

**SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
MINISTRY SCHOOL - - FOURTH EDITION
SESSION 10 - THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRIST PART 3
FAITH TOWARD GOD**

FAITH TOWARD GOD

Hebrews 6:1 *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement. 3 And this will we do, if God permit.”*

Romans 1:17 says: *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just (righteous) shall live by faith.”* Again, in **Romans 14:23** it says, *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* In **Hebrews 11:6** it says: *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe...”*

In light of these divine demands, we can easily see why Scripture compares faith to the most precious gold. Its value is unique. There is no substitute for it. Without it, we cannot:

1. approach God,
2. we cannot please Him,
3. and we cannot receive His life.

How, then, do we acquire faith? Is it something unpredictable and unexplainable over which we have no control? Or does the same Bible that presents God’s demands for faith also show us the way to acquire it?

It is the purpose in this part of the lesson to share one of the most important discoveries that a man in ministry made in his Christian life. Like most of the lessons that have proved of permanent value, these were learned the hard way—by his own personal experience. Out of a period of struggle and suffering, he eventually emerged with this one pearl of great price: He had learned how faith comes.

His story: Light in a Dark Valley

During the service with the British Army in World War II, a man lay sick with a chronic skin infection for twelve months in a military hospital in Egypt. Month by month, he became more convinced that, in the hot desert climate, the doctors did not have the means to cure

him. Having recently become a Christian and having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, he had a real, personal relationship with God, and he felt that somehow God must have the answer to his problem, but he did not know how to find it.

Repeatedly he said to himself, “I know that if I had faith, God would heal me.” Then he always added, “But I don’t have faith.” Each time he said that he found himself in what John Bunyan, in his book *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, called the “Slough of Despond”—the dark, lonely valley of despair. One day, however, a brilliant ray of light pierced the darkness. Propped up on his pillows in bed, he held the King James Version of the Bible open across his knees. His eyes were suddenly arrested by **Romans 10:17**: “**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**” A single word gripped his attention. It was “**comes.**” He laid hold of one simple fact: “**Faith comes!**” If he did not have faith, he could get it!

But how does faith come? He read the verse again: “**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**” He had already accepted the Bible as the Word of God. So, the source of faith was right there in his hands. But what was meant by “hearing”? How could he “hear” what the Bible had to say to him?

He determined to go back to the beginning of the Bible and read it right through, book by book, in order. At the same time, he armed himself with a blue pencil, intending to underline in blue every verse that dealt with the following themes: healing, health, physical strength, and long life. At times, the going was not easy, but he persevered. He was surprised at how often he needed to use his blue pencil.

After about two months, he reached the book of Proverbs. There, in the fourth chapter, **Proverbs 4:20-22 KJV**, he found three consecutive verses that required his blue pencil:

1. **My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.**
2. **Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.**
3. **For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.**

As he was underlining these words, their meaning began to open up to him.

A. “**My son.**” It was his Father, God, speaking directly to him, His child. The message was very personal. God was telling him what His “words” and His “sayings” could be to him:

B. **“health to all [my] flesh.”** How could God promise him more for his physical body than that? Health and sickness are opposites; each excludes the other. If he could have health in all his flesh—his whole physical body—then there would be no room for sickness in it anywhere.

He noticed that in the margin of his Bible there was an alternative translation for “health.” It was “medicine.” Could God’s “words” and “sayings” really be medicine for the healing of his whole body? After much inward debate, he determined to put this idea to the test. At his own request, all his medication was suspended. Then he began to take God’s Word as his medicine. Since he was a hospital attendant by his military trade, he was familiar with the way people usually take their medicine: “three times daily after meals.” He decided to take God’s Word as his medicine that way.

When he made that decision, God spoke to his mind with words as clear as if he had heard them audibly: “When the doctor gives a person medicine, the directions for taking it are on the bottle. This passage in Proverbs is your medicine bottle, and the directions are on it. You had better read them.”

In reading **Proverbs 4:20-22** carefully through once more, he saw that there were four directions for taking God’s medicine:

1. **“Attend”** (v. 20 KJV). He must give undivided, concentrated attention to God’s words as he read them.
2. **“Incline thine ear”** (v. 20 KJV). Inclining his ear would indicate a humble, teachable attitude. He would have to lay aside his own prejudices and preconceptions and receive with an open mind what God was saying to him.
3. **“Let them not depart from thine eyes”** (v. 21 KJV). He would have to keep his eyes focused on God’s words. He must not allow his eyes to wander to other statements from conflicting sources, such as books or articles not based on Scripture.
4. **“Keep them in the midst of thine heart”** (v. 21 KJV). Even when the actual words are no longer in front of his eyes, he must keep meditating on them in his heart, thus keeping them at the very source and center of his life.

To describe all that happened in the following months it would require almost a book of its own. The army transferred him from Egypt to the Sudan, a land with one of the worst climates in Africa, where temperatures reach as high as 127 degrees. Excessive heat had always aggravated his skin condition.

Everything in his circumstances was opposed to his healing. Healthy men all around him were becoming sick. Gradually, however, he realized that the fulfillment of God's promises does not depend on external circumstances, but solely on meeting His conditions. So, he simply continued to take his "medicine" three times daily. After each main meal, he would bow his head over his open Bible and say, "Lord, you have promised that these words of Yours will be medicine to all my flesh. I'm taking them as my medicine now—in the name of Jesus!"

No sudden or dramatic change took place. He experienced nothing that he could describe as a miracle. But after he had been in Sudan for about three months, he discovered that his medicine had made good its claims. He was perfectly well. There was no more sickness anywhere in his body. He had actually received "**health to all [my] flesh**" (Proverbs 4:22 KJV).

This was not a case of "mind over matter"—some kind of temporary illusion that would quickly fade. Over fifty years have passed since then. With few exceptions, he has continued to enjoy excellent health. Looking back, he realized that, through that period of testing and eventual victory, he made contact with a source of life above the natural level that stayed with him until the Lord called him home at 88.

Logos and Rhema

I have described the steps that led to this man's healing and health because they illustrate certain deep, enduring principles concerning the nature of God's word. In the original Greek of the New Testament, there are two different words that are normally translated "word."

1. One is **logos**.
2. The other is **rhema**.

At times, the two words are used interchangeably. Yet, each has a distinct, special significance of its own.

Logos: The word *logos* means more than a word that is spoken or written. It denotes functions that are the expression of a mind. The authoritative Greek lexicon of Liddell and Scott defines *logos* as "the power of the mind that is manifested in speech; reason."

In this sense, logos is the unchanging word of God. It is God's counsel, settled in eternity before time began, due to continue on into eternity long after time has run its course.

It was of this divine logos that David was speaking when he said in **Psalm 119:89**, **“Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven.”** Nothing that happens on earth can ever affect or change this word that is eternal in heaven.

Rhema: On the other hand, the word *rhema* is derived from a verb meaning “to speak,” and denotes specifically “a word that is spoken”—something that occurs in time and space. In **Romans 10:17**, when Paul said that **“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (KJV), he used the word *rhema*, not *logos*. This agrees with the fact that he coupled “word” with “hearing.” Logically, in order to be heard, a word must be spoken.

Back to the man that was healed: As he sat on his hospital bed with his Bible open across his knees, all he had in front of him—from the material point of view—were white sheets of paper with black marks printed on them. But, when he came to those verses in **Proverbs 4** about God’s words and sayings being health to all his flesh, they were no longer just black marks on white paper. The Holy Spirit took the very words that would meet his need at that moment and imparted *His life* to them. They became *a rhema—something he could “hear”—a living voice speaking to his heart*. God Himself was speaking directly and personally to him. As he heard His words, faith came to him through them.

This agrees with Paul’s statement in **2 Corinthians 3:6**: **“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** Apart from the Holy Spirit, there can be no *rhema*. In the Bible, the *logos*—the total counsel of God—is made available to us. But the *logos* is too vast and too complex for us to comprehend or assimilate in its totality. *Rhema* is the way that the Holy Spirit brings a portion of *logos* down out of eternity and relates it to time and human experience. *Rhema* is that portion of the total *logos* that applies at a certain point in time to our particular situation. Through *rhema*, *logos* is applied to our life, and thus becomes specific and personal in our experience.

In the transaction between God and man through which faith comes we learn that *the initiative is with God*. This leaves no room for arrogance or presumption on our part. Indeed, in **Romans 3:27**, Paul told us that boasting is excluded by the law of faith. It is God who knows – knows better than we do—just what part of the total *logos* will meet our need at any given time. By His Holy Spirit, He directs us to the very words that are appropriate and then imparts life to them, so that they become a *rhema* – a living voice. At this point, the response required of us *is hearing*. **To the extent that we hear, we receive faith.**

What is involved in hearing? It is important that we know as precisely as possible what is required of us. This, too, was included in the lesson the man received there in his hospital bed. In the wisdom of God, the words that came to him from **Proverbs 4** not only met his

physical need, but they also provided a complete and detailed example of what it means to “hear” God’s Word.

As God pointed out to him, the directions on His medicine bottle are fourfold:

1. First, **“attend”** (Proverbs 4:20 KJV).
2. Second, **“incline thine ear”** (v. 20 KJV).
3. Third, **“let them not depart from thine eyes”** (v. 21 KJV).
4. Fourth, **“keep them in the midst of thine heart”** (v. 21 KJV).

Without realizing it at first, as he followed these four directions, ***he was hearing***. As a result, faith came.

Hearing, then, consists of these four elements:

1. We give close, undivided attention to what God is saying to us by His Holy Spirit. Then, by a firm decision of our will, we exclude all extraneous, distracting influences.
2. We incline our ears. We adopt a humble, teachable attitude toward God. We renounce our own prejudices and preconceptions, and we accept what God says in its plainest and most practical meaning.
3. We focus our eyes on the word to which God has directed us. We do not allow our eyes to wander to statements from other sources that may conflict with what God is saying.
4. Even when the words are no longer before our eyes, we continue to meditate on them in our hearts. In this way, we retain them continually at the center of our beings, and their influence permeates every area of our lives.

As God’s *rhema* comes to us in this way, it is both specific and personal. Let me illustrate this from the man’s experience in the hospital. God spoke to him at that time as an individual in a specific situation. He showed him how to receive his healing: He was to take God’s words as his medicine and forego all normal medication. He obeyed, and he was healed.

However, it would have been wrong for him to assume that God would necessarily have prescribed the same remedy for someone else, or even for him at another stage of his life experience. On subsequent occasions when he had needed healing, God did not always direct him in the same way. There have been times when he gratefully accepted the help of doctors and received healing that way.

Rhema, then, comes to each of us directly and individually from God. *It is appropriate to a specific time and place.* It presupposes an ongoing, personal relationship with God. By each successive *rhema*, God guides us in the individual walk of faith to which He has called us.

A rhema that is given to one believer may not be appropriate for another. Or, again, it may not be appropriate even for the same believer in another stage of his experience.

This life of continuing dependence on God's *rhema* is clearly set forth in the words with which Jesus answered Satan's first temptation in the wilderness: ***"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word [rhema] that proceeds out of the mouth of God"*** (Matthew 4:4). The word *proceeds* is in the continuous present tense. We could say, ***"Every word as it proceeds out of the mouth of God."***

Jesus here spoke of a specific word proceeding directly from God's mouth, a word energized by the breath of His mouth, or, in other words, by the Holy Spirit. *This is our daily bread—always fresh, always "proceeding."* *As we live in continual dependence on it, it imparts to us, day by day, the faith by which the righteous man lives.*

We may sum up the relationship between logos and rhema in the following statements:

1. Rhema takes the eternal logos and injects it into time.
2. Rhema takes the heavenly logos and brings it down to earth.
3. Rhema takes the potential logos and makes it actual.
4. Rhema takes the general logos and makes it specific.
5. Rhema takes a portion of the total logos and presents it in a form that a man can assimilate.
6. Rhema is like each of the broken pieces of bread with which Jesus fed the multitude—it is suited to each individual's need and capacity. Often it comes to us through another's hands.

From Heaven to Earth

Isaiah 55:8-13 (NASB1995) The prophet Isaiah presented the relationship between *logos* and *rhema* in vivid imagery:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up; and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up; and it will be a memorial to the LORD, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.”

Here we have two different planes: the heavenly plane and the earthly plane. On the heavenly plane is the divine logos: God’s ways and thoughts, the total counsel of God, settled forever in heaven. On the earthly level are man’s ways and thoughts, far below those of God and actually incompatible with them.

There is no way by which man can rise from his level to God’s level, but there is a way by which God’s ways and thoughts can be brought down to man. God says that His word that goes forth from His mouth will be like the rain and the snow that bring heaven’s life-giving moisture down to earth.

This is the same word that Jesus spoke of in **Matthew 4:4**, the ***“word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,”*** the word by which man lives. It is a portion of the heavenly *logos* coming down to earth as *rhema*. It imparts to us the portion of God’s ways and thoughts that applies to our situation and meets our need at that moment.

Received and obeyed, *rhema* brings forth in our lives the activity and the fruit that glorify God. We ***“go out with joy”*** (**Isaiah 55:12-13**); we are ***“led forth with peace”*** (v. 12). ***“Instead of the thorn bush the cypress [comes] up; and instead of the nettle the myrtle [comes] up”*** (v. 13).

The “thorn bush” and the “nettle” typify our ways and our thoughts. As we receive the *rhema* from God’s mouth, these are replaced by the “cypress” and the “myrtle,” which typify God’s ways and God’s thoughts.

David and Mary, Our Examples

To further illustrate the way that *rhema* comes and the results it produces, we will take two beautiful incidents from Scripture—one from the Old Testament, concerning David, and one from the New Testament, concerning the Virgin Mary.

DAVID:

In **1 Chronicles 17**, we see David established as king over Israel—victorious, prosperous, and at ease. Contrasting his own luxurious palace with the humble tabernacle that still housed the sacred ark of God’s covenant, he desired to build a temple worthy of God and His covenant. The prophet Nathan, with whom David shared his desire, at first gave him warm encouragement. But that night, God spoke to Nathan and sent him back to David with a different message. The message began, **“You shall not build a house for Me”** (v. 4), but it closed, **“Moreover, I tell you that the LORD will build a house for you”** (v. 10).

Here is an example of the difference between the ways and thoughts of God and of man. The highest plan that David could conceive in his own mind was still on the earthly plane: that he would build a house for God. The promise that came back to him from God was on the heavenly plane, far higher than David would ever have conceived: that God would build a house for him. Furthermore, David had used the word house in its material sense, merely as a dwelling place. But in His promise, God used the word house in its wider meaning, the meaning of an enduring posterity—a royal line that would continue forever.

In his message, Nathan brought to David *a rhema*—a direct, personal word from God. In response, David (ESV) **“went in and sat before the LORD”** (**1 Chronicles 17:16**). What was he doing? First of all, undoubtedly, he had to set aside his own plans and preconceptions. Gradually, as he was emptied of these, he began to meditate with focused attention on God’s message, allowing it to penetrate to his innermost being.

In this condition of inner stillness, he was able to hear. Finally, out of hearing, faith came—the faith needed to appropriate what God had promised him. Still sitting in God’s presence, David replied, (ESV) **“And now, O LORD, let the word that you**

have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, be established forever, and do as you have spoken” (v. 23).

“The word that you have spoken”—that was the *rhema*. It did not originate on the earthly plane of David’s own ways and thoughts. It came down from the heavenly place, *bringing God’s ways and thoughts down to David*. Having heard this *rhema* and having allowed it to produce faith within him, David appropriated its promise by a prayer that included these five short words: ***“Do as you have spoken.”***

These five words represent the most effective prayer that anyone can pray—so simple, so logical, and yet so powerful. Once we are truly convinced that God has said something to us, and we in turn ask Him to do what He has said, how can we doubt that He will do it? What power in heaven or on earth can prevent it?

MARY:

From David, we move on through a thousand years of Jewish history to *a humble descendant of his royal line*—a peasant maiden named Mary, who lived in the city of Nazareth. An angel appeared to her with a message from the throne of God:

Luke 1:31-33 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.”

When Mary questioned how this could come about, the angel explained that it would be by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. He concluded his message with the words, ***“For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37)***. “Nothing” in the original Greek means literally ***“no word”—“no rhema.”*** The angel’s reply could just as well be translated, ***“No word (rhema) from God will be void of power,”*** or, more freely, ***“Every word (rhema) from God contains the power for its own fulfillment.”***

The angel brought to Mary a *rhema*—a direct, *personal word from God to her*. That *rhema* contained in it the power to fulfill what it promised. The outcome depended on Mary’s response. ***“Behold, the bond slave of the Lord,”*** she replied: ***“be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38)***. By these words, Mary unlocked the supernatural power of God in the *rhema* and opened herself to its fulfillment in her physical body. As a result, there occurred the greatest miracle of human history: the birth of God’s eternal Son from the womb of a virgin.

In its simplicity, Mary's response was parallel to that of David. David said, **"Do as Thou hast spoken"** (1 Chronicles 17:23). Mary said, **"Be it done to me according to your word"** (Luke 1:38). Both of these simple replies unlocked the miracle-working power of God to fulfill the promise that had been given. In both cases, the *rhema*, received by faith, contained in it the power for its own fulfillment.

Some people may question the statement that the miracle of Jesus' birth depended on the response of Mary's faith. Yet this is plainly indicated by the closing words of the salutation with which Elizabeth later greeted Mary: (ESV) **"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord"** (Luke 1:45).

The implication is clear: the fulfillment of the promise came *because Mary had believed it*. Without this, there would have been no way for God's miracle-working power to fulfill what had been promised.

Let us see how the experiences of David and of Mary parallel each other:

1. To both of them, there came a *rhema*—a direct, personal word from God.
2. This *rhema* expressed the ways and thoughts of God, which were far above anything that they would ever have conceived by their own reasoning or imagination.
3. As they *heard* the *rhema*, it *imparted faith* to them.
4. Both expressed faith by a simple statement that gave consent to what was promised: **"Do as you have spoken"** (1 Chronicles 17:23). **"Let it be to me according to your word"** (Luke 1:38).
5. Faith expressed in this way made room for the power of God within the *rhema* to bring about the fulfillment of what had been promised.

God still works the same way today with His believing people. By the Holy Spirit, He takes out of His *logos*, His eternal counsel, a *rhema* —a specific word that fits a particular situation in time and space. As we "hear" this *rhema*, faith comes. Then, as we use the faith, we have thus received to appropriate the *rhema*, we discover that the word from God contains in itself the power needed to work out its own fulfillment.

IN SUMMARY

The Bible presents God's demand for faith, but it also shows us how to acquire faith. **Romans 10:17** tells us that ***"faith comes from hearing"*** God's word—God's *rhema*—His word made alive and personal by the Holy Spirit.

We need to see the relationship between *logos* and *rhema*. *Logos* is God's unchanging counsel, settled forever in heaven. *Rhema* is the way the Holy Spirit brings a portion of *logos* down out of eternity and relates it to time and human experience.

Through *rhema*, the *logos* becomes specific and personal. As I hear this *rhema*, faith comes to me through it.

What is meant by hearing?

A good, practical example is provided by **Proverbs 4:20-22**, which I referred to as "God's medicine bottle." The directions on the medicine bottle contain the four elements that constitute hearing:

1. First, give close, undivided attention to what God is saying to you by the Holy Spirit.
2. Second, adopt a humble, teachable attitude.
3. Third, focus your eyes on the words to which God has directed you.
4. Fourth, continually meditate on them in your heart.

Rhema is God's word proceeding out of God's mouth. As we continue to hear each such word that comes to us, it provides the daily bread by which we maintain our spiritual life and our ongoing walk with God.

Rhema is also compared to the rain and snow that bring heaven's life-giving moisture down to earth, replacing barrenness with fruitfulness. *Rhema* brings God's ways and thoughts down to our human level and replaces our ways and thoughts with His.

Two examples of how *rhema* works are provided by King David and the Virgin Mary. David had planned to build a house for the Lord, but the Lord sent a *rhema*, saying that He would build a house for David. To Mary, God sent a *rhema* by the angel Gabriel, saying that she was to become the mother of Israel's long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God.

In each case, as David and Mary heard the *rhema*, it imparted faith to them. Through faith, they were able to receive the fulfillment of what the *rhema* had promised. Their responses were simple, but sufficient: ***“Do as you have spoken”*** (**1 Chronicles 17:23**), and ***“Be it done to me according to your word”***