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Class Notes

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Maturing Christians Develop:

Knowledge:

- a wide-ranging and deep knowledge of the Bible
- a wealth of rich spiritual experience

Faith:

- a strong sense of the reality of invisible, spiritual truths-past, present, and future
- a vibrant hope in a bright future based on the promises of God
- a deep and detailed conviction of personal sin
- a firm and consistent reliance on Christ
- a consistent sense of practical guidance by the Holy Spirit

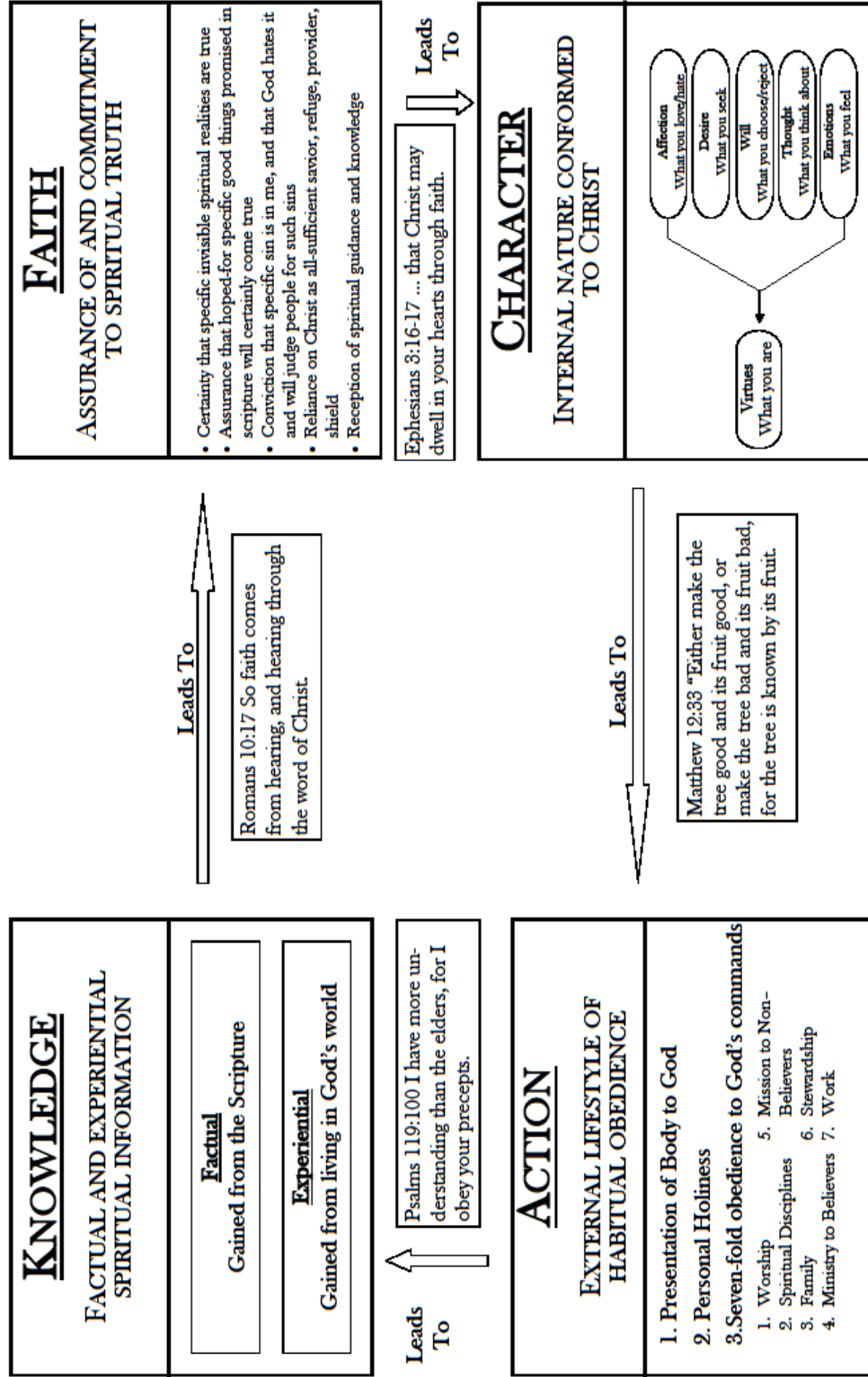
Character:

- a heart that loves what Christ loves and hates what Christ hates
- an array of passionate, godly desires that direct daily life
- a will consistently submissive to the will of God, regardless of the cost
- a thought-life that is pure and excellent
- a healthy emotional life patterned after Christ's
- a consistent display of virtues appropriate to the moment

Action:

- a habit of constantly presenting the body to God in holy obedience
- a lifestyle pure from sin in sex, speech, relationship, and pleasures
- a consistent habit of personal and corporate worship
- a life of daily habit in prayer, Bible intake, and confession of sin
- a pattern of biblical faithfulness in marriage and parenting
- a habit of blessing other Christians with spiritual gift and general ministry
- a regular habit of bold witness to lost people
- a track record of faithful stewardship of money and generosity to others
- a habit of diligent labor for the glory of God

A Pathway to Christian Maturity



Faith, Part I: Certainty of Invisible Truths, Assurance, & Conviction

Opening story: Elisha and his servant

2 Kings 6:15-17 When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. ¹⁶ “Don't be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Faith is the “eyesight of the soul,” by which we see invisible truths.

Ephesians 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened

The Five Elements of Faith

- The certainty of invisible, spiritual truths: past, present and future
- The assurance of things hoped for, both in this world and the next
- The conviction of personal sin
- Active reliance on Christ as all-sufficient Savior, provider, and protector
- Reception of spiritual guidance

1: Certainty of Invisible Spiritual Truths

The essence of faith is that it operates on invisible things. Paul’s statement, “*we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7, ESV), directly compares faith and sight. So does Hebrews 11:1, which says, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things **not seen***” (NASB), and 2 Corinthians 4:18, “*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is **unseen**. For what is seen is temporary, but what is **unseen** is eternal.*”

Realm #1: The Past, Recorded by Scripture: Ours is a historical faith, concerned with the acts of Almighty God in history. The Bible begins with a statement of historical fact: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen. 1:1). It is faith that accepts

this first step of history: *“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”* (Heb.11:3). From that first act of God, a march of Redemptive History began that we can only perceive properly by faith. The events of Redemptive History, including the flood, the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the establishment of the nation of Israel in the Promised Land under the Old Covenant, the acts of the Kings of the Jews, the words and deeds of the prophets, the exile to Babylon, and the restoration from exile all point toward a consummation of the ages in the coming of Christ. Christ’s own life, death, and resurrection are matters of the historical record. We cannot see any of them with our eyes, but must simply accept by faith that the Bible’s historical record is true.

The gospel history really matters, as Paul pointed out: *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”* (1 Cor.15:17). Our faith would be futile because our faith is connected to the historical record of Christ’s life as recorded in Scripture. All generations who lived after the eyewitnesses to Christ’s resurrection must accept it by Scripture alone, or they will never believe: *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”* (1 Cor.15:3-4). When we hear the gospel preached, the “eye of faith” in our souls can “see” Christ crucified and resurrected as though it were happening right now: *“Before your very eyes, Christ Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified”* (Gal. 3:1). The stronger our faith, the more vividly the historical events of the Bible will seem to us, the more radiantly the light of God’s past actions will shine from the words of scripture.

Realm #2: The Present Invisible Spiritual World: We are surrounded at every moment by an invisible spiritual world. Above all, this world contains **God** himself. By faith, we continually see Almighty God seated on a throne of glory and power reigning over the entire earth, and before him, all nations are like grasshoppers (Rev. 4:1-2; Isa. 40:22). The stronger our faith, the more continually we will see this holy, enthroned God and seek to live a life worthy of him. Moses lived a courageous life because he lived “*as seeing him who is invisible*” (Heb. 11:27).

Furthermore, it is by faith alone that we see God the **Son**, Jesus Christ, who was dead but is now alive, risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God. “*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls*” (1 Peter 1:8-9). And by faith also we accept the person and work of the **Holy Spirit**, who is invisibly moving powerfully to accomplish God’s work all over the world. Just as we have never seen the wind but have seen what the wind does, so it is with people born by the Spirit (John 3:8). By faith alone we can perceive the Spirit’s existence and actions in the world.

The invisible spiritual world also contains **angels, demons** and other **spiritual beings**, (they are called “rulers, authorities, powers, and forces” in Eph. 6:12 and “thrones” in Col. 1:16; and “cherubim” in 73 places in the Old Testament; and “seraphim” in Isa 6; and “living creatures” in Ezek. and Rev.). By faith, we believe in holy angels who continually serve God and his people (Heb. 1:14). And by faith, we know there are also incredibly powerful evil beings—the devil and his angels—who continually oppose the Kingdom of Christ and afflict

God's people. By faith, we see the need to put on spiritual armor to defend ourselves against these invisible spiritual enemies (Eph. 6:10-18).

Finally, we also accept by faith that the **souls of departed Christians** are living in the presence of the Lord at this present time (Heb. 12:23), and that the **souls of unbelieving sinners** are presently experiencing torment in hell, as the rich man does in Jesus' parable (Luke 16:22-24).

Realm #3: The Future as Promised or Threatened in Scripture: The Bible is a supernatural book in that it records prophecies spoken from the mind of God, who alone knows and foretells the future (Isa. 41:26, 43:9, 45:21). By faith, we see the future based on these words. We see a world of blessings based on the **promises** of God or curses based on the **warnings** of God. It includes the certainty of the advance of the gospel, of "wars and rumors of wars," of the Antichrist, of the Second Coming of Christ, of Judgment Day, and of an eternal heaven and hell. By faith we see the beauty of the New Heaven and New Earth, we accept it as though we could see it with our eyes; and when we read of the torments of hell, we accept that they are real and we fear it and are deeply concerned for those whose sins are leading them to suffer there eternally. The stronger our faith, the more vividly we see these things as though they were happening right now, before our eyes.

2: Assurance of Things Hoped For

Faith does not merely enable us to "see" the invisible things in the future, but also fills our hearts with a sense of certainty that the good things promised in the Bible will most certainly come true. The author to the Hebrews defined faith as including a forward-looking disposition: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for...*" (Heb. 11:1, NASB). The

“assurance of things hoped for” is a settled confidence that God will bring about all the good things he has promised to us in Christ.

Faith feeds this hope-filled, forward-looking disposition; it causes a Christian to be happy, strong, and confident no matter what earthly circumstances are currently taking place.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Christian going through great suffering is confident that these sufferings are merely preparing us for “*a glory that far outweighs them all*” (2 Cor. 4:17). A Christian experiencing great earthly success and blessing is rooted in the knowledge that no blessing on earth compares with the future heavenly blessings that are coming. An aging Christian does not need to be melancholy at the passing of time, because, no matter how great our happiness up to this point, all (not some!) of our best possessions, our best experiences, our best relationships are yet to come. We yearn for the future!

Faith looks forward to “things hoped for” in two invisible future realms: 1) future things in this present age; 2) future things in the age to come. The “things hoped for” are based on the promises of God.

“Things Hoped for” in the Present Age: Faith is bold in the presence of Almighty God when it comes to his promises in this world. This is the faith of the “Persistent Widow” (Luke 18:1-5) who keeps coming and coming until she receives what she wants. It would be impertinent were it not based on the promises and character of God. By faith, we are absolutely certain that God “*will never leave us or forsake us*” (Heb.13:5). By faith, we are confident that, if we seek first God’s Kingdom and his righteousness, food and clothing sufficient for our needs will be provided for us (Matt. 6:33). By faith we trust that God “*will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but with the temptation will make a way of escape so that*

we can bear up under it” (1 Cor.10:13). By faith, we can know that he who began a good work in us will most certainly carry it on to completion (Phil.1:6), with the end result that Christ will not lose any of all the people God has given him (John 6:39). Thus we can be confident in Christ that he will maintain our faith and protect our salvation to the end of our days.

Along with these specific promises are generally good things that God may or may not give us, but that we can appropriate by faith-filled prayer. For example, we can pray for a person to be healed based on James 5:15, knowing that God may or may not heal that person. But the prayer is still offered “in faith.” George Mueller took care of over ten thousand orphans in England in the 19th century, learning how to ask God day after day for physical materials (food, clothing, money) that his orphanages would need based on the promise of God: “*Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it*” (Psalm 81:10).

Things Hoped for in the Age to Come: Even sweeter to the Christian, however, is the confidence we have that the age to come, the New Heaven and Earth, will be infinitely and eternally satisfying to us, and that we will most certainly live there and enjoy its delicacies and beauties forever. By faith, we trust that God will enable us to survive the rigors of Judgment Day, when our whole lives will stand open for God’s assessment. By faith, we earnestly hope to be delivered from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10), to have our spirits made perfectly pure (Heb. 12:23; 1 John 3:2), to be raised in resurrection bodies (Phil. 3:11, 21; 1 Cor.15:12-58), and to be welcomed (2 Peter 1:11) into the New Heaven and the New Earth, which Peter calls the “home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). By faith, we expect to be rewarded for earthly service, for earthly suffering, for earthly seeds planted in hope that never seemed to come to fruition while we observed them.

3. Conviction of Things Not Seen

Faith has both a positive and negative aspect. We just finished describing the positive aspect of faith, “*assurance of things hoped for.*” But Hebrews 11:1 also gives the negative aspect as well, “*conviction of things not seen.*” Faith warns us of the dire effects of sin. Faith makes the wrath of God real and powerful in our hearts before the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment is revealed (Rom. 2:5). These fearful and negative things become more vivid in the heart of a believer by a growing faith. Faith is thus a “two-sided coin.”

John Newton understood the negative aspect of saving faith when he wrote the lyrics to *Amazing Grace*: “‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” Grace moves in the hearts of the elect when they hear the gospel fully proclaimed, including the dire threat of hell if they refuse to repent and believe.

Conviction in Hebrews 11:1: A careful study of the seventeen times the verbal form of this Greek word appears in the New Testament shows that this word “conviction” in Hebrews 11:1 means “a rebuke for sin.” The word has to do with producing evidence of sin to bring about a sense of conviction necessary for repentance. The sting of conviction for sin is what the New Testament has in mind when the word is employed.

Why Conviction is Essential to Ongoing Salvation: Faith’s work of conviction will sadly be needed as long as “*sin living in us*” (Rom. 7:17) continues to work its havoc. Since the essence of our journey of sanctification is putting sin to death by the Spirit, the ongoing conviction that specific sins are in us is indispensable. Often, the quiet internal voice of the Spirit while we are reading a text of Scripture or listening to a good sermon is sufficient. Sometimes however, if we are blind to indwelling sin, he will need to increase his chastising work on us, in order to bring us to repentance (Heb. 12:4-11). Jesus reminds sinners in

Laodicea of his personal zeal to cleanse his church of wickedness: *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent”* (Rev. 3:19).

A spiritually mature person will fully expect this “convicting” process to be going on regularly in his or her life. Such a person will not bridle with pride when someone confronts him with evidence of his sin, but will be grateful for it and humbly accept it: *“Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it”* (Psalm 141:5). When such a person reads accounts of the sins of the Israelites or of some evil king in the Bible, he will bow humbly and say, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23-24).

Faith, Part II: Reliance & Guidance

Faith is Reliance

Faith enables the soul to rest securely and rely totally on God, as if serenely standing on the walls of a mighty fortress and, while looking out over a vast, besieging army, still having no anxiety about the outcome.

Lessons from the Old Testament: One of the central lessons of the Old Testament was to teach Israel to rely on God alone. In order to establish a pure reliance on God for all things, God had to strip Israel of all false hopes, all faulty foundations, and all sinful alliances. Therefore the Old Testament gives positive commands and examples of rightly trusting in the Lord, but it also puts on display plainly the wide variety of false hopes which polluted the souls of God’s chosen people.

1) Lessons of God the Savior: When Israel was trapped by Pharaoh's army against the Red Sea with no possible escape, Israel cried out to the Lord, who spoke through Moses saying, "*The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still*" (Ex. 14:14). After Israel safely crossed the Red Sea with the water like a great wall to the left and the right, and the mighty Egyptian army was subsequently drowned, then the nation had a solid basis for trusting in the Lord forever: "*And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and **put their trust in him** and in Moses his servant*" (Ex. 14:31).

2) Lessons of God the Provider: But not only would God be Savior, he would also be Provider as well. The Lord used the people's own natural rhythms of hunger and thirst to teach them a central lesson—God will supply all your needs according to the infinite bounty of his storehouse.

Deuteronomy 8:3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

By providing bread from heaven every day, water from a rock, daily guidance in the pillar of cloud and fire, and by miraculously preventing their shoes from wearing out, God taught Israel to look to him for everything they would need in life.

3) The Enemy of Faith—Self-Reliance: But Israel turned to the basic idol which competes with God above all others: self-reliance. Moses sent out twelve spies to explore the land of Canaan which God had promised to give them. The spies brought a disease back from their exploration: the virus of unbelief. Ten of the twelve spies spread a bad report about the land. They spoke of the giant warriors in the land and shrank in their own estimation: "*We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them*" (Num. 13:33).

Their focus was completely on their own military prowess, and they rightly came up short in that assessment. But they sinned in both this self-focus and the resultant despair. God judged their faithlessness: *“In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey”* (Deut. 1:32-33). God punished Israel for this unbelief by commanding them to turn around and wander in the desert for forty years.

But then the people rebelled again. Stunned by God’s declaration of their punishment, they looked inward again at their own military prowess and this time put on their armor, *“thinking it easy to go up to into the hill country”* (Deut.1:41). This was the same sin of self-reliance, with an opposite conclusion. Self-reliance that looks inward and fails to find the necessary resources results in **despair**. But self-reliance that looks inward and actually finds the necessary resources results in **arrogance**. Israel clearly displayed both of the results of self-reliance. Despair and arrogance are merely two sides of the same coin: **self-reliance**. For the rest of Israel’s history, God fought their self-reliance. And for the rest of our lives on earth, God will fight our self-reliance as well.

4) Multiple False Trusts: There are many other false refuges in which people put their trust, and at some point or other, Israel leaned on them all. People can rely on their own understanding (Prov. 3:5), physical strength or personal wisdom (Jer. 9:23), material wealth (Prov. 18:11), the fortifications of a well-built city wall (Deut. 28:52), chariots and horses (Psalm 20:7), self-righteousness (Ezek. 33:13), alliance with Egypt and other Gentile nations (Isa. 30:2), and worst of all, idols (Isa. 42:17). God has rejected each of these and judges all who trust in them.

5) Wonderful Examples of Genuine Trust: Of course, Israel did not always fail the lesson of trust. Occasionally the Jews openly trusted in the Lord and won great victories

against overwhelming odds. King Asa, faced with an army of over a million Cushites prayed, “*Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army*” (2 Chron. 14:11). God delivered Israel. King Jehoshaphat, faced with a vast army of Moabites and Ammonites prayed, “*we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you*” (2 Chron. 20:12). Again, God delivered Israel. Many such examples exist.

The question remains before us as well: On what are you relying? Upon what are you resting yourself? What do you use to comfort yourself when you consider an uncertain and even terrifying future? When sick, do you think of the excellent hospital near your home, or do you trust in Christ? When seeking a job, do you trust in your extensive education and varied work experience, or do you trust in Christ? When restless and yearning for satisfaction, do you turn to the world or to Christ? And ultimately, when you are struggling with besetting sin, do you use willpower or some other technique, or do you trust in Christ?

Christ: All-Sufficient Savior from Sin

This is precisely what the Holy Spirit seeks to work in a desperate sinner who has come to realize that he has nowhere else to turn. The finished work of Christ on the cross is the only foundation on which our souls can rest. The issue here is one of total reliance, of placing your entire weight in one place. [Vine bridge illustration]

The hymn “Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy” captures this element of faith with striking vividness:

Lo, the incarnate God, ascended,
Pleads the merit of his blood:
**Venture on him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude!**

Christ: All-Sufficient Provider for the Internal Journey of Holiness

As we must entirely rely on Christ for the beginning of the Christian life, so we must rely on him alone for the completion of it: *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...”* (Heb. 12:2). Jesus is faith’s “author,” the one who wrote its first lines on the blank pages of our soul. Jesus is also faith’s perfecter, the one who will complete the work he began in us.

Christ Constantly Supplies Our Faith: God gave us our faith to begin with, and only God through Christ can keep it alive. As Jesus told Peter: *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22:31-32). So Jesus is at the right hand of God and is continually praying for all Christians that their faith will not fail, no matter how great are the trials they are facing (Heb. 7:25).

In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan did a masterful job of portraying our ongoing reliance on Christ’s ministry for the maintenance of the work of grace in our soul:

Then I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil; but in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the backside of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart: by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, that is to teach thee that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul.

Faith and Spiritual Guidance

We have become increasingly more dependent on GPS software to guide us to the destinations of our lives. So also we need guidance in our spiritual journey to heaven.

Guidance in the Internal Journey: Isaiah prophesied a day when the highway of holiness would be established in our hearts and the navigation system would be activated to guide us along it: *“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it”* (Isa. 35:8). *“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’”* (Isa. 30:21). Jesus says in John 14:6 that he is the “Way of Holiness.” The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is our navigation system, for Romans 8:13-14 teaches us that those who are led by the Spirit to put sin to death are the children of God. Moment by moment, the Spirit speaks to the heart of a child of God, saying “This is the way, walk in it.”

By faith, we enjoy a delightful intimacy with Christ that guides us through life: *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27).

The Lord leads us also by warning us from temptations, showing us the “way of escape” that he has sovereignly guaranteed will always be available for us: *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the **way of escape**, that you may be able to endure it”* (1 Cor. 10:13, ESV).

Guidance in the External Journey: In the external journey of Kingdom advance, God guides us by giving us insight into the best, most fruitful paths of service for his glory. In the New Testament, the Lord gave specific strategic guidance to his servants again and again in the

Book of Acts for the purpose of the external journey of worldwide gospel advance. For example, in Acts 8, Philip is guided to a certain desert road by an angel of the Lord, and then to a specific chariot there by the indwelling Spirit, resulting in a prime witnessing opportunity with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-29). This same guidance completely covered the life and ministry of Paul from the moment of his conversion until the end of his life. The Holy Spirit clearly guided the church at Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas, and send them on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-4). On Paul's next journey, the Spirit led Paul and Silas forcefully west toward Europe rather than east toward Asia by means of a vision of a man from Macedonia begging for help (Acts 16:6-10).

Common Forms of Guidance: Such dramatic communications from the Lord to his servants by means of supernatural visions, dreams, angelic visitations and the like are not the norm. More commonly, the Lord speaks to us as he did to Elijah, in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12, KJV). These quiet impressions from the Lord may have to do with personal spiritual growth (internal journey) or missionary strategy (external journey), or other vital details of our spiritual health and fruitfulness. Such impressions must be tested by the Word of God, for no private impression can ever take priority over Scripture. **James 1:5-8 commands us to seek wisdom from the Lord in prayer, and to not doubt that he gives it.**

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

This is God's usual way of giving guidance to his children: by the Spirit, by prayer, by the Scripture, in a still, small voice, and in connection with the church's input.