

The Test of Faith

by Hendrik Joubert

Some people dread taking tests, and as a result do not do well in spite of being quite knowledgeable in a given area. Then there are those who do not enjoy *surprise* tests. They want to be given advance notice to make special preparation. Because of the society I grew up in open book exams seemed an oxymoron – when the book is open the answers are *copied*. Tests were supposed to measure the information stored in memory. One who is not familiar with the subject matter will do poorly in spite of an open book exam. The Bible is a good example of this. Notice how believers are constantly *examined* to see if they would remain faithful to God's word – an open book.

The testing of believers is a deliberate and spontaneous process. Reaction to the word (instructions) of God is a *demonstration* of faith (or the lack thereof). This is the point God makes through **James (2:14-26)**. The way we react is an illustration or declaration at the most basic and spontaneous level – how does one claim to believe in God, yet alter His words, even in the slightest manner? This action demonstrates faith in one's own abilities, logic and understanding.

Salvation has always been by faith, and this point is clearly illustrated in **Hebrews 11**, as well as in the quote from the prophets in **Galatians 3:6** and **11: 3:6** ***Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 3:11*** ***Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."*** Notice that Abraham acted, demonstrating that he believed in God. James explains that his actions made his faith complete, or perfect. (**James 2:21-23**)

Two examples are mentioned of Abraham. ***By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)*** There was not rationalization or back-talk, he upped and moved trusting that the Lord knows what He is doing. The second time the fact that it was a test is specifically mentioned: ***By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;... (Hebrews 11:17)***

The essence of the test is illustrated in the phrase ***offering up his only begotten son***. God promised to make him a great nation, but then instructions to kill the only logical source through which the promise was to be fulfilled. He did not try to help God out by *interpreting* what the Lord *really meant* for him to do. The belief that God could raise him from the dead may be nothing to those who have seen the evidence of that happening; however when Abraham reacted there was no such evidence – his faith was in God and he reacted, passing the test.

Abraham could not undo his own sins and shortcomings by moving, or by killing his son. However, he would demonstrate a lack of faith in God by failing to do what God told him to

do. The fact that he did not understand the why and wherefores would not excuse him. This is the very nature of faith, that one does things asked of you without necessarily understanding the logic behind it. There is no relationship between the actions which demonstrate the faith, and the results accomplished. The walls of Jericho. The brazen serpent. Naaman's washing in the Jordan. It works in that it tests faith in God and in what He says. Changing it in the slightest demonstrates a lack of faith.

Some of these tests in our day and age are spontaneous consequences of the believer's serious effort to conform to the standard God revealed in the Scriptures. ***In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;...*** (1 Peter 1:6-7)

From this it is obvious that the testing may become quite tough – ***even though tested by fire***. This kind of pressure does not have to be a life threatening experience. Personal relationships may cause one much stress because you have to choose between what God actually says, and what friends and family *feel* (*believe*) Him to say. When Jesus discusses a demonstration of loyalty by confessing Him before men He issues the following warning: ***...and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.*** ³⁷ ***"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*** (Matthew 10:36-37)

A lack of familiarity with the Scriptures causes many to blindly follow false doctrines. Statements concerning the inability of the law to save (**Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16; 3:11**, etc.), because it requires perfection (**Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12**), are used to justify disobedience to simple instructions which serve no other purpose than to demonstrate faith in God. Some object that the Scriptures mentions works in which we may boast. These are the works of the law which, if one was able to keep perfectly as Jesus did, it would indeed be reason for boasting. Instead the Lord gives us simple instructions which every person who believes in Him (and His word) is able to do. Because of a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures many fail the simplest tests of faith.

The underlying problem for most is that they do not recognize the Bible for what it is, the inspired word of God. Many will say they believe it to be God's word; however the way they react to it do not confirm their words. If the Bible contains the words of the God Most Holy, it should be treated with the utmost respect ***For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*** (Hebrews 4:12)