

BY FAITH

By

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When the apostles cited examples of Christians in the early church, they did not list their accomplishments in terms of success, members added to the church, the facilities in which they met, nor accolades given them by secular organizations, but rather pointed to their faith.

The concept of faith has been corrupted in American culture in several ways. In the name of tolerance, the advocates of multi-culturism promote many “faiths,” so that one’s faith simply refers to his particular brand of religion. Neither is Biblical faith that which distinguishes one congregation from another by the kind of worship program that is followed. One may have membership in a church or denomination and have no real faith at all. Also, people are continually being fed the gospel of self-help and self-esteem. Faith, too many, means to “believe in yourself,” or as some preach it, the practice of positive thinking.

Such concepts do not qualify for what the Bible calls faith, nor does Scripture advocate “faith in the future,” which is the mere idea that whatever we do things will turn out well!

FAITH AND REALITY

In Hebrews it is written: “Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him” (Heb. 11:6). Faith is not belief in a myth or a tradition. Rather, it is belief that God is Who He says He is; that He has revealed Himself through Jesus His Son, and that He will do and act just as He has promised.

There is a gospel song which says, “My God is real, for I can feel Him in my soul.” But the reality of God does not depend on how one feels about Him. Paul wrote that “the invisible things of (God) are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made” (Rom 1:20). God is as real as all creation, even though millions may not have any feeling about Him at all. Those who depend on their feelings to give evidence of God may fail to feel His presence in times of great problems, the very times when they need Him the most.

Christian faith is based on objective truth, on facts that are unique and absolute: that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God that everything Jesus said is true; that He died and rose again and now sits on the throne of his kingdom with all authority in heaven and in earth. These facts were not invented by men, nor are they mere traditions. They are history. They are reality.

Faith embraces much more. It is to believe that by Christ's death we can be forgiven and reconciled to God; that He is with us all the time; that He is going to return and will raise us up from death and give us eternal life.

One reason for division and confusion in the church world is that much which is called "faith" is not grounded in the truth revealed by God. "So belief comes of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). On the contrary, much of what people call "faith" is based on nothing more than feelings which are generated by songs and a sermon aimed at creating a great emotional "experience." The next day, in the midst of a crisis, that feeling of faith has vanished. Real faith is not produced on a diet of the kind of cotton candy theology being presented in modern mainstream churches. Faith is derived from the truth of the Word and is actually hindered, rather than helped by all the embellishments of man.

Faith is the root of our relationship to God the Creator. We can't see Him, touch Him nor hear Him. We relate to Him only in a mind-to-mind way; where He gives us truth and we believe Him. Therefore, faith is not merely an arbitrary requirement of God as some kind of test for mankind. It is an absolute necessity if there is to be any relationship between man and God. There can be no value in His plans, purposes and revelation for man if man does not believe in the reality of it all.

LIVING BY FAITH

What does the Scripture mean: "The righteous shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17)? For one thing, it means that while we cannot see God, we have faith that He is with us. This is not because we "feel" His presence nor have some kind of experience that indicates His presence, but because we believe the promise of God that He would never leave us. I do not need to have daily reminders through subjective feelings to be able to depend upon Him; I just need to believe Him.

After Jacob's vision of the ladder and God's promise to him, Jacob said, "Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16). But *we* certainly ought to know it, **by faith**, because He has promised to be with us. In a religious service you may hear someone say, "I could just *feel* God's presence." Good; we are blessed when our feelings are in harmony with the reality of God's presence. But what of those who had no such feelings? God was still present, whether felt or not. We are not to live by our feelings, but by faith.

Faith cannot be measured by our circumstances. When things are going well, one may think that his faith is just as it should be. Popular preachers may say, "Trust God to keep you safe from harm and to give you health and wealth. He will protect you from sickness and pain if you just have faith." Then when the believer falls into serious difficulties he doubts his faith and questions his relationship to the heavenly Father. Faith is not necessarily rewarded with material blessings and smooth sailing.

One of God's means of building faith involves suffering and hardship. When material security is lost, friends are removed, and health is threatened, then do we still have total

faith in God? Indeed we do, for faith is perfected in the grief “of manifold trials,” even as gold is refined in fire. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Usually we pray that God will change circumstances under which we must live, and He often does this. But faith is trusting God in spite of the circumstances. It is having the mind of Christ. Who accepted the circumstances and prayed “Not my will but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). such faith requires our willingness to be transformed according to God’s judgment, willing for Him to disrupt our lives and tear away the design we have so carefully develop over the years, and replace the qualities that are so prominently “us” with much less attractive (to the world) qualities of humility, patience, compassion and meekness.

Faith is to say. “Whatever God wills is best, wherever it may lead me and whatever it may cost.” To live by faith is to be so yielded to God’s will that one is happy to accept whatever circumstance God provides, believing that God gives only good gifts to His children. It is to accept Christ’s challenge: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

“For whatsoever is begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world even our faith” (I John 5:4).

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