

Acts Week 42

Fear Not

I'm sure everyone here has heard these words or read them before but you may not know how often it is repeated throughout your bibles. **“Do not be afraid,”** occurs 286 times in 58 verses in the NKJV, including 50 exact phrases shown first. Many teachers and pastors say if God says it once, ponder it, if He says it twice, listen up, and three times or more, believe it and live it. Listen to the rest of the sentence as God is talking to Abraham, *Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” Genesis 15:1.* This was a moment of trust and faith for Abraham, having no child of his own in his older years he wondered how God should have such promises for him. He had just come back from retrieving his nephew Lot, and all the people, “William MacDonald says his backslidden nephew,” and all the people's belongings. The king of Sodom came out to meet him “after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer (ked-or-law-o'-mer) and the kings who were with him” who took all the people that Abraham brought back and the king told Abram he could keep all the treasure and he would take the people, but Abraham refused him and took nothing.

Why do I bring this up here, what is the connection between Abraham and Paul? It is not only the measure of faith but of trust also. Abraham is being challenged and he continues to place his trust in the Lord. Paul too was challenged in his work, to the point of death but he continued to work with faith and trust. The link between these two men set an example for us to live by. It will not guarantee our safety as we know and think of safety, but it does guarantee our salvation. The people of Israel failed to understand this salvation and thought of it as defeating sickness, plagues, battles, and other fears.¹ Paul had a faith that carried him through all the punishment and difficult times he endured. When Paul was beaten we find out later his persecutors did not know he was of Roman descent, he could have claimed this before the abuse but he chose not to, he placed all into the Lord's protection and showed no fear of what we see as we read the Scripture.

¹ **Salvation**, This word is used of the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exd 14:13), and of deliverance generally from evil or danger. In the New Testament it is specially used with reference to the great deliverance from the guilt and the pollution of sin wrought out by Jesus Christ, "the great salvation" (Hbr 2:3).

LITERATURE

In English Versions of the Bible the words "salvation" "save," are not technical theological terms, but denote simply "deliverance," in almost any sense the latter word can have. In systematic theology, however, "salvation" denotes the whole process by which man is delivered from all that would prevent his attaining to the highest good that God has prepared for him. Or, by a transferred sense, "salvation" denotes the actual enjoyment of that good. So, while these technical senses are often associated with the Greek or Hebrew words translated "save," etc., yet they are still more often used in connection with other words or represented only by the general sense of a passage. And so a collection of the original terms for "save," etc., is of value only for the student doing minute detailed work, while it is the purpose of the present article to present a general view of the Biblical doctrine of salvation.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=ET0003201.IT0007604.NT000423.2.ST0000176.TT0000502.VT0002466>

“I am your shield,” says the Lord, *“your exceedingly great reward.”* What is this reward? First off, it is God Himself, the God of all creation has chosen him to be the father of His people. As we leave Genesis chapter 14 we jump right into the promise of descendants, so numerous Abraham could not count them. Could anyone imagine a greater reward in the Old Testament to have received the promise Abraham was given?

Genesis chapter 15:5-6; “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Now we go back to Paul, **Acts 18:9; Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.**

What we now find after all Paul has already endured is God’s promise that Paul is to preach in this town and be bold for God is your provider and protector, and no harm will come to you in this town. Abraham stepped out in faith to become a new people, God started the process of selecting a people of His own, did it make them perfect, no, did He say they would all be saved, no, but for the nations around them, people witnessed the blessing and curses Israel would face. Paul knew of Abraham and talked boldly about him. Demonstrating his faith, Paul would endure much but never quit.

Romans 4:1-4; What then shall we say that Abraham our father was found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Boasting, where is boasting? I have been with numerous people who boast about all God is doing in their lives the things He has given to them and the people they have brought to Him. However, look here at what is said about Abraham, if he was justified by the law/works because the keeping of the law required works. But look at what Paul says here to the **Galatians 6:14; “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** If we boast it should be about what Jesus has accomplished in our lives and the lives of all who believe, we were all destined to damnation, but saved by the measure of faith God the Father gave to us when He drew us near to the Son.

I like to draw attention here to the use of the word “Believe” (Pisteuo). I think it is important that every Christian should know this word, for although we know we must have faith we must also believe. Abraham stepped out in faith but as we read of his growth we find he would come to believe later, such is the episode of having a child in his old age. Paul believed when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and his belief secured a deep faith.

Grace is given to man for the condition of heart not the works of man. Paul's faith produced the works he did, God gave him the desires of his heart² and his heart desired to introduce everyone he could to Jesus. We have seen that Paul has already been run out from one place to another, threatened and confined; it would not slow him down, and because of this, we see Paul as a great example in the New Testament as Abraham was in the Old Testament. It was Abraham's faith that Paul drew our attention. However, we do not find Paul wobbling in his faith as Abraham did at first. Perhaps this is in part the reason we are to look to the Scripture not as two books but as one book. We can follow the transition of both men, one who did not know of this God but when called he stepped forward, the other, the persecutor of Jesus' bride, the Christian church, and the miraculous transition of which we read.

So we can first establish the pattern or process of both men coming to faith under very different conditions, but God used both of them for you and me to learn from. It takes faith (Pistis) and believing (Pisteuo) working together to bring about a solid faith.

12 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, (ach-ah-ee'-ah), the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

Contrary to the law but not to grace, again we find the greatest enemy is in the church. What could be so threatening that the leaders were fearful of Paul's preaching? Change is difficult for many of us and even more for those who have been taught and are devoted to the law. We see these issues with the leaders as being wrong, that this is political posturing done in corruption and fear of losing power and control. If we did not have the New Testament how much different would we see it today? Would we also be the teachers of the law? Remember there are still millions of people trying to live by the law, we know them as Jews. Gallio was right in his response to the Jews, this was for the synagogue to reason for themselves. Paul taught about the early church taking their disputes before Gentiles instead of working out their differences amongst themselves.

14 And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15 But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat.

We still find many people in the church today who will take disputes before the Gentile courts and not to the pastor or elders. As an elder for six years, I saw numerous issues brought before us, some were easy to settle, others took time, and were very sensitive, and some were never settled but years have brought peace.

Yet here we find retaliation against the ruler of the synagogue, as though some score was due. In the process of retaliation, people often increase their anger as they stew over the issue, much as

² Psalm 37⁴; Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

when we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the power of those miracles performed by Aaron and Moses, not by some wicked spell God did.

17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

Paul Returns to Antioch

18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. 23 After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

Apparently, the upset regarding Sosthenes was not enough to persuade Paul to immediately move on for he stayed a good while. When he does leave he takes Aquila and Priscilla with him as far as Ephesus and from there moves on only with Mark-Luke.

Ministry of Apollos

24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos³, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

The reason is now clear, Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus to aid in Apollo's teaching. It would seem strange for us, on this side of the written Bible, that a man of knowledge and grace

³ Apollos:

a Jew "born at Alexandria," a man well versed in the Scriptures and eloquent (Act 18:24; R.V., "learned"). He came to Ephesus (about A.D. 49), where he spoke "boldly" in the synagogue (18:26), although he did not know as yet that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Aquila and Priscilla instructed him more perfectly in "the way of God", i.e., in the knowledge of Christ. He then proceeded to Corinth, where he met Paul (Act 18:27; 19:1). He was there very useful in watering the good seed Paul had sown (1Cr 1:12), and in gaining many to Christ. His disciples were much attached to him (1Cr 3:4-7,22). He was with Paul at Ephesus when he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians; and Paul makes kindly reference to him in his letter to Titus (Tts 3:13). Some have supposed, although without sufficient ground, that he was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

teaching the Bible would not know the full story. It must have also seemed strange to Apollos that this couple wanted to teach him more of the understanding of our Christ Jesus.

Stott writes; Since Apollos can hardly have known John's baptism without also knowing his teaching, he must have been familiar with John's witness to Jesus as the Messiah. But how much did he know? At all events, when he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, and Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they recognized that his understanding was defective, invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (26), literally, 'more accurately' (rsv), the comparative of the adverb *akribōs* used in the previous verse.⁴

We can ponder the lack of understanding by Apollos, was it a misunderstanding? Were his words even addressing Jesus as the Messiah? Whatever it may have been and however he preached the word he had only to gain through the sharing with Aquila and Priscilla. Iron sharpens Iron. This is a verse to be taken to heart for it demonstrates the love and concern between brothers and sisters in Christ. Aquila could have told him to stop preaching and made fun of him by condemning his lack of understanding. But concerned more about the Word being taught in its fullness for all to learn they saw the tenacity of Apollos in serving the Lord and knew gentle correction would foster in a more powerful and meaningful way to his presentation. If he knew not of the Baptism Jesus spoke of, how then was he teaching the work of the Holy Spirit?

If we look forward just a few verses we find Paul asking the question, *Acts 19:2; he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."* Oh that we might not know of the Holy Spirit, who then was Jesus talking when He said I will ask the Father and He will send another in my place.

John 14:15-18 "If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. I can't even begin to imagine what a wonderful difference this must have been for Apollos. We who believe are no longer without guidance and conviction, correction and support for the believer the Spirit indwells us full time. God is our mighty fortress, He strengthens us and leads us in His ways and the profits we gain from such leading are greater than anything treasure money can buy.

⁴ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (p. 366). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.