

## FAITH

The Christian is called to the life of faith. *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him”* (Col. 2:6). He received Christ by faith and he is to live life by faith. *“We live by faith, not by sight”* (2 Cor. 5:7). He cannot please God without faith in his life. *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him”* (Heb. 11:6). He is to fight a life of faith. *“Fight the good fight of faith”* (1 Tim. 6:12). The essence of a Christian’s life is to live by faith in Christ. *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Gal. 2:10).

Faith is the key that unlocks the door of Christianity. Without faith there is no Christianity. Faith opens the door to the supernatural and the spiritual world that is more real than the material world. The invisible world (spiritual kingdom) undergirds, surrounds and moves through the visible world. This kingdom is unrestricted, unlimited and infinite. The invisible world is where nothing is impossible for God. This is illustrated in the Bible when Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a great army of the King of Aram (2 Kings 6:11-18). The servant said, *“Oh, my lord, what shall we do?”* Elisha replied, *“Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”* Then Elisha prayed, *“O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.”* At that very moment, the servant’s eyes were opened, *“and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”* Angels in the spiritual world were protecting Elisha and his servant. Blind eyes were opened to the supernatural kingdom through believing prayer.

We live in the realm of the five senses—taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing, but the spiritual realm is more real and more permanent. The spiritual world is entered into only by faith in the God of the Bible. There comes a time where reason ends and faith begins and then the believer moves into the realm of the supernatural.

### DEFINITION OF FAITH

The Bible defines faith for us in Hebrews 11:1. *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen”* (NASB). *“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see up ahead”* (TLB). *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (NIV).

From Hebrews 11:1 there are principles we can learn about faith: 1) Faith is the means whereby spiritual truth can be a reality to true believers; 2) By faith we are sure of eternal things and by hope we are confident that we will have them; 3) Faith makes the unseen works of God real. It is a conviction of the reality of things that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Faith makes us aware of the invisible kingdom and its realities. There are realities that cannot be seen, weighed, measured, analyzed or touched, and yet they are as real and vital as anything we can see. In fact, they are more real because they are an explanation of things that are seen.

Other definitions of faith are: 1) Faith is trusting in God's faithfulness to His promises; 2) Faith is confidence in God; and 3) Faith is praying into existence that which does not exist but for which God has promised.

## WHAT FAITH IS NOT

Faith is not just positive thinking, although there is a positive element to faith. Faith is not a hunch or feeling one follows, although faith does deal with the subjective side of man. Faith is not hoping for the best, although faith expects the best from God. Faith is not optimism, even though faith does make one optimistic. According to the Bible, faith is trusting in the God who has revealed Himself in inspired Scripture. It is taking God at His word.

Faith is not a belief in one's own faith. The most important thing about faith is not faith itself but the object of faith. It is not enough to say one has faith but he must have faith in the God of the Bible. Faith is not enough to save a person, for all the people who are of different religions have some kind of faith— Shintos, Buddhists, Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses all have faith. But real saving and sanctifying faith must have as its object the Trinitarian God of Scripture.

Faith is not getting all emotional or psyched up to believe hard enough so what we desire will happen. This is often expressed in the words, "You have to believe, just believe." We're told if one believes long enough and hard enough something will happen. But believe what? Faith is in the God of the Bible and Him alone.

Faith is not a particular outcome to a particular set of circumstances; that is, our faith is what makes God respond to our desires. We think we have figured out what God should do and He in turn should respond in the way we want Him to respond. Biblical faith is confidence in God that He will do what is right according to His sovereign will, plan and purpose. We do not always know what His will is but we know our God and we trust Him. If our faith is what makes God respond to our desires, then if we do not get our desires, there are only two alternatives we can come to: 1) Our faith is inadequate, or 2) Our God is inadequate. Either alternative destroys faith.

Faith is not confidence in our feelings, thinking God must meet our desires or whims because He is a loving God. Faith is not feeling, but confidence in God. Whatever God ordains is right. We may not understand, make sense of it or even like it, but we know our God and His character, and we turn the matter over to Him. We will present our desires, our wants and our plans to God, but ultimately we will have to say, "Not my will but Yours." Not even Christ got all His desires met. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*" (Matt. 26:39).

Faith is not confidence in what we think should happen as long as our motive honors God. The thinking is, "If my wish honors God, then He ought to honor my faith." We must remember that we are not God. He alone can look into the human heart and His divine plan to know what glorifies Him. If our faith is pure, then God will honor it but only He knows whether our faith is pure.

Faith is not made ineffective when we add the words, "If the Lord wills it" at the end of a faith statement. Some say that using the words "if the Lord wills it" at the end of a prayer is really a statement of doubt. But this is not lack of faith. In Daniel 3:16-18, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship the gods of King Nebuchadnezzar and bow down to the golden image.

The threat was made that if they did not bow to the image they would be thrown into the blazing furnace. The reply of the three men was a statement of great faith with and “if” preceded it. *“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”*

## **FAITH MUST GROW**

Faith must grow or diminish; it cannot stay static. *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more”* (2 Thess. 1:3). Other Christian virtues must be added to faith. *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness . . . knowledge . . . self-control . . . perseverance . . . godliness . . . brotherly kindness . . . love”* (2 Pet. 1:5-6). The faith of a Christian must increase and the Christian must pray for this. *“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’”*

Faith comes as one interacts with the word of Christ. *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ”* (Rom. 10:17). The word of Christ is true but is of no value to the Christian unless the message is combined or mixed with faith. *“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith”* (Heb. 4:2).

In order for faith to grow, faith must be stretched. When faith is stretched, there is always a risk involved. When we obey God without knowing what the outcome might be we are risking. It is frightening but exciting. When we risk, we are vulnerable to the attacks of life. In order to risk, we must get out of our comfort zones and fortresses we have built in our life.

The miracle of increasing the widow’s oil illustrates how faith must continue to grow (2 Kings 4:1-7).

There was a crisis. This woman had a big problem. She lost her husband by death and was in debt to a creditor who was about to take her two sons and make them slaves to pay the debt. The lesson is that before faith can increase, there must be crisis. Crisis demands a decision.

There was a complaint. Elisha wanted to help this woman out of her predicament and asked if there was anything of value in the widow’s home. She had nothing but a jar of oil. Humanly speaking she had nothing that God could work with so the situation looked hopeless. Yet she had one pot or flask of oil.

There was a challenge. The prophet give the woman a challenge. He told her to borrow as many jars or vessels as she could from her neighbors. This woman had to be obedient to the prophet, who represented God, if God was going to fill these jars with oil. She literally had to step out in faith and risk. She did not know how God would perform the task but she obeyed. It was her responsibility to get the pots and it was God’s responsibility to fill them. The widow trusted that God would do a miracle. Had this woman not stepped out in faith (risked) the jars would have never been filled.

There was a completion. The widow began to pour the one little flask of oil into all the other jars. Each time a jar was filled, it was taken away and another jar was placed under the original flask.

As long as there were pots to fill, the oil continued to flow. When they stopped bringing jars, the oil stopped flowing.

## FAITH AND VISION

Faith is the means God has ordained to accomplish His ends. God has a plan and that plan will be accomplished. Yet faith is our human response to accomplishing the divine plan.

Since faith is the means to accomplish God's ends, then we can "make it happen" as well as "let it happen." By faith, we can plan. By faith, we can have a vision. This can happen as we think positively about God and His power to accomplish things through us. Someone has said, "If we aim at nothing, we will surely hit our target."

Numbers 13:26-33 is a good illustration how faith and vision are directly connected. Ten spies went into the land. Eight of them said it could not be conquered. They gave a negative report. They had no faith in God and no vision for the land. They had a "grasshopper" complex that says, "It can't be done. The problem is too great!" They were trying to solve human problems with human resources. The grasshopper complex began with a negative attitude: "*We can't attack these people; they are stronger than we are.*" Also they exaggerated the situation: "*We are like grasshoppers.*" Unbelief always distorts the facts. A pessimist always gives reasons why failure should be expected. They had no vision because they had no faith. However, Joshua and Caleb had faith and vision. They were thinking positively because they were looking at God and not the circumstances. Caleb said, "*We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.*" Faith looks beyond the circumstances to God who has the power to do the impossible. Caleb was saying, "By faith, we can make it happen!"

## FAITH AND TESTING

Our faith will be tested. Testing increases and develops our faith, giving us the ability to persevere. "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*" (James 1:2-3).

Testing to our faith also tests the reality or the genuineness of our faith. "*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*" (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

The testing of faith can be illustrated in the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites. Israel was fleeing Egypt and Pharaoh and his army was hotly pursuing them. The only way out was through the Red Sea and that was humanly impossible. The children of Israel panicked and complained against Moses (Exo. 14:10-12). They were looking at life from a human viewpoint. Moses directed the people to Jehovah-God. "*Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still'*" (Exo. 14:13-14). The Israelites were not to be afraid. They were to stand firm in faith. They were to be still and let God work. They were to let God fight for them. Then they would experience the deliverance of the Lord. Moses was to have the people stop crying, panicking and doubting and to move on. "*Then the*

*LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on” (14:15). The people were to stop complaining and move out in faith. As they moved by faith, God would do a supernatural work for them (14:16-17). The end result would be God’s glory and the Egyptians would know that God is God. “The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen” (14:18).*

## **FAITH IN GOD AND HIS PROMISES**

There are over 7000 promises in the Word of God that the Christian can claim by faith. However, sometimes there are no specific promises we can apply to a specific situation. Then we must operate totally by faith in the character of God.

God is Sovereign. Nothing happens outside of God’s control. God has a plan for the Christian’s life and whatever happens is part of the plan. While we may not understand the situation, we can still thank Him for it.

God is Righteous. Whatever God does is perfect and right; therefore we accept this circumstance willingly.

God is Justice. God is absolutely fair, and, while this circumstance may not seem fair to us, it is fair.

God is Love. God loves the Christian with an infinite love; therefore, His love will carry us through this situation.

God is Omniscient. God knows everything. He knew of any situation a Christian may have billions of years before it happened and He has also made a way of escape for us.

God is Immutable. God cannot change. He has delivered millions of other Christians out of trying circumstances and we know He can deliver us.

## **ATTITUDE AND FAITH**

*“The just shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38)*

*“Though he slay me, yet will I hope (trust) in him” (Job 13:15)*

The life of faith can be summed up by the words of William Carey, the father of modern missions:

**“Ask great things of God.  
Expect great things from God.  
Attempt great things for God.”**