

The Circuit Rider

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Faith

“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)

The subject of faith has been a controversial one since the beginning of the church. The early church found itself debating if Gentiles could be saved apart from the Jewish ritual of circumcision (Acts 15). It was over the issue of faith that controversy between the Reformers and Rome arose which provoked Martin Luther to nail his 95 Thesis to the church doors of Wittenberg. The Latin phrase, “Sola Fide”, which means BY FAITH ALONE, became a great reformation slogan.

It’s impossible to study the Bible without becoming conscious of the importance of faith. Just as disbelief was prominent in the sin of the “first Adam”, faith must be prominent in redemption through the “last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45). A sinner cannot be “saved” (Rom. 10:9) apart from faith and neither can a saved person walk pleasing to God except by faith (Eph. 5:2,15). Therefore, it’s important that we find out what the Bible teaches about real genuine holy faith. The requirement of faith, in addition to repentance, proves that only sorrow for sin is insufficient to the saving of our souls (Acts 20:21).

Faith is personal confidence and we often use the word in everyday conversation. However, it’s one thing to have confidence in your doctor or your airline pilot and another to have confidence in Almighty God. Unless we know what it means to have confidence in God, then we don’t know anything about Biblical faith. Faith must always have an object. To get inside of an automobile or elevator is to trust it to take you where you want to go. Unless one’s faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, then that person will someday discover that he has a misplaced spiritual trust for all eternity.

The Nature of Faith

As to the meaning of Biblical faith, it is misunderstood by the vast majority of people (Matt. 7:13-23). A simple statement, "Keep the Faith", is often heard from the lips of the world, but it reveals their misconception of godly faith. Christians should most definitely keep the faith, but what do most people mean when they refer to faith or when they refer to keeping it?

In answer to that question, let me say what faith is NOT. Faith is not mere optimism or the power of positive thinking. Faith is not mere anticipation that things will get better. Faith is not merely the physical exertion of keeping your chin up. Faith is not mere acceptance of what some mortal man tells you to believe. Unless our attitude of TRUST is in Jesus Christ, then our exercise of faith is not biblical. In the Bible, the noun faith and the verb believe, go hand in hand and involves the concept of commitment (Rom. 3:22). Biblical faith has God alone for its OBJECT (I Pet. 1:21).

The nature of godly faith never changes as the one doing the believing directs his trust toward the living God. The Christian concept of faith is to REST upon the OBJECT of our confidence (Heb. 4:8-11). By using the acrostic in the word F A I T H, such rest can be illustrated: Forsaking All I Trust Him! If one's confidence and commitment are not in Christ, then it's not biblical faith. The words, Faith, Believe, and Trust all correspond to each other in reference to what they mean. However, the words faith and hope defer in meaning (I Pet. 1:21). Faith is belief and hope is expectation (Heb. 11:1). Hope is the result of faith (Gal. 5:5).

Sometimes faith is referred to in Holy Scripture as a body of truth or a system of doctrinal belief (I Tim. 4:1,6). The Bible distinguishes between intellectual faith (belief) and a genuine commitment of trustful obedience (Jam. 2:14-26). Believing facts about the Bible without trusting Christ as your personal Savior is like believing that an airplane can transport you from one location to another, but refuse to board it. Historical acceptance of Christ is not the same as trusting Him as your Master and Redeemer. A faith that touches only the intellect and not the heart (Rom. 10:10) is dead (Jam. 2:26). Failure to believe the Gospel of Christ is the same as calling God a liar (I Jh. 5:10). A perfect knowledge of God is not necessary to faith; otherwise, it would be impossible. However, a true believer will hunger for a greater knowledge of God and His will. Faith for the Christian is not only his initial commitment to Christ, but it becomes a way of life.

The Source of Faith

We must never forget that faith starts with God and not with some church dogma or creed, or human mystical experience or revelation. The spring of faith is funneled directly from the Word of God (I Thess. 2:13) by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:17). God reveals to sinful man, by means of His Spirit (Jh. 3:8), the truth (Jh. 16:13) about Himself.

Sin and Satan have so blinded (II Cor. 4:4-6) the eyes of fallen man that he cannot discern truth apart from God's intervention (I Cor. 2:14). Only those who are

divinely drawn and taught by the Holy Spirit receive faith to believe (Jh. 6:44, 63-65). Saving faith is a gift of God's mercy that opens our eyes to the truth (Eph. 2:8). In witnessing to the lost, we need to pray for God to open their blind eyes or else they'll never believe unto salvation nor "see the kingdom of God" (Jh. 3:3).

Faith and Salvation

Coming to Christ in faith is like falling helplessly into the open arms of our Savior. In CHRIST, through CHRIST, and because of CHRIST perfect salvation links Christ to man by faith (Rom. 8:1-39). Nobody can ever need more than is freely given in Jesus Christ. To deny the adequacy of faith alone for salvation is to deny that Christ is an adequate Savior. To emphasize the sufficiency of faith in salvation, we must look at the Philippian jail cell and listen to the words of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:30-31). When the jailer asked, "what must I do to be saved?", the response was "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ". There is not a thing we can do to merit or contribute to our salvation. We must simply exercise the faith that God gives us to believe.

True faith is a wholehearted trust and confidence in God's mercy alone. In despair, we must abandon dependence in self, religion, and all else except Christ. We must fling ourselves upon His mercy like a little child in humility (Mk. 10:15). Trying to contribute to God's acceptance of us in salvation will not win His favor. Christ will either be our whole Savior or no Savior at all. We must come to Christ like the hymn writer described: Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling, Naked, come to thee for dress, Helpless look to thee for GRACE.

Faith and Works

Although, man is saved through faith (Eph. 2:8) alone, that faith is never alone because saving faith is evidenced in righteous works (Titus 3:14). Godly "faith ... worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). The believer does not work to gain salvation, but once he is saved, his works will express gratitude to God for his salvation (Jam. 2:17-18).

Oftentimes, we think of faith only in connection with salvation, but it should be seen as also a controlling principle in the Christian life (Rom. 1:17). Christian living is not only a walk (Eph. 4:1,7) with God by faith, but it is also a fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12, Eph. 6:16) against the forces of Hell. Since we are no match for the devil (Jam. 4:7), we can only contend with him in faith as we draw our strength from the Lord our God. The hall of faith from the book of Hebrews (Heb. 11:1-33) reminds us that the Christian life is not lived out on beds of ease, but on spiritual battlefields of contention. Every person named in this list of faithful heroes shows us how their faith was in the Lord and in Him they found victory (I Jh. 5:4-5).

Closing Thoughts

The only way to live a life pleasing and acceptable to God is by FAITH (Rom. 14:23). Faith in God produces faithfulness to God. Faith expresses itself in obedience

to God while unbelief expresses itself in disobedience (Jh. 3:18). There is, without question, different degrees of faith (Matt. 17:20, I Cor. 12:9), but it only takes a childlike immature faith to be saved. But, how is it that we can nurture our faith and grow strong in the Lord? Weak faith can be made strong and little faith (Matt. 6:30) can be made great by exercising trust in the promises of God. By fixing our eyes on things eternal and not temporal (II Cor. 4:18) and believing God at His word, can fuel our faith and cause it to mature and become more fruitful.

A MINISTRY UPDATE

First of all, allow me to share something of a personal note. Upon my retirement from the pastorate last July; Ann and I had no idea where God would lead us to a church home. But, He led us back to my “home church” at Friendly Avenue Baptist where we have been so warmly received. This is a great church with a great staff and God’s hand is evident upon it. They have been gracious to invite me to teach the Wednesday morning Bible Study each week and allow me to speak on several other occasions. We praise our Lord for the blessing that He has been to us through this church.

Currently, I’m teaching a character study in the Life of Gideon from the book of Judges during our Wednesday Morning Bible Study at FABC. After our current radio series ends (AM830 WTRU at 1 PM on Sundays) in June on the Book of James, I plan to air a study in the life of Gideon. This study will appear on our website either toward the end of this year or the first of next year.

I’m very pleased with the number of “hits” that we are receiving on our website from around the world. Last year in 2008, we had a total of 9,152 hits on our website. Last month in February we had a total of 797 hits and thus far in March at the writing of this newsletter, we have had a total of 617 hits. Most of the “hits” come from the United States, but last month, we also had “hits” from Romania, Russian Federation, Netherlands, India, Italy, Germany, Malaysia, Japan, South Africa, Malawi, Ivory Coast, Australia, Singapore, Brazil, Canada, and New Zealand. In previous months, we have also had a number of “hits” from Pakistan.

Only God knows and only eternity will reveal the outcome of this little ministry that God has given us. Thank you for your prayerful and financial support that makes it possible for us to continue doing what God has opened the door for us to do for His honor and glory.

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM