

MAJOR TESTS OF OUR FAITH

Prepared by

Bill Hall

LESSON #1: CRITICISM

It seems that anyone who becomes truly active in the Lord's work will be subjected to criticism. Discouragement can easily result, leading the person to slack off in his work. Criticism, then, should be recognized as a major test of one's faith.

1. What are some reasons why people criticize others who are diligent in the Lord's work?

2. Consider John 12:1-8. What led to the criticism of Mary on this occasion?

On the surface, did the criticism seem reasonable?

3. Matthew's account (Matt. 26:6-13) indicates that others of the disciples joined Judas in this criticism. What would have caused them to do so?

What can we learn from this regarding joining others who are being critical?

4. Can you think of other Bible examples of unjust criticism? (There are many. Please be considerate of the teacher when he feels that he must cut off discussion.)

Major Tests of Our Faith

5. What warning is given in Gal. 5:15?

6. Consider the characteristics of love found in 1 Cor. 13:4-8. List the ones that should be especially helpful in overcoming a critical attitude.

7. If we are to overcome this major test of our faith, we must learn how to react to criticism. Discuss briefly the proper actions of a Christian when he is subjected to criticism.

Can you think of scriptures that would help?

8. What are some wrong reactions to criticism?

9. Is there such a thing as constructive criticism?

Discuss this.

10. **Soul Searcher:** Did you find yourself being critical of someone in class today?

Will you find yourself being critical of someone during the worship period?

If Jesus were here in bodily presence, would He join you in the criticism or would He defend the one being criticized?

LESSON #2: WHEN OVERTAKEN BY SIN

1. Consider Luke 22:31-32. For what had Jesus prayed in regards to Simon Peter?
2. **Think!** Why is it so difficult for one to get up and try again after he has fallen into sin?
3. Consider Matt. 27:3-5. What did Judas do after committing sin?
4. Consider Psalms 51:1-12. Summarizing this passage, what do you see as David's greatest need at this time in his life?
5. Consider Matt. 18:6-7. What warning is given regarding our actions around other Christians?
6. What can we do to help the person who has fallen into sin? Consider Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:32; Luke 17:3-4; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Cor. 2:6-11.

Major Tests of Our Faith

7. What can the person himself do in order to return to faithful service and to overcome this trial of his faith?

8. Consider Luke 15:11-24. Describe the attitude with which the son returned to his father.

Then describe the father's actions in receiving his son.

9. **Soul Searcher:** Do I know someone who had served the Lord well, but after falling into sin never tried again?

Is there anything I could do for him now?

LESSON #3: COMMANDS THAT TEST OUR FAITH

1. Discuss briefly why the command to offer his son (Gen. 22:1-13) was such a severe test of Abraham's faith.

What enabled him to obey God even when faced with such a test?

2. Consider Luke 5:1-8. Why would the command to "let down your nets" be a test of Peter's faith (There are several reasons)?

What blessing followed his obedience?

3. List some other commands given to specific individuals in the scriptures that would have tested their faith. (There are many. Please be considerate of the teacher when he feels that he must cut off discussion.)
4. There are conditions under which the command to assemble for worship becomes a test of one's faith. List some of these conditions.
5. There are conditions under which the command to give liberally becomes a test of one's faith. List some of these conditions.

Major Tests of Our Faith

6. In Luke 17:3-5 Jesus gave a command that the apostles apparently thought was a test of faith. What was that command?

7. List some other commands that on a day to day basis test our faith. Be prepared to tell why strong faith would be required to obey each command listed.

8. Consider the command of Rev. 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death,". Do you consider this to be the greatest test of faith?

Why?

9. Consider James 2:17, 20, 24, 26. What is said of faith if it is without obedience (works)?

10. **Soul Searcher:** Whatever provides the major test of one person's faith will differ from that of another. Let each one ask of himself: What command of the Lord is most difficult for me to obey? This is the area where I must strive hardest to please Him.

LESSON #4: DISAPPOINTMENT IN OTHER CHRISTIANS

New converts to Christ often have unrealistic expectations of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and when other Christians do not live up to their expectations, they may become disillusioned and discouraged, and give up their faith. Disappointment in other Christians thus becomes a major test of faith.

Answer the following questions briefly

1. Consider Jesus' parable of the sower, recorded in Matt. 13:1-8, 18-23. Of the four types of soil Jesus described, how many represent people who obey the gospel but then fall away?

Which are they?

2. Consider Philippians 2:19-21. What did Paul say was generally true of the "Christians" of his day?

Whom did he name as an exception?

3. Discuss briefly the difference between the picture one might have of "ideal Christians" and the picture he gets as he looks at a typical local church.

4. Give some reasons why this difference exists.

5. In what ways might one wrongly react to the weaknesses he sees in others within the church?

Major Tests of Our Faith

6. Consider 1 Kings 19:18. What message from God encouraged Elijah?
7. According to verse 10, how many had Elijah thought were faithful to God?
8. Name some Bible characters who remained faithful in their service to God even when others around them left the Lord.
9. How can we help new converts who are growing discouraged because of their disappointment in other Christians?
10. **Soul Searcher:** Is it possible that I expect more of my fellow Christians than I do of myself?

LESSON #6: CHURCH PROBLEMS

As long as the church is made up of human beings, it will occasionally face problems. When problems come, the faith of Christians is sorely tested.

1. Consider 3 John 9-10. What caused the problem that existed in the church mentioned in this passage?

2. Consider Philippians 4:2. What problem existed in Philippi?

Would you consider the Philippian church a strong church or a weak church?

3. Oftentimes problems grow out of a church's being active and diligent in its work. Consider the problem the Jerusalem church faced with (1) Ananias' and Sapphira's lie and (2) murmuring concerning the neglect of certain widows. What work of that church provided the occasion for these problems? Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34-35

4. List some other churches in the Bible that had problems, and be prepared to tell what problem each had.

5. Consider Acts 15:36-41. What caused the problem between Paul and Barnabas?

If these two great men could have a difference between them, should we be surprised when good men today differ?

LESSON #7: CHANGES IN CIRCUMSTANCES

Changes in circumstances (a move from one city to another; a change in preachers; death of a companion; etc.) can prove to be a major test to one's faith.

Answer the following questions

1. Consider Acts 8:4. What did the earliest Christians do when they were scattered from Jerusalem?
2. Aquila and Priscilla moved frequently: from Pontus to Rome, to Corinth, to Ephesus, and back to Rome. Consider Acts 18:24-26; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5. What are some things said of this couple, proving their faithfulness wherever they went?
3. **Thought Question:** What qualities would enable these people to continue their faithful service to the Lord after being taken away from the spiritual environment they were accustomed to?
4. Why would a change in preachers prove to be a test of one's faith?
5. Consider Luke 24:51-53. What were the actions of the apostles after Jesus was taken from them?

LESSON #8: PERSECUTION

When the scriptures speak of "trials of our faith", they are often referring to persecution. We of this century rarely face bodily persecution, but the persecution that we do face still sorely tries our faith.

Answer the following questions

1. Consider Hebrews 10:32-34. List some of the afflictions suffered by the Hebrews in their early days as Christians.

According to verse 34, what enabled them to endure this trial of their faith?

2. Consider 1 Cor. 4:9-13. After reading these verses, give a brief summary of the abuses suffered by the apostles.
3. Read John 15:18-21. **Think!** Give reasons why these abuses were heaped upon the apostles, according to these verses.
4. The Bible is full of examples of severe persecution. List three or four that stand out in your mind.
5. What is said of persecution in 2 Tim. 3:12?

LESSON #9: WORLDLY SURROUNDINGS

We live in a corrupt world. Immorality abounds. The Christian's faith is constantly tried as a result of the worldly society in which he lives.

Answer the following questions

1. What automatically results if one loves the world, according to 1 John 2:15-16?

What three manifestations of the world are mentioned in verse 16?

2. How can one avoid being conformed to the world, according to Romans 12:2? (Be sure your answer is complete.)
3. Consider Proverbs 4:23-27. According to verses 24-27, how can one keep his heart with all diligence?
4. From what does immoral conduct proceed, according to Matt. 15:19?
5. Make a list of the major influences in our society that corrupt the hearts of Christians.
6. How can we avoid being corrupted by the filth that surrounds us?

**LESSON #10: UNFAITHFULNESS OF THOSE
WHOM WE HAVE INFLUENCED**

A Christian experiences great joy when people he has influenced obey the gospel. His faith however can be tried when many of them fall away.

1. Consider 3 John 4. What did John say brought him great joy?
2. Consider 1 Thess. 3:6-8. How did Paul react when Timothy brought him a good report concerning the faith of the Thessalonians?

Considering this, how do you think he would have reacted had he been told that they had left the faith?

3. Consider 2 Cor. 2:4. Describe the emotions Paul felt as he wrote to the Corinthians concerning the problems that existed there.
4. A Christian hurts most when his own children turn their backs on the Lord. Discuss some reasons why this is an especially severe trial to one's faith.
5. Consider 1 Sam. 3:1-18. What was Eli's response when Samuel told him of the destruction that was coming to his house?
6. Can you think of others who remained faithful to the Lord after their children had brought them deep disappointment?

Major Tests of Our Faith

7. What dangers does one face when he diligently tries to convert others, but with no success? Or, when those that he does convert fall away?

8. What would you say to encourage such a person?

9. Consider 1 Cor. 3:11-15. What is said of one if his work abides?

If his work is burned?

Can one be saved himself even though his work is burned?

LESSON #11: BOREDOM, WEARINESS

Many begin well in their service to the Lord until the "new" wears off. Then boredom and weariness become a great trial of their faith.

1. What warning is given in Galatians 6:9?
2. Consider Malachi 1:13. List some of the sins of the priests in Malachi's day as given in this verse.

Observe the context. What was the Lord's attitude toward them?

3. What does Jesus teach us to do on a daily basis in Luke 9:23?
4. What steps can one take to maintain zeal for the Lord's work and to avoid the problem of boredom and weariness?
5. Consider Heb. 10:32-33. What were the Hebrews told to do as they began to waver in their service to the Lord?

Major Tests of Our Faith

6. Consider Luke 15:11-24. The prodigal son obviously became bored with life in his father's home and longed for the excitement of the "far country." What were some important lessons he learned while in that far country?

7. When boredom begins to set in, people tend to blame others - the church, the preacher, the worship periods. Where does the real problem lie?

Where will the solution be found?

8. Consider 1 Cor. 15:58. What assurance is given to those who remain steadfast and unmovable in the Lord's work?

9. **Soul Searcher:** Do I need an attitudes change?

Do I need to throw off my boredom and lethargy, and find ways to be more active and fruitful for the Lord?

LESSON #12: FAMILY PROBLEMS

Family problems create a major strain on people's spiritual strength. In this lesson we hope to analyze this trial of faith and discuss ways to overcome it.

1. Consider 1 Peter 3:1-7. Briefly discuss the character of the ideal wife and husband as pictured in this passage.

2. In what are parents to bring up their children, according to Ephesians 6:4?

3. Consider Proverbs 10:1. What is said of a wise son?

Of a foolish son?

4. We have seen parents falter in their convictions, in their attendance, and in their service to the Lord generally at a time when their children were disappointing them. How can parents overcome this major trial of their faith?

5. Consider Luke 1:5-6. How are Zacharias and Elisabeth described?

Do all couples live up to this description?

6. What in your opinion should be the first concern of a Christian who is facing problems in his or her marriage?

LESSON #13: ATTACKS ON CONVICTIONS

One of Satan's most effective tools for destroying faith is to attack a person's convictions which he has come to accept but is poorly equipped to defend.

1. Consider 2 Peter 3:3-4. How are scoffers described in this passage?
2. Consider 2 Tim. 2:16-18. What was being taught in Paul's day that was overthrowing the faith of some?
3. Consider 1 Peter 3:15. What are the instructions found in this verse?

Think! What do these instructions necessarily imply?

4. Consider Hebrews 5:12 - 6:1. What problem existed among the Hebrew Christians, according to these verses?

What does the writer exhort them to do?

5. Many religious people believe that strong convictions are not essential, that "it is not important what one believes, just so he is honest and sincere." How would you answer these?

