

Exchanging Our Inactive Attitudes for Attitudes of Faith

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God was not a reality to me in my early graduate school years, but I had no problem at all singing folk songs about Him or about Jesus. One such song began this way:

“I saw Jesus on the cross on a hill called Calvary:
‘Do you hate mankind for what they’ve done to you?’
‘He said talk of love – not hate! Things to do, it’s getting late.’
‘There’s so little time and I’m just passing through.’”

That song touched me in a strange way. As a young man who never thought deeply about eternal things, it caused me to contemplate the temporariness of my own life, and my need to make the most of it. The problem was that I concluded that making the most of it meant being happy, and doing whatever it took to stay happy. Frank Sinatra’s famous song “I did it my way” pretty much describes my life until the middle 70s when God revealed Himself to me and, in one profound moment, “my way,” became “His way.”

Now when I say “His Way,” I mean that I saw, for the first time, that happiness was not the goal, but that obedience to God and service to my fellow man was the goal, and that happiness could be achieved in the process. A lot of change was needed in my attitudes in order that I could fully embrace this revised outlook on life, and God was gracious to accelerate my discipleship, so that today, when I think back over my born-again life, I no longer count my memory of temporal pleasures as being part of my life’s fulfillment; rather, I now see the pleasures in their proper place – blessings for which I am ever so thankful to God. And as for my life’s fulfillment? God will judge that by how selflessly I am willing to help others be fulfilled as well.

Now becoming discipled requires changing attitudes, and when I say that God accelerated my discipleship, I do not mean it was just Him and me alone in the wilderness. On the contrary, God used many others to help me to change. I recently came across a book by James MacDonald titled “Lord, Change My Attitude (Before It’s Too Late),” and as I was leafing through it and thinking about changing and replacing attitudes, one jumped out at me that I hadn’t thought of before – it was the attitude of inaction, and our need to replace it with an active attitude of faith. I can understand this sounding strange to you, because the term is awkward, and you may be thinking “What does one have to do with the other?” Well, consider what James 2:17-24 has to say about faith versus an attitude of inaction:

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was

accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

“Works” connotes action, and no “works” connotes inaction. James admonishes us that if we have faith for something, we must act on it. An inactive attitude is not, therefore, an attitude of faith; rather, it is an attitude that can know what is right, yet do nothing about it. An inactive attitude is also a disobedient attitude, because all of God’s commandments call us to action. 2 Corinthians 5:7 exhorts us to “walk by faith, not by sight.” So faith involves walking in what we believe, and walking involves doing. One cannot be consistent and effective in doing, if one has an inactive attitude because they are opposites.

There are several possible reasons for a believer to have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God, and none of them leads to a fulfilled life. Since my message time is limited, I’ll speak about only four of them that I believe are most often the cause; they are: #(1) not believing completely that the Bible is true; #(2) believing that the Bible is true, but not trusting God; #(3) allowing our emotions to rule us; and #(4) seeking to serve ourselves before others. Let’s begin with #(1), not believing that the Bible is the true and infallible Word of God.

I say “not believing completely,” because here at Ohev, I am speaking mainly to people who consider themselves Bible believers, and believers in the God and Messiah of the Bible. But I have learned that not everyone who calls himself a Bible believer would stake his or her life on everything the Bible says. Those who don’t are on shaky ground because, short of God visiting us and teaching us in person, Scripture is really the only way that we can know for sure what is true. Perhaps there are some here who doubt that a rational and educated person can believe that the entire Bible is true and that, in its original languages, the Bible is completely without fault. Well, I testify to you today that I am educated, and I do believe it, and I do stake my life on it. Indeed, God has visited each of us who have been born again of the Spirit and, through our new spirit, He has spoken assurance to us that the Bible is true, and that believing it, and being active in that belief is the only way to achieve a life of fulfillment, stability, and *shalom*.

Still, there are some among us who have blocked out or rejected the full message, and the consequence is that they are weak and hurting in their ability to overcome life’s adversities; they know what the Bible says but their inactive attitude toward it handicaps them. If that is you, you need to spend less time being satisfied that you are a believer, and more time believing, and acting on your belief. Believing what? you say? Believing everything the Bible says, from cover to cover. And doing what? Doing everything you hear God telling you to do, everything that is commanded, and everything that is reasonable that comes from an undoubting spirit that believes in the absolute truth of the Scriptures. You might wish there were an easier way, but God has provided no other way.

Let’s now look at a few reasons that believers can sometimes not fully believe the Bible:

A primary one is being ignorant of what Scripture teaches. We understand how that can happen in the case of a new believer or one who has spent years in a Christian church that does not sufficiently teach Scripture, but it also can happen in a Messianic Jewish congregation when a believer does not consider all the books of the Bible to be equally valid, so that he does not pay

sufficient attention to part of the Bible, and his resultant understanding of God's teaching is skewed. To properly understand God's Word on a subject, everything the Bible says about it must be considered and given weight according to its context, its application, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. It's like a lawyer looking up the Virginia law on carrying weapons. He will find a statute that authorizes a permit-holder to carry a concealed weapon. But he will not know the law if he has not read further and has also found the school and church exception to it, which is elsewhere in the code. The Bible is just like that so, if a believer does not have a complete knowledge of what's in it, and does not consider its entire contents, he can come up with wrong doctrines that seem unreasonable, and that cause him to not fully believe the Bible.

Another reason that believers can sometimes not fully believe the Bible is that they have not yet really bought into God's powerful and supernatural nature. Their experience with books other than the Bible is that they all contain some degree of fault, so it is difficult for them to look at this book, and believe that it does not. I like retelling something Sid Roth said on his radio program years ago that speaks to this. He asked a man who was doubting the Bible's accuracy, whether he believed in God, and the man said "yes." Sid then asked him if he believed that God created the world according to his perfect will, and the man answered "yes." Then Sid asked him, "Well, if you believe that God has the power to create the world and everything in it according to His perfect will, why do you find it so hard to believe that He could have written a perfect book?" And of course the answer was that the man did not really have the convictions about God that he professed to have.

Another reason that believers sometimes don't fully believe the Bible is – are you ready for this? It's because they don't want to. Yes, because the Bible often directs us in ways that we don't like. It directs us to repent from sins that we have gotten to like, and it directs us to do things that are inconvenient or contrary to what we would rather be doing. And it seems more defensible to disbelieve or selectively believe what the Bible says, than to admit to ourselves that we believe it, and then have to justify our saying "no" to it. We don't really want to face our sins, so we obscure them by rationalizing that the Bible could not really be saying what it seems to be saying, or that the Bible has just gotten it wrong in this particular case. Like God did not anticipate our situation, and had He, He would have certainly made sure that the Bible was written differently. Of course, once we decide that we don't believe the whole Bible, we can justify having an inactive attitude toward it – that is, not acting on it, or disobeying what it teaches. So an inactive attitude is a result – a symptom of something larger – it is not the basic problem. The basic problem is usually sin – either the sin of unbelief, or the sin of disobedience. And we cannot hide behind innocent unbelief because, remember, we are talking about born again believers who have, sometime in the past, had a deep encounter with God.

I spent a disproportionate amount of time on reason #(1) for a believer having an inactive attitude due to not fully believing the Bible, and I won't spend as much time on the other; but let's move on now to reason #(2) – believing that the Bible is true, but not trusting God. Surely it's obvious why not trusting God would put a damper on someone having an active attitude toward godly things, but why would a born-again Bible believer not trust God, and how can he get away with it? Well, he doesn't get away with it, but God allows us time to mature. That's why there are so many Scriptures urging us to trust God:

Psalm 56:11: *“In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

Proverbs 3:5-6: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*

Isaiah 12:2: *“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'”*

2 Corinthians 1:9: *“Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,”*

1 Timothy 4:10: *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”*

1 Timothy 6:17: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”*

There are many more, but I had to stop somewhere. Not trusting God is never acceptable, but even God allows us time to get to where we ought to be; still, at some point in our maturation, not trusting God becomes sin. A person who does not trust God fully is likely to chew over whether or not he will be obedient to God when he reads a direction in the Bible he doesn't like, or that seems dangerous or unpleasant. He may believe that the Bible's directives are truly from God, but will God let him down by not keeping His promises of protection? This is, of course, not an attitude of faith; such a person is weak in his spirit, feels little peace, and though he may be born-again and eternally saved, he blows in the wind of life's adversities.

Let's move on now to reason #(3) for why a believer may have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God – allowing his emotions to rule him. If God's direction to him through Scripture or revelation causes him to fear and renders him inactive so that he does not obey, he sins. If bitterness towards a brother keeps him from forgiving and actively seeking reconciliation, his attitude of inaction is sinful. If anger seizes him and he responds contrary to Scripture and to God's will, he sins because his activity is in the flesh, while his attitude in the Spirit remains inactive. If he allows sexual temptation lure him into sin, it is the same. The common factor in all of these situations is allowing oneself to be ruled by emotion, thereby acting contrary to God's commandments. While his attitude toward his sinful conduct may be hugely active, his attitude toward obeying God is inactive, and so he is defenseless and without excuse. 2 Corinthians 5:7 has this to say about allowing our emotions to rule us:

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

I cited this Scripture earlier, but I cite it here for another purpose. “Faith” here is contrasted with “sight,” and “sight” here does not only mean eyesight, but any natural means by which we perceive reality. That includes what we call our five senses, also our intelligence, our visceral and sexual emotions, and so on; feeling emotion is just as physical as feeling with our fingers or experiencing eyesight. Faith does not utilize any of these; in fact, if we lean on any of them, our

resulting actions cannot be of faith. This is clearly seen in another Scripture, Hebrews 11:1, which says:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

According to this Scripture, if we see it, faith is not involved. But we don't want to live that way because Hebrews 10:38 says:

“Now the just shall live by faith; ..”

And Romans 14:23 says:

“... for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Reason #(4) for why a believer may have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God, is that some of us consistently seek to serve ourselves before others, and that conflicts with all of Scripture, including the entire Gospel message that calls us to follow Yeshua's example of living sacrificially in order to serve others. It goes without saying that if we are intent on self-concern, self-aggrandizement, self-promotion, self-protection, and self-satisfaction, any sacrifice for others or service to others that costs us anything, or is the least inconvenient, goes out the window, and though we know and believe what we are called by God to do, we do not do it. Once again, an inactive attitude toward the things of God.

I won't go further than this, because of a lack of time, and I don't want to leave you without some guidance on how to change from an attitude of inaction to an attitude of faith, should you need to change. If your attitude of inaction is because you do not completely believe that the Bible is true, I urge you think about my testimony about it that you have just heard, and to put into practice Romans 10:17:

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

The implication of this Scripture is that if we immerse ourselves in the Word of God – the Bible – its supernatural power will do its work in us, and we will come to hear God.

If you believe the Bible, but your attitude of inaction is because you don't fully trust that God will fulfill His promises and protect you, then spending quality time with God is the answer. Some people call it prayer, but I just call it hanging out with God. You can't really trust someone unless you know them very well. And you can't get to know someone very well unless you spend lots of time with them, and share life with them through good times and bad. In Revelation 3:20, Yeshua promised us:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Your part is to knock on the door by spending quality time with God. He will do His part.

If your attitude of inaction is because you are allowing your emotions to rule you, you should meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:7 and also these three Scriptures:

2 Timothy 1:7: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

1 John 4:4: *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

These Scriptures are medicine to the soul and the spirit. If you meditate on them and place yourself in God’s hands, He will deliver you from the bondage of being ruled by your emotions. But you have to do your part because James 4:7 also says:

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Finally, if your attitude of inaction is because you have been seeking to serve yourself over others, then you must do two things. The first is to meditate on the following Scriptures:

Mark 12:28-31: *“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Yeshua answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. “And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

Romans 12:10: *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;”*

John 13:14-15: *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”*

What this will do for you is to remind you of how important God thinks it is for you to love Him, and to also love and serve your neighbor. The second thing you must do is just stop seeking to serve yourself and putting yourself first; it is an act of the will that is completely under your control; there’s nothing more to it than deciding to do it, and then doing it.

What we have been talking about is becoming over comers of life’s adversities by exchanging attitudes of inaction for attitudes of faith. Scripture assures us that we can be over comers:

1 John 5:3-5: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?”*

Revelation 2:7: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the ekklesia. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

If you have needed this teaching, I pray that God gives you determination to follow through with what you now know to do.