

# 816 What Do We Need Spiritually? (1)

## Phil Sanders

### God's Answers to Life's Questions

If you think of your physical life, you need air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, clothing to wear, and housing for protection. What do you need spiritually to survive and to prosper? Today people think they need all kinds of things. They flirt with ideas and experiences, thinking these human things will fill their inner needs, but every person you meet needs more than human ideas can provide.

Every once in a while I feel a little like Rip Van Winkle. You remember him, he is the fictional character of Washington Irving, who went to sleep under a shady tree and slept for twenty years. He woke up to find the American Revolution had taken place and life was very different. When I think of the social, moral, and philosophical changes in our country today, compared to my youth, I wonder how things could be so different so quickly. What do we need today? We need some basic things that will help us to get on the right path to God. For the next three weeks, I'll be presenting three answers to the question, "What do we need spiritually?"

The Bible in Acts 27 tells the story of Paul's ill-fated voyage to Italy. From Fair Havens in Crete Paul sailed in an Alexandrian ship with 276 passengers and crew in the hope of reaching Phoenix, a city on the same island. For fourteen days the wind violently battered the ship off course. Luke, who was on board with Paul, said in verse twenty, "since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned." The ship's captain and crew had no reference point, no North Star to guide them. The storm kept them all at its mercy. So despondent were the men they did not eat. In the midst of their hopelessness Paul received a vision from God.

In Acts 27:21-25 Paul told his fellow passengers, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told" (Acts 27:21-25).

In our own struggles of life, adrift on a sea of uncertainty, we too have a God who can lead us safely through the storm. Paul proclaimed, "I believe God." We too need a sure faith in God, who will keep His promises and do just as He has told us. Just as all 276 people survived the storm in Paul's day, so we today can survive the uncertain storms we face, if we hold fast to our faith. We need faith in God as a Person and in His promises. God does not make promises He will not keep. He is faithful. The Bible says in Romans 4:21 that Abraham was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." We need to have that same conviction in God and in His promises.

And what kind of faith is necessary for these times? First, *we need an informed faith*. We must know what we believe and why we believe it. The word of God itself remains the basis of our Christian faith. Paul said in Romans 10:17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Christians would do well to read God's Word daily to strengthen their hearts for the challenges to come. We need continuous preparation on a wide variety of issues. We must not only know why we believe in God; we must also know God Himself. We must know the evidences for God's existence, for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, for Christianity as the one and only saving faith, and for the importance and necessity of the church. The Word of God has power to touch hearts and make changes in people's lives. We must know the Word and put confidence in its ability to bring people to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

We must also understand the disjointed thinking of our times, how people have begun to think in a format like picture albums or slide-shows. In times past we were trained to reason and to think in a logical procession. Many people today reject logic and think in terms of a loosely connected set of facts. These facts do not need to be consistent and may contradict each other. Truth, however, is always consistent with itself. Truth doesn't change with the wind; it is not fickle. The Bible says in Psalm 119:89, "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." God's word is not something you can ever change; you cannot add to it or take anything away from it. Rather, you and I must listen to it more closely than ever to hear what God says.

Second, *we Christians need an effective faith*. The times ahead demand conviction. The world will hardly take our faith any more seriously than we do. We cannot share a faith we do not possess. The inspired apostle Paul told Philemon in that little letter verses 4-7: I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

We too need a faith of such character that when people are with us, it rubs off on them. Our lives, our attitudes, our faith, and our love ought to make people want to be Christians. Philemon refreshed the hearts of people around him, and we can do the same. The most attractive person in any room is not the best looking but the most loving and attentive. We too must cultivate in our lives the spirit of Christ, so the world will come to love the Christ who lives in us. You see, Christ does live in our hearts by faith, and people ought to be able to see that. Faith that is hidden is worthless, but faith that is demonstrated in life is a true light to the world.

*Third, we need a bold faith*. We must not allow the world to intimidate us into silence. The worst thing we can do is adopt a strategy of fear and neutrality. We cannot afford to sit silently as spectators, while the world speaks loud and long of that God no longer matters. The gospel of John revealed, "many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:42,43). Bold faith puts its trust in God over the objections of men. Like Peter, it cries out, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Churches who compromise to get along with religious neighbors are saying they want the approval of men more than they want the approval of God. In their own way they are saying each man can have his own faith and each view is as good as another's. If this be true, where is the Lord's authority? Bold faith is willing to stand with the Lord and against the tide of popular belief. Bold faith is willing to take the consequences of believing; it is willing to die for Christ and with Christ. Bold faith says, "We must obey God rather than men!"

Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him at all times "that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:19,20). Christ has some hard things to say to lost people. It is never easy to speak of sin, repentance, or the consequences of disobedience. We cannot know how people will react to our message, and we fear their rejection. No one likes rejection, but faithfulness to God demands the courage to speak the truth.

We need a faith like Daniel, who prayed to the Lord in spite of the king's law. He was willing to spend the night in a lion's den rather than to stop praying to his heavenly Father. We need a faith like the three Hebrew children, who would gladly enter the fiery furnace rather than bow down to the golden image. They decided to obey God whether God delivered them or not. We need a faith like Elijah, who in the midst of hundreds of false prophets called for fire from heaven. We need faith like John the Baptist who spoke out against sin at the cost of his head. We need faith like Paul who challenged the philosophers of Athens with the resurrection. It is bold faith that changes lives and moves mountains. Let us be bold.

*Fourth, we need an active faith.* The apostle Peter admonished the brethren of his time to "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). I fear that many people don't see all the good churches do. Some Christians are lights hidden under a basket. They have a close relationship to God but no one knows it. Our faith needs to be alive and working, so that people may glorify God.

Faith without works is dead toward God and unfruitful with men. James said in James 2:19, 20, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" The church must do more than speak; it must act out its faith. Good deeds matter; people still react favorably to kindness and love. Kindness characterized the church of the early centuries and won countless converts. The Roman historian Suetonius mistakenly spoke of Christ with the word "Chrestus" instead of "Christus." The word "Chrestus" means kind, and the mistake was not all that unintentional, for early Christians were known for their kindness. Kindness is still the unanswerable argument for Christianity.

*Fifth, we need a morally pure faith.* James describes "pure religion" as "keeping oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). Many Christians have allowed themselves to make serious moral compromises in the last few decades. The dramatic increase in ungodliness in media, R-rated movies, legalized abortion, widespread gambling, no-fault divorce, unwanted pregnancies have left our country amoral, unwilling to judge anything as wrong. We are afraid to speak out against sin, because we all know people close to us who are facing moral dilemmas. By being unwilling to speak against sin, we have unwittingly encouraged a society that has no sense of right and wrong.

Christians who pattern their lives after the Lord learn to live above the level of the world. The inspired apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:17-24: "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." There is a difference in the way genuine Christians live and in the way those who do not know God live. The world itself sees this difference and appreciates it. We regularly get calls and emails at the church from companies looking to hire Christians. Why do they call the church? They want workers they can trust, who will not steal and will give an honest day's work. Many companies want Christian workers, because Christians have a work ethic tied to their faith. Yes, my friend, faith in Christ matters! Faith is what we need inside our hearts.

As long as Christians maintain pure and honest lives, they will matter in the world. Though the world theoretically wants to rid itself of moral restraints, it demands something better for itself. Many people want moral freedom, until they become the victim of someone else's sin. What we believe and how we live matters. Christians need to develop a strong and mature faith, which will guide them through the roughest storms in the coming years. In the Bible they have the directions to the everlastingly safe harbor, heaven. We don't have to be uncertain, when God's word has proved true over and over again. The Bible gives us the guidance to know where we came from, who we are, where we are now, why we are here, and where we are going. That is an inner need, and God is the only one who can fill that need.

Real faith says "I believe God." Real faith understands that God is greater in wisdom and in power than we are. He sees and knows things we do not see and know. Real faith trusts God to be true every time He speaks, because God never lies and never fails to keep His promises. God is truly wiser than men, and we need His wisdom. We also need to obey Him when He gives us the prescriptions for our lives. God asks us not only to believe in Him, but also to change our lives by repenting of our sins. God's way is the right way and the best way for us to live. Every commandment He gives us is for our good and will bless our lives. With faith and repentance, out of love, we too must obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this obedience, which place in baptism, we die with Christ, are buried with Christ, and are raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. In baptism all our sins are washed away and we become children of God and members of the church Jesus purchased with his own blood.

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i.Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* (25:4). Suetonius says of Christ, "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."