

Personal Faith

The New Testament uses the word faith in two general ways. It uses it to express the gospel system established by God as the means of saving men (Acts. 6:7; Rom. 1:5,16). That use of the word faith will be the subject of a subsequent article. The other way the New Testament uses the word faith is in reference to personal faith. Personal faith is absolutely essential to one's salvation. The Hebrews writer penned these words: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Heb. 11:6). Jesus answered the question of Thomas about where He was going and how the apostles could know the way with the words: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by me"* (John 14:6). Thus, it is essential for salvation to believe in both the Father and in His only begotten Son.

But just what is faith? Hebrews 11:1 is often quoted as a definition of faith, but it is really more a description of what faith does (underlies and supports our hope) than a definition of faith. When faith is defined, the following trio of words provide some of the basics of what faith is: belief, trust, and confidence.

Faith is belief. That fact was borne out by Hebrews 11:6). It would be unreasonable for a man to say he would obey God, while not believing in Him. If one said, "I'll keep the commands just in case there is a God," it would be vain. In John 14:1, Jesus said, *"Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."* Faith involves a conviction of the heart that God is. Yet, faith is more than mere belief, even the devils (demons) believe (Jam. 2:19).

Faith is trust. Faith implies trust. Paul expresses this aspect of faith to the Corinthians: *"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us"* (2 Cor. 1:9,10). Men may fail us in the promises they commit to us, but God will not. The apostle affirms: *"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance"* (Rom. 11:29). What God has promised to do, including raising us from the dead, He both can do and will do.

Faith is confidence our actions conform to God's commands. Many people go through life hoping that what they do is pleasing to God, but we can know that we have kept God's commands, and know that we know it. Paul affirmed that his writings were the commands of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). Peter argues that we have a more sure word of prophecy (2 Pet. 1:19). When one does all the things the New Testament says to in connection with the soul's salvation, one can have absolute confidence that God will extend to him His mercy in the judgment. Christians can also know that their worship and their conformance with the New Testament pattern in organization and work of the church is well pleasing to, and blessed of, God. Based on obedience to God's will, John assures us: *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments"* (1 John 2:3).

Since the faith heretofore described is essential to salvation, we must know where it comes from or originates that we might have it. Many people mistakenly think that God arbitrarily passes out faith to this person and not to another. Have you ever been at an event where someone drew out of a hat, and those few received a door prize, but the rest did not? That is the way some people think faith comes; that is false. In Romans 10:8, Paul states: *"But what saith it? the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith which we preach."* Paul then discusses belief, confession, calling upon the name of the Lord, expands upon the point of preaching, then concludes: *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (v. 17). All who hear the gospel have it within their power to believe it or not believe it. Those on Pentecost exemplify those who believe it (Acts 2:37), and the Jews to whom Paul preached in Acts 13 did not (Acts 13:46).

There is a personal faith that is toward salvation and one that is not. Faith alone will not save (Jam. 2:17). That kind of faith is dead (v. 20), and even the demons have it (v. 19). The man who is blessed in his deed is not one who is a hearer only, but the one who is a doer of the work (Jam. 1:20-25). The faith that avails is the faith which works by love (Gal. 5:6). Jesus taught that many will be rejected in the judgment even though they believed in Him, because they did not do the will of the heavenly Father (Matt. 7:21). The obedient faith is the faith that saves. Paul says just that to the Roman brethren: *"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you"* (Rom. 6:17).

The newborn child of God must be interested in increasing his faith (1 Pet. 2:2), because that which does not grow will die. How is faith increased? One way is the way it was developed in the first place, by the word of God. Paul told the Ephesian elders that the word of God's grace would build them up (Acts. 20:32). Timothy was exhorted to study to show himself approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15). One of the ways the Word of God builds our faith is by all of the times it records God making promises to His people to bless them, then doing it. By that we know that He will also keep His promises to us, if we keep His commandments. God will not fail us. Let us not fail Him!

Trials also build our faith, because they work patience and patience makes us complete and wanting nothing (Jam. 1:2-5). Christ is our example of suffering and He was received into the eternal glory. If we suffer for Him, we can view the trials we face as not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed (Rom. 8:18).

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