

A Missing Ingredient

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My first job was working at a bakery. I didn't get paid. That might have something to do with the fact that I was a 3 or 4 years old, working for my parents. I have a lot of memories working at my parents' bakery. I took naps there. I got in trouble there. (I shot rubber bands into the mixing bowl of dough, because I didn't like the guy who made the dough.) My brother and I counted cars and trucks as they went by on the highway out in front of the bakery. Not only did I acquire some good memories, but I learned how to make bread, and how NOT to make bread. When Dad let me make the dough, I would sometimes accidentally leave out an important ingredient. That was not so good. I don't know WHAT we did with the bread. Sometimes you didn't know an ingredient was missing until the bread had already been baked. The telltale sign was that the bread didn't rise. You say, "You must have left out the yeast." Yes, I'm sure I left out the yeast a time or two, but what I remember is leaving out the salt. And that can have a similar effect.

Whether the recipe is for bread or for a healthy Christian, a missing ingredient results in an undesirable product.

The last few weeks we have been learning what the Bible says about being healthy Christians. (And if you're wondering, we WILL get to the part about being dangerous Christians, too.) So far we have learned that a healthy Christian is someone who is like Christ. We have broken this down into three parts. A healthy Christian (1) has a 100% good DNA, (2) has chosen to sacrifice their 100% sinful DNA, and (3) has invited the Holy Spirit as a new resident. The Holy Spirit replaces the sinful DNA.

These are three ingredients in a "recipe" for being a healthy Christian. There is a very important ingredient missing, though, in this recipe.

Turn with me to Matthew 4:5, 6. The context for these two verses is Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness. He is trying to get Christ to sin, and thus ruin the human race's hope of eternal life. In his second temptation Satan himself quotes Scripture. This is an example of how well Satan knows the Bible. In fact, I would say he knows it all by heart. He knows the DNA of a Christian. He knows how to be a healthy Christian. He has all the knowledge, but he is missing one essential ingredient. This is why he will not be saved, but lost.

Let's now look at 1 Corinthians 8:1. Having knowledge by itself is a problem. It will result in someone becoming proud of their knowledge. I know this all too well from my own experience. When I graduated from elementary school, I knew more than most adults when it came to spiritual things (here goes my sinful DNA boasting). When I graduated from college with a degree in Theology, I was full of knowledge. But it fed my ego. I repeatedly struggled against

spiritual pride. Oh, I was known for being humble, but in my OWN eyes, I had set myself up above all my peers. I even believed my professors felt the same way about me. I had knowledge (although I didn't understand the DNA of a Christian), but I was lacking greatly in one, essential ingredient.

Where can we find this missing ingredient? Well, I'll first tell you where I DIDN'T find it. I went to Nepal as a student missionary, and it wasn't there. I got in to full-time ministry as a pastor, and it didn't help me find it. I got interested into new ideas, hoping that one of them would make me the healthy Christian I wanted to be. I will use the people in the city of Athens as an example. They are mentioned in Acts 17. Athens was the university city of the Roman Empire. When Paul came into town, these Greek philosophers were intrigued with his new ideas. We will pick up the story in verses 19-21. The reason they wanted to hear what Paul had to say was because it was something NEW. They were interested just because it was DIFFERENT. There was a time in MY life when I went on a search much like the people of Athens. I figured that what I knew wasn't enough. I kept looking for some missing information that would make me a healthy Christian. Anytime someone would present a new idea or a different perspective, I would listen closely and think, "Maybe this is the missing ingredient."

The Lord has since shown me where this missing ingredient is found. Turn with me to Colossians chapter 2. We will read verses 6-10. If only I had understood this. When I accepted Christ, I received everything I will EVER need. Throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity I will never exhaust what I was given when I received Christ as my Savior. When I receive Christ, I receive all the fullness of the Godhead! I am complete in Him. The whole recipe for being a healthy Christian is not in Nepal. It's not in a full-time ministry. It's not in a new, hidden idea. It's in Christ. We don't need anything else.

You probably have purchased an item at the store that required assembly. We men often enjoy the challenge of putting something together. But for some reason we seem to be known for not wanting to read the directions. My wife's sister purchased a co-sleeper for us when Elijah was born. It can be used as a bassinet as well as a pack 'n play. Having multiple uses makes its assembly and disassembly a little more complicated. I remember one time in particular when my wife and I were attempting to fold it up and put it away for our garage sale. Between the two of us we must have spent an hour trying to figure out how to fold it up. We looked everywhere for help, even on the internet. Finally in desperation I grabbed the assembly instructions, again. We had already read them many times before. This time, I guess, I must have read a little closer, because I found what we had been looking for. There was a section in there entitled, "Frequently Asked Questions". Here it clearly stated how to fold the co-sleeper. Everything we needed for our task came with the co-sleeper. Our missing ingredient for becoming healthy Christians is in the package. It comes with CHRIST.

So, what is the missing ingredient? What essential ingredient is so far missing from our recipe for a healthy Christian?

Turn with me to Ephesians 3:14-19. What an incredible passage of Scripture. I'll have to do a whole sermon series sometime on this one text. But for now, it answers our question concerning our missing ingredient. How does Christ, or you could say the Spirit, dwell in our hearts? Through FAITH. Faith is our missing ingredient. All our knowledge about how to be a healthy Christian becomes a reality in my life through FAITH. I become the Christian I've always dreamed of being, by FAITH.

I have never found a definition for faith that seems to cover all that faith is. So instead of defining it, I would like us to look at what AWAKENS it, and then we will look at a couple of its identifying characteristics.

Turn with me to Hebrews 12:2. The author of Hebrews, whom most believe is Paul, has been highlighting people of faith throughout chapter 11 of Hebrews. He calls these people a "cloud of witnesses". And now he highlights Jesus Christ Himself. (Read) Jesus Christ is the author of our faith. In other words, He awakens our faith. And the context in verse 2 is Him enduring the cross. Seeing Christ dying in my place awakens faith. I love the song in our hymnal, "At the Cross". "Alas, and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I? At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light and the burden of my heart rolled away. It was there by FAITH I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day."

Let's now look at two identifying marks of faith. Look with me at verse 10 of Romans 10. Confession is done with the mouth. Faith takes place in the heart. Often the Bible contrasts what people say with what they believe in their heart. The heart represents what is on the inside. What I SAY does not show I have faith. Who I am on the inside shows I have faith.

Now let's read Luke 17:5-10. This passage follows the Christ's command to forgive someone 7 times in one day, if you need to. The disciples are feeling like this is more than they can handle, so they ask Christ for more faith. Maybe you're in a situation where you wish you had more faith. Jesus must have caught them off guard with His response: "All the faith you need is no bigger than a mustard seed." It's not so much a question of how much faith as it is do you have the real thing. Then Jesus goes on to explain a key characteristic of "the real thing". He uses the illustration of a master and his servants. These are, in reality, what we would call slaves. They don't go home after work. Instead, they fix supper for their master, after a hard day's work. The master doesn't feel indebted to them because they fixed him supper. And the servants don't fix their master supper because they expect something in return. This is part of their job.

This is the attitude of someone with faith. God doesn't owe me anything for what I do for Him. This is humility. Faith gets rid of pride. Probably the best definition I have ever heard of

humility is this: Realizing that every good thing I have, I owe to someone else. This is a paraphrase from Steve K Scott's book The Richest Man Who Ever Lived.

Let's review what we have learned. (1) Faith is awakened by Jesus Christ. More specifically, seeing Him enduring the cross. I don't know how it happens. I can't explain it. But there is a power there that awakens faith. (2) Faith is awakened in the heart. It is a response on the inside. And (3) Faith fills the heart with humility. And humility is not self-hate. It is not saying, "Poor me." It is realizing that every good thing I have, I owe to Jesus Christ.

We read in Luke 17 that faith is like a mustard seed. It is small, but it grows into a rather large plant. In closing I would like us to consider 3 enemies to faith and then 3 friends to faith. What is constantly trying to destroy my faith? And, in contrast, what makes my faith GROW? I have found that the number one enemy to my faith is Satan. He knows how to destroy faith. He destroyed Adam and Eve's faith in the Garden of Eden. I would encourage you to read Genesis 3:1-6 and look very closely at how he destroyed their faith. You will find pretty much every enemy to faith in this story. A second enemy to faith that I have had to face is doubt. Doubt comes as a thought in my mind: "How do you KNOW God even exists? How do you know that what you believe is true? He doesn't hear you. And even if He does, He won't do what you want Him to." A third enemy is discontentment. This is a desire that often tells me, "You're missing out. Everyone else is better off than you. God isn't treating you very well. He isn't treating you as good as you deserve."

Now let's look at 3 friends of faith. I have found that the number one friend of faith is Jesus Christ. As we read in Hebrews 12:2, He is the author and finisher of our faith. And the context is Him enduring the cross. Keeping in mind what Jesus did for me on the cross does more for my faith than anything. That is where my faith was awakened. And it's also what keeps my faith strong. I've also discovered that a second friend of faith is other people of faith. I have been blessed by the faith of people in the Bible. I've also been blessed by the faith of people in our time. I have learned about most of these people through books. And, as I mentioned last week, I would be happy to recommend some. I have found a third friend of faith: nature. I don't get out in nature near enough. But when I do I am almost always blessed. Nature speaks so eloquently about Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. He created everything, and He has left glimpses of Himself in what He has made.

Faith is a gift from God. I want to take good care of it, and do whatever I can to help it grow. If this is your desire too, please stand with me.