

Understanding Faith
Part Two – Doctrinal Faith

- *The Greek Word “little faith” (ὀλιγόπιστος - oligopistos) is used five times in the New Testament and four of those occurrences are found in the Gospel of Matthew.*
- *In each occurrence Christ showed His disciples areas where their faith still lacked the depth and maturity necessary to withstand the rigors, challenges, and trials of life.*
- *Our faith may be stronger in specific areas, but Jesus wants our faith to grow and mature in every area of our lives.*
- *Each time Jesus confronted them with their weak faith He included the rebuke, “O You of Little Faith.”*
- *Jesus’ motivation for pointing out their “little faith” was not to humiliate or discourage them, but to help them to recognize aspects of their faith that needed strengthening.*
- *He wanted them to develop an unshakeable faith, enabling them to stand strong in the face of whatever trials, hardships, or uncertainties life would bring.*
- *From the four times that Jesus says, “O you of little faith” in the Gospel of Matthew, we can identify four things that attack our faith and God’s strategy to overcome them.*
- *There are four aspects to faith and each one releases God’s Glory:*
 - *Creative Faith – This is the power of faith – the Glory of His Name*
 - *Doctrinal Faith – This is the truth of faith – the Glory of His Word*
 - *Persevering Faith – This is the strength of faith – the Glory of His Life*
 - *God Conscious Faith – This is the reality of faith – the Glory of His Presence*
- *Jesus rebuked His disciples with the words, “O you of little faith” is found in Matthew 6:30.*

³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

- *This rebuke relates to Creative Faith and warns against those things that oppose receiving God’s provision and resist God working miraculously in our lives.*
- *Through creative faith, God’s provision is released in our lives whether through miracles, healings, or His divine supply for those areas where we are experiencing lack.*
- *It is evident from reading the context of the reproof, “O you of little faith,” in Matthew, Chapter six, that it contains a warning against worrying. Of the six times the Greek*

word for worry is used in the Gospel of Matthew, five of those occurrences are found in Matthew, Chapter 6 in relationship to “O you of little faith.”

- *Worry is the enemy that attacks us so we are unable to operate in creative faith. Worry paralyzes us so we are unable to step out in faith and trust God for His provision.*
- *The second aspect of faith is Doctrinal Faith.*
- *The opposition that comes against doctrinal faith is error of doctrine.*
- *Doctrinal Faith releases the Glory of His Word.*
- *When we understand and apply God’s Word correctly to our lives then the glory of His Word is manifest for the entire world to see as they witness the life changing message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ at work within us.*
- *When we have wrong doctrine it brings confusion and disgrace to God’s Word.*
- *Error of doctrine has often caused schisms and divisions in the Body of Christ, sometimes resulting in the formation of cults.*
- *Error of doctrine can result in many false teachings, from legalism to justifying sinful and destructive lifestyles.*
- *Error of doctrine has caused some Christians to do terrible things in the name of Christ, from the crusades to cults like Jim Jones and David Koresh.*
- *Some of the leaders and pioneers of the Reform movement were guilty of anti-Semitism, persecuting and even killing those who did not agree with their religious views.*
- *Some Christians in the Reform movement who held to the doctrine of infant baptism persecuted and even killed Christians who taught adult baptism or believer’s baptism.*
- *The real root of the problem which caused such violent behaviour was not the doctrine of baptism but their view of God. They saw themselves as acting on behalf of God, whom they wrongly perceived as an angry and vengeful God. They tried to stamp out what they perceived as heresy by whatever means necessary.*
- *They acted more like Old Testament judges than New Testament Christians.*
- *In the history of the Church we can read how certain Christian leaders lashed out in anger, persecuted, and even killed their opponents. The heart of the issue wasn’t their character flaws and fleshly impulses but their wrong doctrine which prevented them from seeing their motivation and behaviour as sinful. Their wrong doctrine actually encouraged their sinful attitudes and harsh and oppressive actions.*

- *If they had correctly understood God's Word they would have realized that the condition of their hearts was wrong. They would have been convicted by the Holy Spirit of their fleshly impulses and would have sought God to help change and free them so that they could produce the fruit of the Spirit.*
- *Some Christians downplay the importance of doctrine not realizing that correct biblical doctrine provides a correct and accurate image of God and how we are to relate to Him, how we are to relate to others, and how we are to live.*
- *In Apostle Paul's three pastoral epistles (1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus), he specifically addressed doctrine 16 times and emphasized the importance of having healthy doctrine and how to guard against wrong doctrine.*

1 Timothy 4:6 NKJV

⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

- *Matthew, Chapter 16 contains another instance of Jesus rebuking His disciples with the words, "O you of little faith." In this chapter Jesus addressed the importance of doctrinal faith and being watchful against error of doctrine.*

Matthew 16:1-12 (NKJV)

¹ Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.

² He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red';

³ and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

⁵ Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

⁶ Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

⁷ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

⁸ But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?"

⁹ Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up?

¹⁰ Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?

¹¹ How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?-but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

¹² Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- *At the beginning of this chapter the Jewish religious leaders asked Jesus for a sign from heaven. “Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.” (Verse 1).*
- *Jesus responded by rebuking them for asking for a sign by calling them wicked and unfaithful. “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.” (Verse 4a).*
- *Even though Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for seeking a sign it is recorded that Jesus performed many signs and miracles so people would believe in Him.*

John 20:30-31 NKJV

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

- *If Jesus performed many signs and miracles so people would believe, why did Jesus rebuke the Jewish leaders for asking for a sign from Heaven?*
- *The Pharisees and Sadducees were not seeking a sign so they could believe in Jesus; they were looking for an excuse to disprove Him and validate their unbelief. That is why Jesus referred to them as wicked and adulterous—unbelieving and unfaithful.*
- *When the Jewish religious leaders asked for a sign from Heaven, Jesus pointed to the sky and said, “You know how to tell the weather, so why can’t you discern the sign of the times?” “Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.” (Verse 3b).*
- *Jesus was telling them it is obvious from both the Law and the Prophets and from Jesus’ own ministry that He was the promised Messiah. However, they refused to believe.*
- *Then Jesus told them the only sign they would be given—“and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”*
- *What is the sign of Jonah? It is the sign of the cross. Jonah is a prophetic type of Christ. Jonah depicts Christ being in the tomb for three days and nights and His glorious resurrection!*
- *There is another aspect of the sign of Jonah which the Jewish religious leaders loathed to acknowledge. God sent Jonah to bring salvation to a Gentile nation—and not just*

any Gentile nation, but one of Israel's worst enemies. In God's plan, Jesus came to save both Jews and Gentiles.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 NKJV

³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- *The Jewish religious leaders refused to receive the only sign that could bring salvation to them—Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.*
- *“For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.” (Acts 23:8). The Sadducees believed their existence ended with their earthly life. They didn't believe in the resurrection and consequently didn't see their need for salvation.*
- *In contrast, the Pharisees saw themselves as “righteous” and didn't see their need for a Saviour.*
- *Jesus' three days in the tomb and His resurrection would be a sign to the Sadducees of their wrong doctrine concerning the resurrection, and a sign to the Pharisees that Jesus was their promised Messiah.*
- *There was another Jewish leader in the Old Testament who, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, refused to accept a sign from God so he could believe—King Ahaz of Judah who ruled Judah from 732-716 BC.*
- *Judah was facing many enemies who threatened the kingdom, but God had promised through the prophet Isaiah that He would deliver them. However, King Ahaz had to put his trust in God for this to happen.*
- *Therefore, God offered to give Ahaz any sign at all, even as deep as the depth of the earth or as high as Heaven above, so his faith in God would stand. “Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”” (Isaiah 7:10-11).*
- *However, Ahaz responded by declining to ask for a sign. “But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”” (Isaiah 7:12). If Ahaz had asked for a sign, it would have tested him and not God!*
- *While on the surface his response sounds very noble, it was rooted in deep unbelief and rebellion. “Then he said, “Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?”” (Isaiah 7:13).*
- *Ahaz' true motivation in not asking for a sign was that he did not want to fully trust and submit to the Lord God of Israel since he was involved in idol worship.*

- *Since Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, God Himself chose the sign that would be as high as the Heavens and reach down to the depths of the earth. “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14).*
- *The sign that God would give would be His Son, Jesus Christ. Anyone who would receive this sign would be saved.*

John 3:16 NKJV

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

- *Jesus, the Son of God, came down from Heaven and was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life as the Son of Man and He died on the cross for the sins of all mankind. He descended into the depths of earth. Then after three days He rose from the dead and ascended to the heights of Heaven to be once again seated at the right hand of the Father.*
- *The sign of a virgin conceiving and bearing a Son called Immanuel, meaning God with us, is the sign that extended to the heights of the heavens and descended to the depths of the earth—it is the sign of Jonah that the Pharisees and Sadducees were given and which they needed to receive and believe in if they were to be saved.*
- *This was the same sign given at the birth of Christ and the shepherds rejoiced in it. The sign of the Son of God coming down from Heaven to be born in human form—a helplessly baby lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling cloths.*

“behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10b-12).

- *When Jesus and His disciples left and went to the other side of the lake He warned them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:6).*
- *Jesus’ disciples totally misunderstood the true meaning of His warning. They thought He was concerned about having enough bread for sandwiches. “And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” (Verse 7).*
- *Maybe the disciples thought, “We have no bread and we might be forced to ask for bread from the Pharisees and Jesus wouldn’t want us to eat the Pharisees’ bread.”*
- *As the disciples were thinking that Jesus was concerned because they hadn’t brought any bread with them, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. “But Jesus, being*

aware of it, said to them, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?”” (Verse 8).

- *Jesus then brought to their remembrance God’s faithfulness. The disciples were thinking and acting as if God was not involved in every detail of their lives. They began to think that Jesus was thinking the same way and that He was concerned about what they would eat.*

⁹ Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up?

¹⁰ Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?

- *One of the signs of error of doctrine is having a limited or distorted view of God. Error of doctrine can cause us to see God as distant or disinterested in the details of our lives.*
- *We can begin to think in very carnal and self-seeking ways when we forget that God is always with us and is interested in every detail of our lives.*
- *Then Jesus redirected the disciples’ attention to understand that the words He spoke reflected spiritual truths.*

¹¹ How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?-but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

¹² Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- *The disciples were so caught up with thinking and seeing everything from the natural point of view that they completely misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misapplied Jesus’ words.*
- *When people try to understand the Bible from a carnal point of view, it produces all kinds of erroneous doctrines and conclusions. The Word of God can only be understood correctly and applied to our lives in a life giving way through the Holy Spirit because “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63).*
- *One of the causes of error of doctrine is trying to understand the Word of God using a carnal or natural mind devoid of the leading of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Since Jesus warned against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees a good question to ask is this: “What does leaven represent in the Bible?”*
- *Leaven represents the fermentation process which causes bread to rise.*
- *In the Bible leaven generally represents sin or corruption which is why the Old Testament Laws forbade leavened bread to be offered as a sacrifice.*

Exodus 23:18 NKJV

¹⁸ “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.”

Matthew 13:33 NKJV

³³ Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

- *Not every reference in the Bible to leaven is negative. It is important to read the context to understand its meaning.*
- *Jesus exhorted His disciples to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16b). He wasn’t telling them to emulate the wicked behavior of the ungodly, described as serpents, He was exhorting them not to be naïve and gullible.*
- *Some of the attributes of leaven are neutral and can be used either in a positive or negative sense.*
- *“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal.” Although leaven is hidden and invisible, its effects are far reaching.*
- *In terms of the kingdom of heaven, leaven is hidden when a person is born again. It may not immediately be apparent to an outside observer the wonder and glory of the new birth and new life of Christ that now resides in the spirit of the believer.*
- *In terms of sin and corruption, leaven is a picture of those desires and motivations hidden in a person’s heart that are not always visible to the casual observer.*
- *“till it was all leavened.” Leaven will eventually permeate, invade, and transform every portion of the dough.*
- *Likewise leaven, in terms of the kingdom of heaven—the life of Christ in each believer is vibrant and alive and if allowed to grow will transform our lives completely in every area for the glory of God.*
- *Leaven in terms of sin and corruption—the hidden things of the flesh if left unchecked will corrupt and defile every area of our lives, every relationship, and destroy everything good that God has planned for our lives.*

Galatians 5:4 NKJV

⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

- *In Galatians, Apostle Paul warned believers against trying to keep the Law and seeking being justified by our works. He said such doctrine actually brings a wedge in the relationship between us and Christ and hinders us from being able to access the grace of God by which we can live truly righteous lives.*

Galatians 5:7-9 NKJV

⁷ You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

⁸ This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.

⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

- *Paul continued by describing the teachings that one needs to keep the Law and observe the Feasts and Sabbaths as leaven.*
- *Apostle Paul warned them not to even dabble in such doctrines because before you know it legalism and confusion in regards to the Law will contaminate your entire spiritual life. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”*

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NKJV

⁶ Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

⁷ Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- *In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 5, Apostle Paul described sinful and fleshly desires and lifestyles as leaven.*
- *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” In verse 6 Paul reminded the believers that even “a little leaven” will result in their entire lives becoming corrupted and defiled.*
- *Compromise allows both righteousness and unrighteousness to be present in our lives, but in reality soon every aspect has become contaminated and defiled by sin.*
- *“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.” (Verse 7a). Paul encouraged them to remove the leaven that was in their lives and in their souls just as in their reborn spirits they are already unleavened, pure, and righteous.*
- *Removing the leaven from our lives is called sanctification as we become free from the power, the control, and defilement of sin.*
- *“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (Verse 7b). Paul then turned to the Old Testament typology of the Passover. The Passover was the Feast where all leaven had to be purged. Not even the smallest scrap or remnant could remain in the home.*

- *Christ is our Passover sacrifice so we could fully become that “unleavened lump,” free from every aspect of corruption and sin—spirit, soul, and body.*
- *“Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (Verse 8). While leaven is depicted as malice and wickedness, unleavened bread reflects a life that is pure, sincere, and where only truth is present.*
- *The next question to ask is, “What exactly was the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?”*
- *Jesus’ warning to His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees indicates there was a real danger that they could become infected by the same error of doctrine brewing in the Jewish religious leaders.*
- *One of the best ways to recognize “leavened doctrine” is to know what is “unleavened doctrine.”*
- *A short time after Jesus warned His disciples against the leaven of the Jewish religious leaders He asked His disciples a question, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13b). Their response reflected the leavened doctrine of men’s opinions. “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” (Verse 14).*
- *Then Jesus asked His disciples the most important question, “But who do you say that I am?” (Verse 15).*
- *Peter’s response is a wonderful example of unleavened doctrine, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Verse 16). Unleavened doctrine teaches the preeminence and centrality of Jesus Christ!*
- *Then Jesus told them the source of unleavened doctrine, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” The revelation of Jesus Christ and of pure and unleavened doctrine comes directly from God.*
- *It is God who provide us with saving faith and who draws us to His Son, Jesus Christ.*

John 6:44 NKJV

⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 12:32 NKJV

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

- *Unleavened doctrine will draw everyone to Christ.*
- *However, the Pharisees and Sadducees sought to draw men unto themselves.*

Matthew 23:5-7 (TLB)

⁵ “Everything they do is done for show. They act holy by wearing on their arms little prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and by lengthening the memorial fringes of their robes.

⁶ And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the reserved pews in the synagogue!

⁷ How they enjoy the deference paid them on the streets and to be called 'Rabbi' and 'Master'!

- *The disciples were in danger of falling into the same error of doctrine as the Pharisees by becoming defiled and leavened by selfish ambition, competitiveness, and pride. “Then a dispute arose among them (Jesus’ disciples) as to which of them would be greatest.” (Luke 9:46).*
- *If the leaven of selfishness and self-promotion had not been uprooted and cleansed from the apostles it would have been disastrous for the early church, but thanks be to God that He purged His apostles from this leaven.*
- *Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthian church, addressed and brought correction to the leaven that was beginning to creep in. Some Christians were being tempted to be drawn to men instead of Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 1:12-13 NKJV

¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

- *The second aspect of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees and which is closely link to the first aspect of leaven is legalism.*
- *Legalism means adhering to the letter of the Scriptures but losing the spirit and the intent.*

2 Corinthians 3:6 NKJV

⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- *Legalism makes the Scriptures harder to keep or lessens their real meaning. Keeping the letter but breaking the spirit and intent produces a lifeless Gospel that has no power to save or change people’s lives.*

- *When the Pharisees saw something they didn't agree with in Scripture they would try to find another Scripture to negate it or interpret it in such a way that its true meaning was lost.*

But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:11-13).

- *Legalism makes something that is not doctrine into doctrine. Legalism transforms the Gospel into a list of rules and rituals.*
- *Legalism makes it appear that we are seeking God when in fact our hearts are far from God.*

Matthew 15:7-9 NKJV

⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸ 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

John 6:48 NKJV

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.

- *Jesus is the true and unleavened doctrine that produces holiness, life, true unity, and love.*
- *"Asking what we believe divides, asking Who we believe gathers."*
E. Stanley Jones
- *Purity without Jesus produces a list of do's and don't's.*
- *Freedom without Jesus produces an excuse to sin.*
- *Teaching authority without Jesus produces oppressive authoritarianist leadership.*
- *Teaching on blessings without Jesus produces greed and selfishness.*