

Going on to Maturity

Faith and Obedience ó an Issue of the Heart
WOK Conference 2015

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [Lit., go on to a state of completeness; to maturity] **not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.**

Going on to maturity is the overall topic in my two messages for our conference this year. In this first message we will look at how *faith* and *obedience* are inseparable when it comes to spiritual maturity, and in the second message we will look at how obedience to the faith through the renewing of the mind brings about the *inward change* to which God desires (and frankly expects) His children to attain. In our maturity, our goal is to become like Christ ó to be conformed to His image, the very image in which man was originally created, that very image which was lost through Adam's sin. I hope by the end of these two messages, each of us will be a step closer to understanding what it takes to get there.

So for now, let's consider our opening passage in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews says: "Let us go on to maturity! And this we will do, *if God permits.*" While God is the One Who does or does not permit an individual to go on to maturity, His allowing or not allowing is quite dependent upon what that individual does with His Word. Shortly we will see that in the text preceding this passage the author reveals that going from spiritual immaturity to maturity takes both faith *and* obedience on the part of a saved individual. These are the concepts that we will be considering in this message, so let's begin by looking at some of the meanings of the words in this passage and then we'll look at the context of this passage.

Essentially, the author states that in order to go on from immaturity to maturity a Christian would have to *leave the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ*. Verses in chapter five leading up to this passage in chapter six, reveal that the Christians to whom the author was addressing had evidently been saved for a long enough period of time that they should have moved on from elementary things. He wrote: **Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.** For illustrative purposes, the author uses the physical realm in order to teach a spiritual truth. (This is often done in Scripture.) Here the author compares *milk* to *solid food*; and a *babe* to *those who are of full age*. It is expected to feed milk to babies, and solid food to those who have attained a certain amount of growth. A baby is only able to handle milk and not solid food, until a sufficient amount of time has passed, and physical growth has taken place. Eventually the baby *needs* to go on to food that is more substantive than only milk. Otherwise he will not grow and mature properly. And interestingly, the Greek word translated *babe* in v. 13 is taken from a word that shows these individuals are *not even able to speak* yet.

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The author is addressing individuals who should be able *to teach* the Word of God to others, and yet apparently that they can hardly even speak the Word! They have not gone on to solid food (in the spiritual realm); they have not spiritually grown or matured in the way they should have (or could have), and consequently they still only partake in the milk of the Word. These individuals should not only be able to *speak the Word of Christ*, they should be able *to teach it!* They should be partaking of the solid food of the Word, Scriptural food that would allow them *to discern good and evil* (discern good works from dead works), thereby going from spiritual immaturity to maturity. But instead, they have need to be taught all over again *the first principles* [the elementary things] *of the oracles of God* ó the very elementary things which the author states they would need to move away from if they are to come to full age (to maturity)!

Contextually, the reason that they could not partake of the solid food of God's Word is because they had *become dull of hearing*. In **Hebrews 5:10** the author says Jesus was: **called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.** Hearing, understanding and believing óthingsö concerning Jesus having been öcalled by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedekö have to do with things *beyond* the elementary principles about Christ (the milk of the Word); these things have to do with His coming into His kingdom during the Messianic Era, the Coming Age (the solid food of the Word). This is a process of growth which comes about as a result of properly *hearing* God's Word. And the author states that these things *are hard to explain because they had become dull of hearing*. Note that the difficulty in explaining these things lies in their dullness of hearing, and not in the nature of the subject itself! And as we will see in a few moments, the way in which we öhearö the Word of God becomes all important to our being able to go on to maturity. What a rebuke this passage is from God to His people, a rebuke especially applicable to the Church today, here at the end of the dispensation.

At the End of the Dispensation

We live in the time about which Paul wrote to Timothy: **I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.** In having departed from öthe faithö (notice that this is *articulated* faith ó *the* faith, a specific faith), some in the Church forbid teaching the truths about the picture of marriage ó that of becoming the Bride of Christ, and they don't allow the teaching as to what it takes to become the Bride of Christ ó they command abstinence from the solid food of the Word, which *God created to be received by those who believe and know the truth* about these things ó truths that would allow Christians to progress on to maturity.

And so we have a world filled with Christians who give heed to deception and false teachings; we see churches filled with Christians even further described by Paul in his second letter to Timothy: **II Timothy 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control,**

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brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; [that phrase again ó articulated faith] 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was [referring back to Jannes and Jambres].

Paul names two individuals here (traditionally Egyptian names) during Moses' day, using them as illustrations of *worldly* Christians within the Church who ðalways learn and are never able to come to the knowledge of the truthö in respect to öthe faith.ö While this is the only place in all of Scripture where these two names are mentioned, we can know from this text that they had something to do with *resisting Moses* during his time in Egypt just prior to the exodus. Traditional Jewish writings have these two individuals as the chief magicians in Pharaoh's court who mimicked the supernatural power given to Moses in some of the ten plagues. Some ancient Jewish commentary within the Talmud (study material for the Rabbis) has these two men even leaving Egypt with the Israelites on the night of Passover, and continuing to exert wicked influence over Israel during their trek in the wilderness, their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. While we cannot prove this from the OT Scriptures, Paul's mention of these two individuals ó at the very least ó are examples for us of *worldly* Christians (Egypt is a picture of the world) within the Church at the end of the dispensation, men who will resist the truth through mimicking truth; men who are always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth ó individuals disapproved concerning *the faith* ó disapproved concerning things having to do with Jesus as having been called by God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, or things having to do with our becoming the Bride of Christ, things which constitute the solid food of the Word, things which allows Christians to go on to spiritual maturity. And so it is here at the end of the dispensation.

Paul goes on to contrast this type of individuals to Timothy: **II Timothy 3:10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine [Lit., teaching], manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived [contextually referring back to Jannes and Jambres ó the imposter magicians, who sought to derail the faith of Israel, likening these two to people in the Church today who would seek to derail *the faith* of Christians who are wanting to go on to maturity]. Paul then encourages Timothy: 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [teaching], for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

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We can see here that this man of God (Timothy, who followed Paul's teaching, and who learned to *grow up from childhood* through knowing the Scriptures ó the solid food ó that would make him wise for salvation through *the faith*), is now *thoroughly equipped for every good work*. And we can know that the salvation spoken of here is *the salvation of the soul* because works are specifically mentioned in the text, which would of course be works of obedience. It is this kind of faith ó obedience to the faith ó that allows an individual to do good works that will stand the fires at the JSOC. Herein we see how faith and obedience inseparably work together! Herein we see how the Holy Scriptures make us wise to salvation (the salvation of the soul) through *the faith* which is profitable and equips us for every good work.

Let's go back to the Book of Hebrews for a moment. Just prior to the author reprimanding Christians concerning their lack of spiritual growth he wrote this of Jesus: **Hebrews 5:8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected** [i.e., that is He reached His goal through obedience], **He became the author of eternal** [Lit., age-lasting] **salvation to all who obey Him...** Jesus is not only the way and means of the free gift of salvation through faith apart from works ó according to the Gospel of the Grace of God, He is also the way and means of the salvation of the soul with respect to the Age to come. But *this* salvation is for those who learn the obedience of Jesus, as He becomes our example of being obedient through suffering. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, we would see that this type of obedience as always coming through suffering, which has to do with dying to the flesh (*c.f.*, I Pet. 1:10, 11). Herein, Jesus is the author ó the source ó of *salvation for the age to come* for all who obey Him! The way we would know that the salvation referred to here is salvation of the soul is because obedience is required for the salvation mentioned here. Salvation for the Coming Age comes through faith *and* obedience; through works of obedience emanating out of *the faith* ó faith specific to the solid food of the Word. Here is where faith and obedience cannot be separated.

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

With respect to the salvation of the soul, initially, these two words ó *faith* and *obedience* ó may conjure up *differing* concepts in our minds. Initially, we might see *faith* as being a choice to believe something to be true (even regardless if it is in fact true or not); and then we might see *obedience* as being a separate choice to make *after* we believe. But is that the way we should see these two words with respect to the salvation of the soul?

Let's consider this as an example: A Christian may believe that our spiritual birth is all it takes to become part of the Bride of Christ. But is that true? Is that what the Scriptures teach? Some might think that believing this to be true is enough to become part of the Bride. But is *that* true? And because they either don't understand the way God gave His Word (using types and antitypes, for example), and/or they do not take the time to search God's Word to find out what is true about that particular matter (they don't take the time to partake of the solid food, which allows them to discern good from evil), they miss the correct teaching entirely, thereby missing the obedience required in it. And in this they don't move on from immaturity to maturity through obedience. Paul warned Timothy to be careful when it comes to his understanding of Scripture: **II Timothy**

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2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The thing about *faith* is that we really need to be careful about what we believe! When it comes to the things of God, we would want to make sure that we are *rightly dividing* the Word of God, so that we will not be ashamed at the JSOC, as we see evidenced from this passage that there is a possibility that we could be ashamed. And the differential in being ashamed or not is whether we have *rightly divided* God's Word! It is an interesting use of wording here ó *rightly dividing*. Paul uses a compound word means *to make a straight cut*. And isn't this just what we are doing here? We are *dividing* the elementary things of God's Word from things beyond the elementary. We are dividing eternal salvation (our spiritual birth) having to do with faith alone from Age-lasting salvation (the salvation of the soul) having to do with faith and obedience. We are *rightly dividing* the soul from the spirit, as stated in **Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** It is the Word of God that makes these divisions; we are simply studying things along this line of division ó a division of the soul and spirit.

And so, before we go any further here, let's be clear as to what is being said, and what is not being said. The free gift of eternal life ó the Gospel of Grace ó comes on the basis of faith *apart from any work or act of obedience* on our part. Faith stands alone here. But when striving to go from immaturity to maturity, we are not dealing with the Gospel of Grace! We would have to leave the elementary things concerning Christ; we would have to go from the milk of the Word to the solid food of the Word. We are dealing with things beyond His death on the cross to things concerning His coming as the King/Priest after the order of Melchizedek, things pertaining to the Coming Age, a time when His Bride will become His Wife, and together They will rule over the earth for 1,000 years.

So, please grasp the fact that in dealing with things beyond the free gift, faith and obedience must go hand in hand. The Scriptures refers to this as *obedience to the faith*. This phrase that can be found at least three times in the New Testament:

1. **Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

Then Paul opens the Book of Romans with the same idea:

2. **Romans 1:5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith...**

And Paul closes the same epistle in this way:

3. **Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the**

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everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

Specifically, the Scriptural phrase ðthe faithö is used in respect of things connected to our becoming part of the Bride of Christ, and all that is attendant to that. Basically the phrase is used of things connected to the solid food of God's Word, to that which is necessary to become spiritually mature. Again, it is *articulated* faith, ðfaithö preceded by the article ðtheö, showing that this is speaking of *faith with respect to something specific*. Sadly though very many of passages that are supposed to have the word *faith* articulated, the translators have dropped the word ðtheö, making it difficult in a cursory reading of Scripture to see the exact intent of the Holy Spirit in those passages. For example I ran a computer check to see the number of uses of the phrase in the various translations. Here is what I found. In the

- KJV, the exact phrase ðthe faithö is found 45 times;
- NKJV, the phrase is found 39 times;
- NASB, 38 times; but interestingly,
- YLT (Young's Literal Translation), the phrase is found 77 times!

Some translations will have a footnote as to when the translators dropped the word ðtheö from the original transcripts, but not every instance is a footnote made, and certainly all translations don't even have this.

But setting this aside, let's take a closer look at the two words: faith and obedience, and see how they are used in an inseparable sense in Scripture. The English word *faith* is translated from the Greek noun *pistis*, which is from the root word *peitho*. The Greek word **peitho** means *to give assent to, to agree with, to have confidence in*. Implicit in the meaning is that there is a speaker and a hearer. In order for one to give assent to something, or to agree with something, or to have confidence in something, *something* would have to have been spoken! Right?

Then the English word *believe* is translated from the Greek verb *pisteuo*, which is also taken from that same root word *peitho*. Since both words are taken from the same root word in the Greek, both would refer to exactly the same thing. When either a noun or a verb is taken from the same root, there can be no change in its underlying meaning, the only difference is in the grammatical use of the word. Below are two passages that exemplify the way this root word is used in grammar of an English translation:

1. **Romans 10:17 So faith [pistis ó the noun form] comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.** This passage reveals from where faith comes. Notice the relationship faith has with *hearing*.
2. **Acts 16:30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe [pistueo ó the verb form] in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.** While this passage reveals the initial action that must be taken with regards to salvation by grace (i.e., that is the free gift received apart from

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works of obedience), it does reveal that in order to *believe*, the word of the Lord needs to *be spoken*. Again, notice the relationship *believing* has with *hearing*.

In both of these examples, faith came about by way of the *spoken* word. Therefore, to have *Scriptural* faith, one simply needs to accept what God has *said* about something. (The truth of the last sentence cannot be over stressed!) Additionally, if we are to have *Scriptural* faith, then not only must we *believe* what the written Word says, but implicit within this is also the need to *know* what the written Word says. In one sense, it really is as simple as that.

Now we all know that receiving the free gift of eternal life is not the end of God's plan for us spiritually; but in reality it is just the beginning. We can easily see this in **Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it [in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS [man] SHALL LIVE BY FAITH [NASB]."** In v.17 we see that *the righteous man must live by faith* – the righteous man must go *from faith to faith*. This shows that faith (our giving assent to that which is spoken) must be an active, ongoing process. And while our initiation into Scriptural faith is believing things concerning the death of Jesus, our *ongoing* faith is shown to be concerned with things beyond His death, as it is always from faith to more faith to more faith. Once a person takes their initial step of faith in Jesus's death, only then can he begin to move within the spiritual realm of faith. Only past the point of being saved a person can move from faith to faith. And we know that *faith comes by hearing!* But in ongoing faith, obedience *must* come into the picture. So let's look at the word *obedience* and see how obedience and faith must work together here.

The Webster Dictionary gives this definition for the word: *obey – to give ear to; to execute the commands of; to yield submission to; to comply with the orders of*. Again, just as was true with the concept of *faith*, implicit in the meaning of the word *obey* there is a speaker and a hearer. In order to give ear to, or to execute the commands of, or yield submission to, or to comply with the orders of, *something* would have to have been spoken! Right? So, on the one side there would be someone giving the commands, and on the other side there would be someone who would hear *with the intent of doing* the commands or orders.

For example, if a child is expected to obey his father, what would the father need to do first? Of course, the father would need to first *verbalize* his expectations to his child. And a good and loving father would not only systematically verbalize his expectations, but in his love for the child he would also give his child everything he needs to carry out those expectations. It then becomes a choice the child needs to make. Then, in addition to all of this, a father would systematically encourage his child toward obedience through the means of telling his child two more things. The father would express:

1. the benefits in obeying his expectations, as well as
2. the outcome in not obeying his expectations.

Here is yet another area in Scripture wherein our loving heavenly Father uses a physical picture to teach a spiritual lesson. It is in our child-training as a child of God. Through our spiritual birth

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we became God's children; He became our Father. So as a Father, what would He *say* to His children? Again, we will look to the Book of Hebrews. **Hebrews 12:9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?** Obviously, the writer is addressing people who have spiritual life through initial faith. So what is this he is saying: *Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?* If the people being addressed here already have spiritual life, then what kind of *life* is he dealing with here? Of course the answer is found in *rightly dividing* the text and context. If we took the time to read the whole of chapter 12, we would see that the author is dealing with life in the Coming Age, the Coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.** So our obedience to God as our Father becomes necessary in order to receive life in the Coming Age. Do you see the division here? The division between life with respect to eternity, and life in the Coming Age?

The first part of Webster's definition for the word *obey* is "to give ear to." The same is true for the Scriptural definitions in both Old and New Testaments, as the word *obey* in both Testaments has to do with *hearing*. In the OT the Hebrew word is *shama*, which literally means to *hear intelligently; to hear with the implication of attention, of obedience*. This implies that an individual would *listen carefully*, with the intent of *acting in agreement* to what they hear. Here is an example: **Deuteronomy 27:10 "You shall therefore obey [Heb: shama] the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."** In speaking to the Children of Israel here, God expects them to *hear intelligently* with the expectation that *they would obey*. This idea can be seen more than a thousand times throughout the OT (actually 1072 times the word is used).

And it is no different in the NT. In the New, the English word *obey* is translated from one of two different Greek words. (This is where it really gets interesting!) One of the Greek words for *obey* is found in **Romans 6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?** This verse shows that as a child of God we have a choice to make as to obedience, and that our choice has consequences. Here the word *obey* is translated from the compound Greek word *hupakouo*, which means *to hear under (as a subordinate), i.e. to listen attentively; to heed or conform to a command or authority: to hearken, be obedient to*. Again notice here what is implied through this compound word ó there is one *subordinate* to another, and the subordinate one is to *hear* the one he is under; there is an expectation of *conforming to that which is heard*. Hence, we have the same understanding from this Greek word as what we saw in the OT Hebrew word, and also the same as what we saw from Webster's definition for the English word!

The other Greek word that is translated *obey* should be familiar to us from what we have just seen in the root word for *faith*. It is used here: **Galatians 3:1a O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey [Grk: peitho] the truth...?** The word *obey* in this verse is the Greek word *peitho*, which as we have just seen is the root word from which we get our

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English words *faith* and *believe*! The thing that is so interesting about seeing the English word *obey* translated from either of these two Greek words is that both of these Greek words bring together the very thing that we learned just about *faith* and *hearing*. *Hupakouo*, has to do with putting oneself *under the hearing of another*! And *peitho*, has to do with *being persuaded to believe something that has been spoken by another*. So now we can understand more fully how **faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ** (Rom. 10:17), and now we see that in hearing the Word of Christ, there is an expectation of obedience. And hence ó the use of the phrase *the obedience of the faith*.

So now, let's consider a few questions: In dealing with things beyond initial faith, according to what we have seen here, can a person truly obey God if he does not know God's Word? And then if *hearing* and *believing* are necessary for *obeying*, can obedience come about apart from faith? Then let's reverse that question: Can faith come about apart from having a heart to obey what is heard? And so we can see then in dealing with things beyond initial faith, that these concepts ó faith and obedience ó cannot be separated. In order to *obey*, you must *believe*; and in order to believe, you must *hear*. And the one hearing must have a heart to obey! It really is as simple as that! Herein faith and obedience become a singular issue of the heart, as they really are one in the same.

And another question: Would obedience be expected of someone who had not yet believed in the death and shed blood of Jesus on the cross? No! It is only *after* a person has exercised faith apart from works that he would then be expected to operate within the framework of ongoing obedience to the faith. It is only *after* this point that a child of God would be expected to believe and obey his/her Father! And so we can come to this passage with more understanding: **Hebrews 11:6 But without faith [a noun] it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe [a verb] that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.** Here we would understand that the faith seen in this passage (in both the noun and the verb forms) would be referring to *faith* which has an expectation of *obedience*, as obedience would be implicit in the very idea of pleasing Him. And tied up with all of this is the *reward* that we know God will grant to those of His children who will have operated within the framework of *obedience to the faith*. In fact the whole of chapter eleven is replete with OT examples of people who were obedient to the faith. Then in bringing all of this together, it is in the very next chapter (Hebrews 12) that we get the picture of God our Father child-training us for the purpose of life in the Coming Age (Heb. 12:9, 28).

And so we understand that *the righteous man must live by faith. It is from faith to faith.* But our willingness to do what God says is only one side of a two-sided picture. If God expects obedience from his children (and He does), then of necessity, God would systematically reveal to His children what His expectations are so that we would know exactly what we are to do or not do. Right? And so He has! **Psalms 18:28 For You will light my lamp; The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.** And, **Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.** God has made His Word available to us, hasn't He? And He has been quite generous about it. Now it is upon us to take hold of His Word through diligent study, through *rightly dividing* His

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Word so that we can be found faithfully obedient to what He says, and not ashamed at the judgment seat.

And not only has our Father given us His Word, but He has also given us everything necessary to be successful in obedience. **II Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

And so we have seen that God has given us His Word with the singular expectation that we believe it and obey it. And in our growing knowledge of His Word He has given us all we need for life (in the Coming Age) and godliness (in the present age) which are in accord with the exceedingly great and precious promises He has laid out for His children to take hold of, promises that have to do with a time yet future. So in all of this, we really see that faith and obedience really is an issue of the heart. In our heart, will we allow Him to train us as His child in order for us to be seen as a son (a mature child)? If we allow that, then He will allow us to go on to maturity. The truth is that He will be as active in our lives as we allow Him. As a loving Father, He will discipline us for a purpose beyond the free gift of salvation, towards something that He so desires us to earn! Let's look more closely at this child-training: **Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Herein we can see the Father/Child relationship at work. The Father disciplines us as His Children because He loves us! He does it for our own good, for our own *profit* that we might share His holiness (v. 10), as He systematically teaches us what He expects from us in the present, all the while revealing to us the reward of obedience in the Coming Age, as well as the consequences of disobedience. And so as we continue to allow our Father to child-train us through His ongoing revelation of His Word, as we move from faith (our giving assent to that which is spoken with the intent to obey) to faith, as we willingly go from milk to solid food, then He will permit us to go on to maturity. Then we will be able to say with Paul: **II Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**

Always Be Ready
Cornerstone Christian Fellowship
November 23, 2014

I Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...

In both of his epistles, Peter was writing to the "dispersion" that group of early Christians made up mostly of Jews who had become disciples of Christ, and who had fled to outlying areas of Jerusalem due to the widespread persecution of the Jews. Peter was writing this first letter to them in order to encourage them to stand steadfast in their faith in the midst of the persecution, as they awaited the reception of their promised inheritance in the heavens. And throughout this letter, over and over again Peter encouraged them, exhorted them, commanded them, and reminded them of exactly where their focus should be in the midst of any trial or persecution that was sure to come their way. **I Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...**

Herein, they were *to sanctify the Lord in their hearts*. They were to set Him apart, placing Him above anything and everything else in their lives. Their focus above all was to be on the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and their heavenly inheritance as a co-heir with Him. They were to set their minds on heavenly things, not on things of the earth (Col 3:2); they were to store up for themselves treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20); they were to seek first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33). And in this place of utter commitment to God's purpose for them, they were *to always be ready to give a defense of the hope that was within them*.

Lately I have been giving quite a lot of thought about *our* being ready to give an answer. You and me here and now. Would we be able to do that? Are we prepared to explain to someone what our hope is, at a moment's notice? Of course we understand that the hope we have has to do with things beyond our free gift of eternal life; our hope has to do with our participation in the Coming Kingdom of Christ as a co-heir and co-ruler, having been found faithful at the JSOC. This is our hope, the very thing we are to be ready to give a defense for.

There's a reason that God has each of us in a unique set of circumstances in our individual lives: We are all in different seasons of life. Different places of work. Different people with whom to interact. For example, when you leave here this morning, where will you go? What will you do? Tomorrow morning when you wake up and go about your day, what will it be like? Who will you talk to? What will you talk about? *Who are the people that God has placed in your life?*

We might want to pause this morning and wonder if God specifically has someone in our lives who needs to know of the hope that is set before them. Would we know what to say? Would

we be ready with an answer to explain the hope that is in us ó a hope that could be in them as well, if someone would but tell them?

On several occasions lately it has come to my mind just how generous God has been with us here at Cornerstone. He has *generously* answered this prayer on our behalf: **Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to [us] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of [our] understanding being enlightened; that [we] may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...** God has *generously* enlightened us; *generously* granted us understanding so that we can successfully face the trials of our everyday lives, no matter what season of life we might be in, or what might come our way.

Yes, we are to *sanctify Jesus as Lord in our hearts* ó He is our *Master* to Whom we will one day give an account. And in sanctifying Him as Lord in our hearts, we have learned of the high and heavenly calling upon our lives wherein we are to walk in a manner worthy. We patiently endure *because* of that hope set before us. And while you and I may not face the blatant persecution that the early church faced at the beginning of the dispensation, still this verse is one we would want to consider here at the end of the dispensation. This message of hope has been all but snuffed-out within the Church, due to the leaven placed within. And hasn't that leaven done its work over the past 2,000 years? So much so that most Christians do not have a clue as to what the hope is that is set before them. The Apostle Peter said this at the beginning of this dispensation, and we are to hear it at the end ó that we are to *always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks the reason for the hope that is in us*. And so because you and I *need* to be ready to do this, I would like to break this verse down for us a bit, so that we might be able to grasp the meaning of it more clearly today. We are to ...

ALWAYS BE READY

Always means *always*. We are to be in a state of constant preparedness to tell someone about our hope. *Always being ready* would have necessitated our having sanctified Jesus as Lord in our hearts, and all that comes with that. It would look like this ó the Coming Kingdom would be:

- The most important thing to us.
- The thing that we think about most of the time.
- The thing that we study.
- The thing that we focus on.
- The thing that we most frequently talk to others about.

And if that be the case, then we would have a good grasp as to what the hope is. And in that, we would only have to get prepared to share it with others!

Being ready means *being prepared*. The Greek word used for *ready* is the same word used to describe the readiness/preparedness of the five wise virgins as they await the return of the Bridegroom. The parable of the Ten Virgins compares Christians who are ready for the return of Christ with Christians who are not ready for His return, along with the respective outcome for

either group. The parable is used to reveal *the means* by which readiness is exemplified. Jesus said: **Matthew 25:1** “**Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.** Herein is the subject matter of the parable *óthe kingdom of the heavens* (i.e., the Coming Age, in which Christ and His Bride will rule from the heavenly city over the whole earth, thus fulfilling God’s created purpose for man), with the parable revealing the *complete* Church (*ten* virgins) waiting for the Bridegroom (Who is Jesus, the very one teaching this parable). Jesus goes on to explain: **2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.** Oil in their lamps pictures the filling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. At one’s spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit comes to *indwell* the new believer, reflected in each virgin possessing a lamp. But the continual *filling of the Holy Spirit* (the *oil* in one’s lamp) is only gotten through a *personal, continual* and *proper* engagement with and study of the Word of God.

By God’s grace, all ten virgins had continual *access* to the filling of their lamps with the oil through the availability of the Holy Spirit through the Word, but it is only the *wise* virgins who keep their lamps full, as they await the return of their Bridegroom, and therefore it is only the wise virgins who are *ready* when He returns. Once the cry goes out (i.e., the trumpet sounds for the resurrection/rapture of the Church), it will too late for the foolish virgins: **6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ 10 And while they [the five foolish virgins] went to buy [to ðbuyøthe oil], the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut...**

There is a marked difference between the wise and the foolish virgins. The marked difference is *readiness*. And with *that* marked difference, there was also a marked difference in the resulting consequence of that readiness. And this consequential difference is one of astronomical import *óthe door was shut*. Those who were *ready* went into the wedding festivities; those who were *not* ready were shut out of the wedding festivities.

May I ask us to consider this on a personal level? If the trumpet sounded today, even this very moment, how *ready* would we be? Would we have oil in our lamps right now, or would we be needing to go ðbuyø some? Will the door be opened or shut to us? Please think about that for a moment, which would it be?

In another place Jesus spoke of a door being shut. He said: **Luke 13: 24** “**Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ 26 then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ 27 But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ 28**

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”

Of course, Jesus was speaking to the Jews on the streets of Jerusalem when He said these things, but application can be made to the Church, as it is now the Church being offered positions within the Coming Kingdom. And one of the obvious things in both of these passages is that there will be an end to the time-period wherein we can ready ourselves for our entrance into the kingdom. There will come a time when the door will be shut and there will be nothing else that anyone can do in their preparations. The time for preparations will have passed. And the door will be shut.

So, just as we are to *be ready* for the Bridegroom to return, we are also to *be ready* to give a reason for our hope. And isn't it a given that it is the oil in one's lamp (via a *personal* and *continual* and *proper* engagement with God's Word) that not only allows one to become a wise virgin, but is also the very thing that would allow one to be ready to give a defense? Again, implicit in all of this would be the idea of being in a *continual* state of preparedness, referring back to the phrase *always be ready*. For, just as we do not know *when* the Bridegroom will return, we also do not know *when* the Lord will call upon us to give a defense of our hope to someone whose heart He has prepared. And ó for obvious reasons ó it would be very sad to not be ready; it would be very sad to miss the opportunity ó both for the person being asked as well as for the person doing the asking.

Let's think about it for a minute: We have all been in the place ó at a time past ó wherein God had prepared our heart to receive the gospel of the glory of Christ, we just needed someone to explain it to us. Imagine where we would be now if that person had not been prepared to explain it, and therefore didn't. Where would we be? Thankfully, God is faithful! And here we sit!

And now how long have we been sitting here? How much have we grown in our knowledge and understanding of the things of God? We have grown from partaking only of the pure milk of the word to a place wherein we can handle the solid meat of the word. Don't you think so? And therefore, could it be said of us that *by this time we should have become teachers, not needing to be taught over again the first principles of the oracles of God?* Surely by this time we have *become skilled in the word of righteousness*, so that *by reason of use* (of the word of righteousness) we have had our *senses trained to discern both good and evil* ó meaning we can easily discern what God wants of us in this present age in view to the Coming Age, as we have been *generously* taught His Word. And with this knowledge we are accountable! We are accountable to live out what we know; *and* at some point in our growth, we are accountable to tell others. God has not brought us to this point in our understanding of His Word for us to become isolated! And so Peter is telling us that we must always be ready to give!

A DEFENSE to Everyone Who Asks

We live at a time in the dispensation of the Church where the greater preponderance of the Church is lukewarm, and they don't even want to hear the message of hope, which happens to be the central message in all four gospels, in the Book of Acts, in all the epistles, with the Book of

the Revelation culminating our hope. (Isn't it true?) The heaven has done its work. We have all experienced some level of rejection as a result of our continuing on in this message. And rejection hurts! The problem with rejection is that it may cause us to want to pull into a shell and not tell anyone of our hope, much less everyone. It would be easy to become complacent here, and let someone else give their defense! But again, where would we be if

And so, honestly, we need to prepare ourselves! God may, at any time, bring someone into our life, whose heart He has prepared to receive this message ó the same as He did for us so many years ago. And this preparation needs to be *intentional*, it's not something that is just going to happen one day. Preparation means that we take time to prepare. By the very nature of the word, it *is* intentional, isn't it? Being ready to give a defense will take systematic planning and preparation. So what would it take for us to prepare? It may take a time of sitting down and writing out what our hope is in your own words . It may take some memorization of specific verses, or at least memorizing the references to specific verses, so that we could lead someone there.

I think of John and Ann's and Jake and Shelby's testimonies of what is going on in Spokane right now. It was so sweet and so encouraging to hear Jake speak last week of the effect that the Spokane conference had on him, as the four of them along with Rodd saw what God is doing out there. The Spokane group has been steadfastly growing in the Word, finding great encouragement as they defend their hope to others, even now. Yes, we live at a time when the Church-at-large doesn't want to hear the message of the kingdom, but are we not told to *hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end* (Heb. 3:6)? That word *confidence* is made up of a compound word that means we are *to be outspoken, to be blunt, to be bold in our boast*, which is our rejoicing. We have the best news anyone could ever hope to hear in their entire lifetime! Why would we want to be quiet about it?

In Paul's day, a similar situation existed within the ranks of Judaism that exists in the Church-at-large today. Look at how he described the situation in: **Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.** [Of course, Paul is referring to the salvation of the soul here, as the greater preponderance of Israel had been eternally saved prior to Christ's death on the cross, through faith in God's provision of Passover.] **2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.** Interestingly, it was to this same group of people that Jesus preached the kingdom of the heavens, and to whom He sent out His twelve with the same message. We know that this message of hope is to be given to eternally saved people, this so great salvation. And so Paul's heart's desire was that Israel would receive the salvation of their souls. But the greater majority of Israel disdained the message, just like the majority of the Church today disdains the same message.

Just prior to writing this, Paul had expressed his passionate desire for Jews to believe the message in this way ó **Romans 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my**

countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. Paul wished himself ðaccursed from Christö if only his brethren ó the Jews ó would believe the message about Christ and His kingdom. He then went on to write that the prophets had foretold that the offer would be made not only to Israel, but at their *rejection* (Hum! Interesting word! You mean Paul was rejected too?), the offer would then be made also to the Gentiles. Paul was the one sent by God to the Gentiles with this message. But during the first 30+ years of the Church, his mode of ministry would be going to the Jew first, and *then* to the Gentiles. And even though he *knew* that the majority of the Jews would not listen; he went to them first anyway. The motivating force in doing so was the ðgreat sorrow and continual grief in his heartö towards his own countrymen. I wonder if we should ask the Lord for that same zeal for people we know in the Church-at-large, who do not understand the hope that is on offer to them.

Then if we would consider the Parable of the Sower and the Seed in Matthew chapter thirteen, we would see that the sower broadcast the seed (i.e., the Word of the kingdom [Mt. 13:18,19]) to large areas wherein he knew the seed would not grow into a place of producing fruit. Yet, he broadcast it anyway. And in broadcasting the seed in such a fashion, a small portion of seed *did* fall upon ground that allowed fruit bearing, even if growing up next to the tares. And that is the way it is and the way it has been throughout this entire dispensation. The seed ó the Word of the kingdom ó needs to be continually broadcast, even though there will not be much fruit born here ó at the end ó due to the working of the leaven, but *there will be some!* (And ó praise the Lord ó we are part of that ðsomeö!) Blessed are those who cast the seed, and those who bear the fruit thereof. Our feet are to be *shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace* (Eph. 6:15). This seems to imply the same thing that our opening verse in I Peter states. It is the *preparation* of the gospel of peace in which we are to walk. And just as there are *two* facets of the gospel ó the Gospel of the Grace of God (to be given to the unsaved) and the Gospel of the Glory of Christ (to be given to the saved), we have two feet which we are to shod with the gospel of peace. We need to be ready in an instant to give either facet of the Gospel as the Holy Spirit would lead as we walk about our world on a daily basis.

In all of this, Paul recognized that we would all play different roles in this process: **I Cor. 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.**

But before Paul could be sent out to lay the foundation, he had to be taught! And so he was! **Galatians 1:11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by**

me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ... .. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. Jesus Himself taught Paul for a period of time prior to His sending him out. And of course that would be necessary. In a real sense, Jesus has taught us, as well. Hasn't He? Here we have sat week after week for how many months? How many years? God has been very generous with His teaching. We have each grown in our own personal understanding of God's Word! But it would be silly to think that it is all for our own personal growth and that that is where it stops! Again: **For though by this time you ought to be teachers... (Heb 5:12).** This is not to say that every one of us needs to get up at a pulpit and teach large groups of people! That is not what is being said this morning. John, Ann, Jake, Shelby and Rodd all five went out to Spokane. John was the main teacher, but were not Ann, Jake, Shelby and Rodd teachers as well. And (if I can make this assumption) their lives were changed as a result of their willingness *and preparedness* to go. The good thing is that we don't have to go to Spokane to plant or water the seed! This can (and should) be done as we walk through our everyday life.

Let's use Paul as an example: Paul found a young Jewish man, whom he recognized as having genuine faith. It was Timothy. And while Timothy eventually became Paul's son in the faith so to speak, it was *not* Paul whom God used to plant the seed in Timothy; for the seed had already been planted in this young man long before Paul met him. Paul was used by God to water that which was previously sown in Timothy. Interestingly, Scriptures do tell us who it was who planted the seed in Timothy's heart concerning the word of the kingdom. The genuine faith that was found to be in Timothy was first in his grandmother, and then in his mother, and then was found to be in him as well.

(That's why I originally asked about your day when you leave here: Who will you talk to? What will you talk about? Etc.. Here is proof positive that we don't have to look very far to find someone into whom we can plant the seed of the Sower no matter what season in life you find yourself. To your children? Your grandchildren? Your extended family? Your co-worker? Your neighbor?

And then note just how important this is from God's perspective? This was so important to God that He even immortalized Timothy's grandmother and mother's names in Lois and Eunice in within the pages of God's immortal Word. And here we are today knowing their names 2,000 years after the fact. These are not just names on a page; these are the names of Timothy's grandmother and mother!

So here is one into whom Paul poured the water of the word, though there were many others. Paul taught Timothy as to the hope that was in him: **II Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.** (Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me! Keep the good thing which was committed to you! In other words, keep your lamp filled with oil, Timothy!) But Paul did not stop there. This was not just to be for Timothy's benefit, but for others as well! We

see in a passage just a few verses down, that Paul commanded Timothy to teach others, who would then teach still others. **2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.** This is the true picture of discipleship ó commit teaching to faithful men (men full of faith) who would be able to teach others! And wouldn't this be the very means of spreading the Word of the kingdom throughout the dispensation? And here we are nearly 2,000 years later, and because of this very process, we have been faithfully taught! But this passage shows us that we have been taught so that we can teach others! (It's too bad that we don't have access to a heavenly Ancestry.com wherein we could look to see whose spiritual lineage we are in, all the way back to the beginning of the dispensation. I wonder if any of our lineages would take us back up to Timothy, to Lois to Eunice.

So what are we to do? We are to *always be ready to give a defense...*

To Everyone Who Asks YOU A REASON

Thus far we have seen that we are to always be ready, and now we see that we are to do this with *everyone* who asks. Everyone means *everyone*. It is the Greek word *pas*, which is contextually an all-inclusive word. It means *any* and *all* who would ask. That's simple enough ó we are to always be ready to give a defense to everyone *who asks...* The Greek word used for the word *asks* is an interesting one, as there are several Greek words which could have been chosen. Peter could have used a word that would imply someone *asking merely as a matter of collecting information*; or another word which would have shown a person *asking for a favor*; or another word which would imply *asking in the way of searching for something hidden*; and still another which would involve the idea of *asking with an urgent need*. But the word that the Holy Spirit specifically chose for Peter to use was a word that is *a demand for something due*. It implies the person *asking, begging, craving, requiring* that which is due him. And why would it be due him? It is because God has prepared their heart, and now they need someone to tell him.

And this would beg the question: *Why* would a person ask or require or beg or crave from us a reason for something? Wouldn't it/shouldn't it be because they have heard us often speak of the very thing for which we *hope*? This is why our hope needs to be something we talk often about to our family and friends. *Hope* implies that there is something that we *anticipate with great pleasure*; something that we *confidently expect*. We are assured of it; we don't waiver about it; we are excited about it; it is the focus of our heart! And we know that that which proceeds out of the mouth comes forth from the heart. So, what do we talk about? What do others hear from our heart? Do we talk about the hope enough that someone might ask? Shouldn't we all be doing this? In other words, unless we are in the habit of talking about the hope that is in us in some fashion or another, who would ever know to ask us about it?

Then we are to give a *reason* for the thing that we are so excitedly confident of. The word for *reason* used here means that we would be able *to lay out in a systematic way* the basis for our hope. But some of us may *not feel* that we are ready. We really are ready by now! Look what Paul said in **Romans 10:6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way... 8b... "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"** (that is, the word of faith which we

preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” But then Paul asks this question: 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: **“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”** Again here we see the feet shod with the gospel of peace. How beautiful are those feet!

The word is near us, in our mouths and in our hearts. Do you believe that? It is what the Word of God says. So, do you believe it? So speak the word! We ó of all people ó should be the most free to speak *this* word, because God has been so generous! We should be speaking it to one another very freely here within the four walls of our Church; and we should be speaking it to others outside these four walls as the Holy Spirit would lead. This needs to be our habit! People need to know this is what we are about! Our children need to hear it; our family needs to hear it; our friends need to hear it; our co-workers need to hear it. We need to get in the habit of talking about it. And *good* habits most generally have to begin intentionally!

Paul encouraged and instructed Timothy in this way: **II Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [Lit., teaching], for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.** We are all very familiar with this passage. We have learned that the reason for the need to continue in these things is so that we will be equipped for every good work! But there is an unfortunate chapter break here, which may render us unfamiliar with the “therefore” that follows in the very next verse: **4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.** Paul told Timothy he *must continue in the things that he had been taught*, as these things have made him wise to salvation. (Perhaps we can see vestiges of being a wise virgin here.) And we can know that Paul is speaking of the salvation of the soul, since the idea leads to *the man of God being thoroughly equipped for every good work*. And then, as Paul says, *because* Jesus Christ will judge, and *because* of His appearing and kingdom, Paul told Timothy to *preach the word!* That word *preach* means that he was to be a *public herald*. And contextually, the word that he was to preach was the word concerning Jesus’ appearing and kingdom.

Timothy was to be ready! He was to be ready to do this *in season and out of season*. This phrase literally means he was to be ready to preach the word *when he had opportunity to*, and *when he did not have opportunity*! still he was to be ready.

We know that the Church-at-large does not know what the hope is. But we do! We know that the hope is not the salvation which we presently possess which is by grace through faith in death of Jesus! *Hope* (by the very meaning of the word) is something that we look forward to, something that we are confidently expectant of; something that we do not yet possess, otherwise it would not be seen as hope, because it would be something that we would have attained. You and I know that this hope is still before us; we have not yet attained it, it is still yet future. This hope is the anchor to our souls! It is because of this hope that is the reason we patiently endure the trials and tribulations we face day in and day out; it is that toward which we strive with every ounce of our being. This hope is the thing that motivates us to love and good deeds, because we know there is coming a Day when our hope will be realized. **II Timothy 4: 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**

Yes, Timothy's mother and grandmother's names have been immortalized within The Book of Scripture, Lois and Eunice. But you know, we still have a chance to have our names immortalized within another book. A heavenly one. Books of Remembrances are still be written in heaven even now. These books will be opened up and read yet future. Wouldn't you want your name to be written now, so that it could be read then? Written because ó just like Lois and Eunice, who had genuine faith, and who passed that faith on to Timothy ó you imparted your genuine faith to another, and perhaps another and then another. To your children, to your grandchildren, to your neighbor, your co-worker, your brother! We must *always be ready!* So may I encourage you today, get ready! Be prepared.