

FOCUSING OUR FAITH

By

Curtis Dickinson

Faith accomplishes great things. We are saved by faith, we live by faith and we are to proclaim the faith to all the world. By faith the ancients confronted terrible foes and put them down. By faith Noah sustained the flood that wiped out all the rest of the world. By faith Abraham defied the force of natural law to accomplish the will of God. By faith Elijah put down a whole denomination of religious pagans in one day.

The apostles boldly advanced the faith against the bloody persecutions of their enemies, and, under all the terror and pressure the empire could bring to bear, they survived. They not only survived, they thrived, multiplied, rejoiced, gained spiritual stature and challenged the world to a life of faith.

Where is that faith today? Over one billion people in the world claim to be Christian! Yet it is a world of violence, hatred, fear, depression, lust, lies and murder. In the business world, where is the faith? In the arts, where is the faith? In politics, where is the evidence of faith? And in the average life of church members, where is the faith?

For many their faith is in their feelings. They go to church to get a “jolt from Jesus” and if there is not enough excitement to give them an 8 on their emotional Richter scale, they start looking for another church. Their faith is in feelings generated by their own experiences.

There is an on-going effort to focus faith on one’s self. Self-confidence is healthy, as is a sensible and realistic self-image. But this is all to come as a by-product of the true faith, and when it becomes the focus of our faith it spells failure.

There has been and continues to be an effort to focus faith in the holy Spirit. People put their faith in some experience attributed to the Holy Spirit. “He is real to me because this is what happened...” When this doesn’t happen to other people, they find no basis for faith! The scriptures never tell us to focus faith on the holy Spirit, but that the holy Spirit is given to us as a result of our true faith in Jesus the Christ.

Legalism attracts the faith of many. “I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:12). These were the words of the Pharisee. He had faith in his own success! His type fills churches over the land. They go to church regularly, pay their dues and do not omit any embarrassing sins, but are filled with anxieties and fears at every disruption of their comfortable lives, because their faith is misplaced.

Faith does not embrace success in any worldly sense. A Christian may fail in business, live and die in poverty, yet be filled with faith and die in faith which saves him. It is not in health. Some of the most faithful have suffered miserably from physical infirmities.

Christian faith is “faith toward God.” It embraces all that He declares of Himself, what He has done through Christ and what He reveals as His purpose for us.

Faith for the Christian centers on the unique three and one-half year ministry of our Lord Jesus the Christ, focusing on His atoning death by which we are delivered from sin and death, and His glorious resurrection and subsequent enthronement as the Lord of heaven and earth. This was the most glorious 42-month period in all history, and should

dominate our thinking, permeate our conversation and fill our hearts and minds to overflowing with joy and thanksgiving so that our faith is victorious in every situation.

THE UNSEEN: Focusing faith on God means that we “walk by faith and not by sight.” We cannot see what the days ahead may hold, nor are we given a complete picture of the ultimate life in the new creation; only that it will be life without the sorrows of this world and lived in the perfect environment with God.

But all this is invisible to us in our present state. That’s why it is by faith. If we can see it, feel it, know it by natural senses, it is not by faith. The things which are seen, says Paul, are temporal, but the things which are NOT seen are eternal! (II Cor. 4:18). But “we look at the things which ARE NOT SEEN,” he writes. That is, we do if we have faith.

Strong evidence for the lack of faith today—both in and out of the church—is the conspicuous absence of any recognition of God and His power in the great questions of famine, nuclear war, and government leaders. Not only is there seldom any mention of God’s power in these things, but the populace (in or out of the church) ignores the fact that none of these events are without God’s knowledge and overriding power.

An example is found in the second chapter of Daniel. The king of Babylon was confident that the nation was his to rule as he saw fit and for as long as he lived. He credited himself with the glory of the kingdom, just as people today credit prosperity and freedom to the ingenuity of men and the wisdom of the ruling administration. But Daniel revealed to the monarch that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will, and sets up over it the lowest of men” (Dan. 2:21).

There are few who stop to consider that God has a hand in elections; that He still removes presidents, and even judges and sheriffs, and sets up leaders according to His own wisdom and purpose.

For the past generation people have been cringing in fear that evil men might set up a world kingdom of invincible power which no one would dare oppose. Some claim this is part of Bible prophecy (then they work day and night to keep the prophecy from coming to pass!). But there is one who is stronger than all world rulers combined. God has given all authority to Jesus our Lord, and it is he that will bring history to a close, will judge the world, destroy all evil, and bring in the perfect eternal world “wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3).

In the meantime His hand in judgment may be seen often in the affairs of the world. We are not to find some way to worm out from under the judgment, but to have faith that it is righteous.

Men cannot legislate God out of their affairs. He will not be separated from government, school, economics or law. Such legislation may be passed, but it only brings the legislatures under condemnation. God still acts.

THE REALITY: Faith is to treat the unseen as reality. God is not just “somebody up there” but a real personality. When you pray, you are not talking to the air, nor as psychology has it, merely to get a load off your chest. When you pray God hears each word. He even hears when you don’t pray. He is there.

More than that, the holy Spirit is present to interpret your secret desires and make them known to God. God is more aware of what we say than those to whom we speak. We can be more sure of His presence than we are of those sitting right across the table.

Involved in Christian faith is the fact that God, His angels, His Spirit and His Son are all more real than anything we can see or touch. They are eternal, changeless, and more dependable than anything temporal. Things seen are changing, dying, decaying and they disappear. This means that we are the unreal ones, with life that is only temporary and that is fading away with time. We will not become real until we have been translated as His manifestation and made incorruptible for the real world of eternity.

This makes the walk by faith the only security. To walk by sight is to walk on shifting sand; when we walk by faith we are setting our feet down on the path that is eternal.

To many “faith” is only a vague hope that things will all turn out “okay.” But that is not Biblical faith. True faith is the very conviction that God is sovereign, that it is he “who works in you both to will and work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), and that in spite of all outward circumstances that He will accomplish His purpose in our lives.

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