

JESUS & RELIGION

David Halbrook

Our society is skeptical of almost everything. This is good if it keeps us from believing what is unproven but bad if it keeps us from believing what is proven. For example, many people are skeptical of religion. Often they have only seen abused, false, man-made religion so they assume all religion is the same. They might even hear *religious groups* say “Jesus didn’t bring religion. You don’t need religion, you need Jesus.” This is a lie. True religion belongs to Jesus!

The Bible tells us Jesus lives and also tells us about *pure religion* (James 1:27). This means personal giving, such as caring for people in real need. It requires self-denial (*keep oneself unspotted from the world*), meaning we must avoid adultery, homosexuality, jealousy, and false religion.

This year diligently seek the pure religion Jesus established when He gave man His plan to forgive sin, add man to Himself, and add man to His church. Answers to questions about pure religion are in the Bible. Contact us if we can help you find God’s answers there.

Editor’s Note: Here’s a simple article to begin our teaching in 2014 in *Arkansas Weekly*. We are again publishing them weekly. Will you help maximize the use of our teaching (and money) by helping someone find our articles or handing one to them?

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Samuel Southall, and others with ongoing trials, our brethren who are travelling, and new Christians.

The men meet on the first Sunday of the month to discuss our work and duties. There is an “agenda” sheet at the back for items needing their attention.

Will you help with the signboard out front or offer an idea of how to use it?

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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THE FAITH-FILLED FEARLESS FIGHTER

Steven F. Deaton

When the Israelites faced the Philistines in 1 Samuel 13, there were many cowards. They "hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits" (1 Sam. 13:6). The men who followed king Saul did so trembling (1 Sam. 13:7). They lacked faith in the Almighty when faced with seemingly overwhelming odds. But, not all were like this.

Jonathan, Saul's son, maintained faith in God. He and his armor bearer went on the attack (1 Sam. 14:1-14). They killed about 20 men at the outset of the fight and kept going. His actions led Israel to a great victory (1 Sam. 4:23). Here is what we need to know.

Jonathan believed God could save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6). It did not and does not require numbers to win a victory. God's side is the right side no matter what. With Him on your side, you can be triumphant against your greatest enemy, Satan. Too, though Christians are vastly outnumbered in this world, we can and will win the war in the end (Rev. 17:14).

Jonathan only won the victory because he broke from the crowd (1 Sam. 14:1, 2, 17). Staying among the fearful will not lead to an advance in the cause of God. He was willing to go it alone and do the right thing with faith in God. If you are going to win the battle, you must get away from those who are afraid to fight.

Jonathan inspired others to fight. His actions led to Saul and the army getting into the fight (1 Sam. 14:20). The Hebrews who had gone over to the Philistines changed sides again and fought (1 Sam. 14:21). The cowards who hid in the mountains came out to battle (1 Sam. 14:22). Your actions and attitude can affect others. You can stir up a fervor of spirit that leads the previously fearful to join in the battle for truth. One who is committed to the Lord need only step out and take the fight to the enemy to bring about a radical change in things. You can be a faith-filled fearless fighter that brings victory to God's people. Yes, I mean you (Phil. 4:13).

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES GREAT ASSURANCE (ROMANS 8:16) [2]

David Halbrook

In Romans 8:16, Paul declares that *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*. Our spirit often needs words of assurance and reassurance that our relationship with the unseen God is real. Last week we began a study of occasions when we need, and the Holy Spirit provides, blessed assurance.

The Holy Spirit Assures of the Reality of Truth & Salvation

As our society returns to vain philosophies common to people of the past, Christians are constantly challenged by unbelievers who view faith as belief in anything unseen whether what is unseen exists in reality or not. These skeptics claim that belief in Christ is void of evidence and is the result of a culture's influence, not a Creator's revelation. Christians who are not yet equipped to give a defense of the gospel may find themselves doubting the reality of sin, the necessity of salvation, or the veracity of the Bible. What makes the faith of a Christian different from the faith of a pagan, Buddhist, Muslim, or Mormon?

The same Holy Spirit who moved prophets to speak of sin, salvation, and exclusive truth also foretold future events and moved the prophets to write their prophecies for all mankind of the present and future to find. They told of a scepter coming from Judah (Genesis 49:10), a branch growing from the roots of Jesse who would be born of a virgin and bruised for iniquities (Is. 11:1; 7:14; 53), a kingdom which would be set up by God during the days of the kingdom following the Grecian empire and never destroyed (Daniel 2, 8), and a ruler born in Bethlehem Ephrathah coming from eternity (Mic. 5:2). Neither the writings nor "prophets" of paganism, Buddhism, or Mormonism can produce a single prophecy that matches the nature of the prophecies sent by Jehovah. The Holy Spirit's work in revealing these words which abide forever, bears witness and fruit today assuring saints who search the Scriptures that these things are so, and therefore the claims of skeptics and false prophets are empty (1 Pet. 1:23; Acts 17:11).

This same work assures the young person who one day realizes that he must search out the things that he was raised to believe. Is his faith merely the faith of his parents or would he believe the same things by a study of the Scriptures if he was not taught the gospel from his youth? The common phase of questioning one's faith need not result in faithlessness when young, honest hearts grope for the God who is not far from them (Acts 17:27). Their faith can be refined, reassured, and renewed by the

word revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5). Here, He *witnesses to us* (Heb. 10:15).

The Holy Spirit Assures of the Value of Salvation

Suffering for the gospel always tests the faith of the saints. Today our suffering usually involves social pressure. In the first and second centuries, saints suffered both social exclusion and physical persecution. The books of Hebrews and 1 Peter were written because Christians were in danger of letting go of their eternal hope when they suffered for their faith. Some were wondering "Is the faith of Christ worth paying the price of persecution?" The Hebrew writer reminds them that the Holy Spirit confirmed the faith by signs, wonders, and miracles and thus, it was an insult to the Spirit of grace to abandon the blood-bought covenant (Heb. 2:3; 10:29). These Christians, whose faith wavered, were given warnings of judgment and punishment to alert and reassure them of reality. They were also reminded that they had come to the assembly and church of the people registered in heaven, whose registration and reservation was incorruptible and undefiled (Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet .1:4). Based on this assurance, we often sing "Heaven will surely be worth it all. Worth all the sorrows that here befall. After this life with all its strife, heaven will surely be worth it all!"¹ Maybe it was a similar song that Paul and Silas sang in the Philippian jail, while uncertain of what additional physical suffering was to come (Acts 16:23-25). If we ever face the same opposition, we have the same Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ and therefore have a great inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

Conclusion

God could have chosen many messengers to deliver the gospel of salvation, but both the Father and Son entrusted this vital work to the Holy Spirit. We may not fully appreciate this assurance until one of Satan's attacks makes us reexamine the reality of our salvation. God uses Satan's attacks to strengthen our faith as the Holy Spirit witnesses to us through His enduring words, settling our faith and hope on the Rock. Indeed this is blessed assurance, our story and song all the day long².

¹ W. Oliver Cooper; Jones, C. Jones. *Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All* (Copyright 1946)

² Crosby, Francis. *Blessed Assurance* (1873)