

Contend Earnestly for the Faith

Key Scripture

*“Beloved, my whole concern was to write to you in regard to our common revelation.
But I found it necessary and was compelled to appeal and exhort you
to contend earnestly for the faith which was ours once and for all handed down to the saints
(the faith that is the sum of Christian belief which was delivered to the people of God.”
Jude 1:3 (Amp)*

Portion for the Journey

We are exhorted to “contend earnestly for the faith.” Since our very lives and eternal salvation depend upon our faith, it is very important that we test ourselves to see if we are in the faith! Paul called believers to, “Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]...” 2 Cori 13:5 (AMP) The phrase “contend earnestly” is translated from the Greek word, “epiagonizomai” (Strong’s #1804). This word is taken from two Greek words:

- “epi” (Strong’s #1909) is a prefix that defines the scope of a word. It means to be superimposed over everything we do, to be constantly making motion towards.
- “agonizomai” (Strong’s #75) is the Greek word from which we get the word “agony.” It means to wrestle, to strive or struggle, straining every nerve to the uttermost in order to achieve victory. It provides a powerful word picture of one who is contending with all of their strength for victory in a public game. This is the nation that originated the Olympic games! Anyone who has ever observed the contestants in these games sees the intensity and sheer agony they subject themselves to in order to win. But our adversary is a roaring lion, seeking whom he can devour. When we contend earnestly for the faith, it is not a game, but a life and death wrestling match. The task set before us is one in which we are called to “contend earnestly” in the face of intense opposition, persecution and hindrances.

A vital aspect of contending for the faith is to hold fast to our faith, firm until the end. This requires endurance and steadfastness. demonstrates the need for endurance of our faith so we will inherit God’s eternal promises. “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” (see Hebrews 10:32-39) This endurance is a key component in our fight to maintain our faith throughout our life. The Hebrew word for “endurance” used in this passage is ‘hupomone’ (Strong’s #5281). This word means ‘to remain firm under pressure, to patiently persevere under difficult circumstances. The NT uses this term to describe the man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and loyalty to the faith by even the greatest trials and suffering. This word includes the characteristics of constancy, patience, hope, waiting, continuance and perseverance. Jesus warns that those who do not have a firm root in themselves will fall away in times of persecution. Those who endure will gain ever increasing strength. Meditate on the verses related to endurance to learn its importance as we contend for the faith. It is helpful to use your concordance and look up the verses containing hupomone (#5281) and its root word, hypomeno (#5278). The following are some of the key verses: Luke 21:19; Jude 24; Rom. 5:3-4; 15:5, Gal. 6:9; Isa. 40:31; Heb. 10-32-39; 12:7; 6:11,12

In order to “contend for the faith” it is essential that we truly understand what comprises true faith. Many believe it is just the box we check to designate our religious preference. Faith is one of those words that is difficult to tie down to one simple definition. According to a modern dictionary, faith is “unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence.” This sounds good on the surface, but as it regards the faith found in the Bible, this is simply not true. For example, a person may have faith that if they continue to buy lottery tickets they will strike it rich one day. A. A. Hodge truly said, “Faith must have adequate evidence, else it is mere superstition.” Faith is not the opposite of fact or of scientific knowledge. The evidences of faith may operate differently than those of science, but evidence is necessary for faith to be based on solid Truth. True faith is based upon the absolute certainty and trust in the Word of God as the foundation of all that we believe.

Someone has written an acronym for FAITH:

Forsaking
All
I
Take
Him

This is a good illustration to use when teaching about faith, but as with most definitions of this kind, it still comes short. It would be better to say, “Forsaking All I Trust Him.” Faith means taking oneself out of one’s own keeping and putting oneself totally in the keeping of the LORD Jesus because He is completely trustworthy and faithful.

[Hebrews 11:1](#) “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” This verse is often used as a definition of faith, but more than that, it is an expression of the power and importance of faith. Let us unpack the meaning of the words used in this passage to gain more insight.

Now faith is the assurance...the confirmation, substance, title deed, in which one trusts oneself into the safekeeping of another, based on confidence in the other’s character and motives and ability to perform a certain task. This means a definite taking of oneself out of one’s own safe keeping and entrusting oneself into the safe keeping of the Lord Jesus. This assurance includes three main elements:

1. The fully convinced acknowledgement of the revelation of grace,
2. Self-surrendered fellowship (adhesion)
3. A fully assured and unswerving trust (and with this, at the same time hope) in the God of salvation, Jesus Christ.

The word ‘assurance’ means, ‘the foundation, firmness, actual substance, steadfastness of mind, courage, resolution, confidence, firm trust. Like a good foundation, assurance is concrete. It is a firm support on which all else is set. It is that which has actual substance. It is real in quality and nature. Heb. 3:14

Of the things hoped for ... What are the things we hope for in Jesus Christ? Salvation, healing, God’s love, eternal life with Jesus, protection and provision, answers to our prayers. His covenant promises.

The PROOF of things we do not see ... PROOF is solid conviction, evidence, assurance, that which is convincing and being absolutely convinced! The Greek word for 'proof' is 'elegchos' (Strong's #1650) and it means, 'a proof, by which a thing is proven or tested in order to bring conviction. By which one is convinced of the truth or reality. This word is only used in Hebrews 11:1. Does this remind you of a court of law in which the evidence must prove beyond a reasonable doubt? This is the evidence that brings us to a place of absolute certainty in the truth! 1 Peter 1:6-7 tells us that trials give us proof of our faith, which is more precious than gold which is perishable and will result in praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus.

And the conviction of their reality ... faith contains the perception of facts, real facts that are not perceived by the senses but are believed in the heart. These facts are based on solid evidence and not superstition or imagination. It is the assurance or being fully convinced of the reality of what we cannot see. Hebrews 6:18,19 instructs us to "take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have of a strong anchor of the soul. A hope both SURE and STEADFAST and one that enters behind the veil.

DEFINITIONS:

The Hebrew word for "faith" used in Hab. 2:4, "the righteous shall live by faith..." is 'emunah' (Strong's #530) meaning, 'faithfulness, truth, stability, steadiness, firmness and security.' The heart of the root of the word is 'certainty' or 'firmness.' It presents the picture of the strong arms of a parent supporting a helpless instant. In most cases, in the Old Testament these words apply to God to express his total dependability. The Hebrew root is Aman, which is translated "faithful nursing Father." (For a deeper examination of the Hebrew word for faith used in this passage, see "The Righteous Shall Live by Faith," Part 1 in the Faith Series.)

In the New Testament, the Greek word "pistis" (Strong's #4102) meaning, faith, assurance, belief or believe, coming from Strong's # 3982 meaning, persuasion, credence, conviction of truth or truthfulness of God, reliance.

A working definition of faith is: taking God at His word. Our faith is in God. Our faith does not rest in how large our faith is, but how large the God in whom we place our faith! We cannot properly know the God we should believe in or know how to believe in Him unless He tells us in His Word. This is why Paul says in [Romans 10:17](#) "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It is full confidence in God's Word. FAITH accepts God's word (His promises and His warnings) as truth and acts accordingly. Since there are many evidences that the word of God is true, this is not a blind leap of faith. It is rather an intelligent, holy reaction to the wondrous words of God.

The Key Scripture for this lesson (Jude 1:3) calls us to "**contend earnestly for the faith.**"

Faith is far more than a mental acceptance of something as true; it also involves placing all of one's trust in or reliance on that object of our faith. We are told that the demons believe the Word but they believe but tremble in fear. It is also possible to know the "facts" but not know the truth. Truth requires that one interpret the facts accurately. "The Righteous Shall Live by Faith," (found in Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) is the TRUTH that started the Reformation in the Middle Ages. The Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a good approach to faith. They taught what they called the three aspects of faith.

1. **Knowledge.** Faith is grounded on the absolute truth of God's Word. Biblical faith is not a mystical belief in God and in other principles based on inner knowledge, personal revelations, or human reasoning. It is not a leap in the dark. Biblical faith firmly rests on the words of Almighty God. Any faith not founded on the Word of God is not Biblical faith. Faith begins with a knowledge of what it is that should be believed. For instance, someone may know that the gospel of Christ refers to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ according to the scriptures but not place their trust in God for their salvation. It is possible for someone to know what the gospel is without believing it to be true. 1 Cor 15:1-4

2. **Belief or assent.** Knowledge is not enough. The person must also believe that the object of faith is true. To reach this level of faith, the person must know what the gospel is (knowledge) and believe it to be true (assent). But this is still not enough for salvation. That takes us to the third aspect of faith. Demons believe but don't love, trust or obey God. James 2:19-23

3. **Confidence and trust** in the object of our faith must develop from our belief. Trust refers to a personal commitment to and reliance upon an object of faith. This confidence will result in action. Faith does not stand alone; it must be accompanied by actions of obedience based on that faith. Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:12; Galatians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Titus 3:8

Example: In salvation, the sinner must know that Jesus died for him and rose again from the dead (knowledge) and he must accept that these facts are true (assent). However, he is still not saved until he relies on these facts as the basis for his personal salvation (belief).

Another example applies the three aspects to one of the promises given to believers. Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Knowing that this teaching is in the Bible is knowledge. Accepting that the fact is true is assent. However, many people take these first two steps and choke at the third one, for it is in trust that we commit our own circumstances to this truth and believe that it refers to us and our own life. We are to "walk by faith" 2 Corinthians 5:7. That means that we are to live our life in such a way that the promises and warnings of God are fully accepted and applied to our own life and our particular circumstances on a daily basis.

Digging Deeper in the Word:

Meditate on these verses and ponder how faith results in the direction one chooses to take in times of trial or struggle: Ps. 20:7; Isa. 31:1; Ps. 33:16-17; 2 Chr. 32:8; Jer. 17:5

- Faith is a choice. It is not a mystery or a mystic gift that we cannot control. Ps. 56:3
- We are to contend earnestly for the faith. Faith is the quality He is looking for in those who follow Him. Faith is an essential aspect of our walk with the Lord. It is the foundation of all that we do in Christ. Luke 1:45; Luke 18:8; Jude 3; John 6:29
- Faith must be anchored to the truth. It is only as strong as the thing to which it is anchored. Luke 5:5; Heb. 6:19
- Faith grows in the dark. Darkness and difficulties are opportunities for us to apply and develop our faith. Trials test our faith and show us where we need to grow and where our faith is weak. Do we see darkness or stars? Do we believe in the stars on a cloudy night? Faith in action will remember in the darkness what we have seen in the light.

- Recognize that everyone is afraid at times. Faith can turn fear into trust. Each time we feel worried, anxious or fretful, choose to trust the LORD. Turn to His Word. Set your eyes on the LORD. He is greater than anything you fear!
- The Bible gives one example after another of the faith of His children regardless of circumstances. There are those who lose their faith when circumstances do not go as they planned, but these difficult situations are actually fertile ground, tilled and overturned to allow faith to grow. Seeds planted deep in the soil of adversity will take deeper root downward and grow taller with better fruit than faith planted in shallow soil! Though situations arise that seem overwhelming, hopeless, oppressive and fearful, God is our refuge. Ps. 42:5-8; 46:1-11; 55:22
- When Peter fell away and denied his LORD, Jesus prayed for him, “that his faith would not fail.” The word for ‘fail’ (Strong’s 1587) is ‘ekleipo’ meaning, to leave out, to quit, pass by, die, cease. It describes the failing of the light of the sun when eclipsed by the moon. The word is a combination of ‘ek’ and ‘leipo’ (Strong’s 3007) which implies a deliberate leaving or departure; to totally and finally fail. When the light of the sun is obscured by the shadow of darkness, we must not doubt the light or lose hope of the power and heat of the sun! Will our faith fail us when for a time we cannot see the light? Peter denied Jesus with an oath, which means to curse, a strong word that pronounces a sentence of death on one at the hand of God. Luke 22:31-32; 58
- In her book, “Gold by Moonlight,” Amy Carmichael wrote, “We only know the outskirts of His ways. The enemy will contest our confidence at every point, he will remind us of the human cause of our trouble. But faith looks above the human....One evening, in a brief lull between the messengers, two of us spent an hour with a small telescope, looking at the Great Nebula of Orion. As I looked into those deeps of darkness, lighted by an infinitely far and faint pale flame, a sense of the eternal came upon me. The world passed away and the lust thereof, and the grief thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever, was the word of that breath of flame. The transitory appeared (as we know it to be) in comparison with the eternal of no account at all. I knew then that THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS WHEN TROUBLE IS APPOINTED IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THAT TROUBLE and I turned from the telescope to meet the next assault with an entirely new peace. The particular circumstances will one day be entirely forgotten but how I touched and handled it... that belonged to the eternal order.”

A note in the NIV Worship Bible adds to the experience Amy described. “I know that you have grown weary. Look to Me for strength and seek My face continually. Trust in Me and do not be afraid. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all of this? I bring out the starry host one by one and call them each by name. Because of My great strength and mighty power, not one of them is missing. So why do you say, “God doesn’t see me, He has disregarded my cause?” Don’t you know, have you not heard? I am the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. I will not grow tired or weary, and my understanding no one can fathom. I give strength to the weary, and increase the power of the weak. So I will strengthen you and help you. With My right hand, I will hold you up. When you run, you will not stumble or fall, in fact, you will feel like an eagle soaring above the world and all of its problems. So sing of My love and strength in the morning and of My faithfulness at night. For I am your Fortress, I am Your refuge in time of trouble. I am your God and I love you. I am your strength. I am your song. I am your salvation. Trust in Me and do not be afraid. When your soul is weary with sorrow, I will

strengthen you according to My Word.” Ps. 59:16-17; Ps. 118:14; Ps. 119:28; Isa. 12:2; Isa. 40:26-31

- Faith is meant to endure. Faith is not meant to be applied in spurts or for a short sprint or one-hundred-yard dash but for a marathon. Heb. 12:1-2
- God tests our faith. Some areas where we are tested are whether we will obey His Word. Complaining, unforgiveness, lack of thankfulness are areas in which He will test our faith through obedience.
- Faith is the basis of our obedience to God. The more faith we have, the more willing we will be to obey Him and be trusted with bigger assignments.
- Faith is the shield which protects us from the Evil One in spiritual warfare. Eph. 6:16; 1 Thes. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:19; 6:12; Heb. 12:2

How do we grow in the faith?

1. Look to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith. Our faith starts with looking at God, not ourselves. We don't examine the strength of our faith by looking inwardly. We don't test our faith against the height of the mountain in our path. We find our faith in looking at the God in whom we trust. Heb. 12:2 (Amp); Ps. 121:1-2

2. **We are directed to fix our eyes on Jesus and His Word to grow in faith.** He is the author and perfecter of our faith. When we focus on physical circumstances, our faith will weaken but when we focus on Jesus in love and worship through His Word our faith will grow. Luke 17:5

3. **Seek the LORD with your whole heart.** Hide God's Word in your heart. Meditation on God's character and ways will give us the confident belief we need in His faithfulness and love. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11-12.

4. **Faith cannot exist in a passive state of mind.** We are to fight or contend earnestly for the faith. This means we seek to walk in faith with an intensity and determination against violent opposition that is set to derail our faith. We are to fight the good fight of faith! Jude 1:3; Matt. 11:12; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7

5. **God is a promise keeping God.** Faith is based on the promises of God, not our hopes or wishes. Faith involves believing God knows what is best. We have no basis to put faith in getting that certain job, finding the right parking place, or not having rain on our picnic. We can place our faith firmly in promises that God has made in His Word. Deut. 7:9; 32:4; Mark 11:22-24; Rom. 4:19-21

Promises of God upon which to build our faith:

- God is faithful. Ps. 89:8 (Amp), see entire chapter
- God will provide us with all our physical and spiritual needs. Matt.6:31-33; P. 23:1; Phil. 4:19
- He will finish the spiritual work He has begun in us. Phil. 1:6
- He will give us wisdom when we ask in faith. James 1:5
- He will never leave us, fail us or forsake us. Heb. 13:5
- He will never allow trials to be more than we can bear. 1 Cor. 10:13
- He will give us true peace. Phil. 4:7
- He will forgive our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness when we repent. 1 John 1:9
- He will make us to become more like Jesus. Eph. 4:15

5. Obey God and act upon what we believe. Faith without obedience is not true faith. Heb. 11:8-9; James 5:16-18

*“May the God of your Hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
[through the experience of your faith]
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
you may abound and be overflowing (bubbling over) with hope.”
Rom. 15:13 (AMP)*

What the LORD has spoken to you through this message:

Your response to God: