto him, It is said, [You shall not tempt the Lord [your] God. (KJV)

The Greek word for "tempt" here is Strong's #1598 and it means *to test thoroughly*. Christ said, "If I did that, I would be putting God to the test." Just like that guy in the car going through the snowstorm is putting God to the test just like the Israelites did. Zodhiates says this about that word #1598: "Sinners are said to tempt God ... putting Him to the test, refusing to believe Him or His Word until He has manifested His power...." I'm not going to believe you until you show me. And I'll know you're God if You get me through this snowstorm even though I don't have to go, shouldn't be going, but that's the only way I'm going to know you're God."

So Christ set the example. The apostles followed through with that example. Let's go to Acts 15 where we'll begin in verse 5. This is the conference that was convened because certain Christian Pharisees came from Jerusalem basically saying that in order to be converted, you have to be a Jew first. You have to convert to Judaism, be circumcised; then, you can be a Christian and be baptized.

Acts 15:5. *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, ... (KJV)*

Now these aren't Pharisees persecuting Christians. These are Pharisees that believed.

5b) ... saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

6) And the apostles and elders came together to consider [the] matter.

7) And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, [you] know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, ... (KJV)

God made the decision. It was God's doing.

7b) ... that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8) And God, which [knows] the hearts, [bore] them witness, giving them the [holy spirit], even as he did unto us; (KJV)

Peter is saying there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles according to God, men and women—no distinctions.

9) And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith [absolute faith].

10) *Now therefore [because of what God did] why tempt [you] God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (KJV)*

The Greek word for “tempt” here is a different word. It is Strong’s #3985 and it means *to test objectively or to assay*, as if you had found some gold up in a mine and came to an assay office where they would look at it to see whether it was legitimate or not. It can also mean *to prove or to try*.

So, Peter is saying that if you require people to convert to Judaism first and men particularly to be circumcised, you’re putting God to the test. What he’s saying is that what you’re doing is you’re putting a giant hurdle in front of every male Gentile that God calls making him get circumcised no matter his age. (I just cringe at the thought.) But you’re putting this giant hurdle in front of God calling these people. You’re making it more difficult for God to convert them just like you were making it more difficult for God in the sense that you take the car out in this blizzard and demand that God save us if we were to make that decision.

So what Peter is saying is don’t put these stumbling blocks in front of God. You’re putting God to the test by doing that. You’re saying, “Even though this guy has to have this operation and it’s going to be very painful, I know God can still convert him. So, God, You prove it to me. We’ll put this in place and, then, You prove it to me.” And Peter is saying we can’t do that to God.

So this last point here, point number five, is we can’t put God to the test. We need to beware of that—trying sometimes self-righteously to be more righteous than God. We have to have everybody circumcised. And God says no, you don’t have to. But no, we’re going to be more righteous. We’re going to do that. I know people that try to be more righteous than God. “We can’t keep Thanksgiving as a Christian.” Now, God says nothing about it, but “I’m more righteous. I’ve got my righteousness to uphold. So, we’re going to do away with wedding anniversaries and Thanksgivings.” Trying to be more righteous than God, we have to be careful about that.

And we have to be careful by putting God to the test by going against His desire, His wishes. Sometimes we can get a head of steam up and we don’t stop to think. We don’t use wisdom and ask is this what God really wants to happen? Does God really want pagan Gentiles coming into the church circumcised? And, then, they have to go make sacrifices and they have to do all this stuff. Is that what God really wants? Peter said, “No, that’s not the case.”

Or the biggest, I think, one for most of us is putting what we want ahead of what God wants. We want something. We want it badly and, so, we’re going to figure out, somehow concoct a way that this is righteous. So, I’m going to demand God give me what I want.” That’s putting God to the test and, then, after it all falls apart, wanting God to make it all right so nobody gets hurt. That’s where wisdom and faith work together.

So, what is the proper relationship between wisdom and faith? God expects both from us. Both are a gift through the holy spirit, the comforter. The comforter comes, the holy spirit comes, gives us (if we will ask) both wisdom and faith. And, hopefully, we can see how they work together where wisdom tempers unrealistic faith, and yet, faith comes to play when a situation is hopeless and we must step out in obedience to God. Hopefully we can see now that faith and wisdom go hand in hand because they guide our very thoughts and our very actions. Wisdom is action related. And let's understand that faith is action related because we demonstrate (as we proved), we demonstrate our faith by our deeds. But both of them together give us balance so that we don't go off on wild tangents, so that we don't go off and do things against God's will, so that we don't try to out self-righteous God, and so that we do His will. And, then, we have the absolute faith, the peace, and the confidence that God is going to back us up. As I gave the example of the husband and the wife, God will back us up and we will learn no matter what.

Now, the fact is going forward we have to realize we need both—faith and wisdom. We're going to need it going forward. There are going to be all kinds of people out there trying to deceive us, as we read in Matthew 24 and in the book of Revelation. There are going to be false prophets out there. There are going to be false ministers out there. There are going to be circumstances to pass that are going to make Satan look like Christ and false ministers look like true ministers. The fact is we need to grow in wisdom and faith and use both. If we do that, then we can be at the marriage supper with Jesus Christ our Savior.