

Living by Faith

By

Curtis Dickinson

“But the righteous shall live by faith”. Romans 1:17

Everyone puts his faith in something. It may be education one's own superiority, money science or the constitution. But to trust to such human powers and instruments is to ultimately fail. Jesus once asked, “When the Son of man cometh will he find the faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). There may be many beliefs and forms of faith when He returns, but will he find the true faith? Will he find you living by faith?

REVEALED FAITH

Affirming that the gospel is the power of God, Paul declared. “For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, but the righteous shall live by faith.” This faith does not refer to the ideologies of man nor to man's own great accomplishments, such as walking on the moon. “The faith” refers to our confidence in God's working to the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. This purpose has been revealed by God through Christ in the gospel. It is not something we learn by exploring nature or space, but something revealed once and for all and recorded permanently in scripture.

Faith requires doctrine. I know that modern man despises that term, insisting that what we need is not doctrine but a “personal experience of Christ”. But seeking faith through subjective experience has resulted in disappointment and frustration for millions.

For example, one hears a testimony of another person's experience of faith. He then tries to duplicate this experience in his own life, worrying over his failure until he gives up the search for faith altogether.

Others may claim an experience of faith when they do not even know Christ. As long as one is left to interpret experiences with no revelation from God, he may call anything a religious experience, from an encounter with Satan's modern wizards, to a trip by way of LSD. In fact it is much easier to simulate a religious attitude than to commit one's self to certain facts and commands from Almighty God. Today it is heard from a thousand sources that man may have faith in God and be Christian without believing any particular doctrine. This in itself is a doctrine, but the children of darkness have never minded using a double standard. Such false doctrine meets with much success in filling churches, gaining audiences and selling books.

A true faith in God must have as its object certain truths about God. Christ can be known only as we know things about Him. This is in direct opposition to the popular claim that “it is not what we know but who we know.” We cannot know the *who* until we know some what about him. The closest friend is known only as we know certain things about him. There is no other way to know a person. We can know Christ only as we know what

He reveals of Himself, what He is like and what He requires of those who would be in fellowship with Him. Doctrine, the truth about God and what God requires of man, is essential to faith in God.

Hence the faith, the faith by which we are to live, is based upon eternal truths which in turn are revealed in Scripture. As Romans 10:17 tells us, “faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” Jesus said, “Every one therefore that hears these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (Matt. 7:24). The word of Christ must be heard, the doctrine must be known, before one can begin to live by it. When the revealed truth is not the basis for interpreting human experiences, the result is chaos and confusion. This partially accounts for division and unbelief in churches of our day. Men claim to believe in God, but they cannot BELIEVE God, for they do not know what He teaches. Many a church member holds to the traditions of his church but is generally ignorant of the Bible and what it teaches. His faith is not found on revealed truth, and is therefore faith in something that is not true or maybe doesn't exist.

Faith must be tied to reality. It is not some unexplainable feeling nor the mere optimistic confidence that things will turn out all right. God is a reality. He appeared in the flesh, through Jesus Christ. His purpose is definite, as defined and demonstrated by Jesus. The death of Christ was real, demonstrating that the punishment for sin and sinner is to be real. The blood of Christ was of “the seed of Abraham”. The same blood shared by the race of man (Hebrews 2:14-16), hence Christ could be the substitute blood-shedder for His brethren, the Christians. His resurrection was real, demonstrating that we believers are to be resurrected to immortality. This is the gospel, the object of our faith. Faith, then, is our belief in these realities and the confidence that we share in the benefit of them. Faith must have an object and that object, where Christianity is concerned, must be in the doctrine God has revealed.

Furthermore, the better the understanding of the object of faith, the greater the faith itself. Vast amounts of faith in a false concept of God is as no faith at all. To believe one is going the right direction may speed one on his way, but if it happens to be the wrong way, his faith only encourages him to get farther from his destiny. It is not the size of faith that counts, but the object of faith that gets results.

THE LEAP OF FAITH

It is not enough, however, for us to know the doctrine. We must place our lives in trust to God and live as those who are objects of the purpose and work of God. If the purpose of God is the object of our faith then we believe that we are the objects of God's purpose. Believing this, we trust ourselves to His every command. This is what Kierkegaard called the “leap of faith”. Jesus was talking about this when He said “If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God ...’ (John 7:17). That is, if one acts upon God's word, he will find that it is all true! This is the real Christian experience. But if he never actually does it, he never experiences faith, and doesn't live by faith. He reads, “Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and all these things (necessities) will be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:33) He acknowledges it to be true. But first he must make sure

that his job, his home and his personal needs all are met. He never knows the truth of what Jesus said, for he refuses to live “by faith”. But let him start putting the Kingdom absolutely first, even risking his job, his expensive house and all, then, if he has made God’s purpose the object of faith, he will know the truth of the doctrine. He will find God is true.

God’s command to Abraham, to slay his son as a burnt offering, contradicted all reason. The son was the means of fulfilling God’s earlier promise of Christ. There’ fore the will of God to sacrifice Isaac was opposed to all that was rational, human and logical. But Abraham believed God, and proceeded to obey, even to the point of wielding the knife over his son. At the last split second God stopped him and provided a ram for the offering, but Abraham had “willed to do His will” and had believed all the time that God would restore this son and fulfill the promise. This was the “leap of faith”; to step out into God’s powerful will, believing that His purpose would be accomplished through the obedience to his word.

“By faith” means to believe the doctrine, and to act upon it. It is to read a challenging command in the Bible and say, “I believe this is just what I must do” and proceed to do it against the world’s scorn, mockery and ridicule, However hard and difficult the command, it is right, and will lead to the ultimate and perfect good that God has designed. But if one does not know that ultimate goal, he is not likely to take the step of staking all upon it.

The first step in living by faith, then, is to establish faith in the doctrine of the gospel. That doctrine rests upon the purpose of God, that man should be conformed to His image and live forever in His presence. This is made possible by Christ taking our sin and our punishment- death, and in doing so making us clean from every sin so that we might be resurrected to immortality. Once we believe this we are never again fearful of what may happen in this life. The loss of things does not impede our being conformed to God’s image. Sickness and hardship bring us pain and suffering, but cannot keep us from advancing toward the ultimate purpose. Death itself is no obstacle, for the eternal plan of God includes a resurrection with an immortal body that will never die. Believing this our faith has a firm foundation, and no matter what is required in doing God’s will, we always rest on that foundation. Even in the leap of faith, we still stand on the foundation, so that the farther the leap carries us, the more solid our foundation of faith.

The life of faith is not necessarily a life free of problems of suffering. Abraham, the example of true faith, was not excused from trials and problems. Joseph’s faith did not keep him from suffering at the hands of his brothers as well as at the hands of Potipher. Paul’s faith did not spare him from the constant persecution by the Jews, finally resulting in his imprisonment.

Yet these men lived by faith, knowing the ultimate purpose of God and content in the assurance that all the experiences of their lives were instruments in God’s hands to perfect them, that in the last day they would be found trusting in Him.

It is necessary, therefore, that we steep ourselves in the word of God. "It is written," Jesus said, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) We, too, must know that "it is written" if we would resist Satan and be faithful to God. It is a flagrant rejection of God to question the truths given in the Bible and blasphemy to suggest that man must create a new set of laws and a code of ethics for the space age. But it is also foolish and equally disastrous for man to try to claim a faith and at the same time remain ignorant of the object of that faith. It was Paul's desire that the brethren be "nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine" (Tim. 4:6). The accent of the apostles was on the faith, its foundation, its growth and nourishment. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "for your furtherance and joy of faith" (Phil. 1:25). His prayer for the church was that "the Father of glory may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know" (Eph. 1:15-23).

This is a sharp contrast to modern emphasis on building programs and campaigns of every sort. The church may boast as did that of Laodicea that it is making great progress and has need of nothing, and all the time be poor and blind naked because its members have no faith. The desperate need of each Christian is to nourish the faith, to build himself up in it, to be firmly established upon it, and then to live by it.

The unbelieving world will continually seek its ways apart from God's laws and will assault the Christian who maintains them. The world measures success in terms of fun, power and things. Consider how all the world lauds the "moon walk" as a great leap for mankind, when it has done absolutely nothing to make man better morally, physically, socially or spiritually. The Christian cannot prove his way is right by comparing it with the world, for to the world it has no appeal. But he walks by faith and not by sight. As Paul declared, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live in faith the faith which is in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Because of the doctrine of the gospel Paul was able to live by faith.

So instead of putting faith in financial resources that may be wiped out in a moment, or in personal superiority which is no stronger than flesh, or in some political movement which may be betrayed before it is realized, put your faith in Christ the Lord and rely totally on his eternal purpose being brought to perfection in the last day. Even now he works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).

The righteous shall live by faith.

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. IX. Number 8.
.....