

Article of the Month
March, 2021

What Good Is Faith?

“Faith” is a popular word among Christians — and it *should be*. After all, the Apostle Paul informs us that “without faith it is impossible to please” God. (Hebrews 11:6) Indeed, if faith is that important, we should do all we can to define it and practice it!

Faith is not a New Testament item only. In Romans 4:9, Paul lets us know that “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” (Paul was quoting from Genesis 15:6.) The meaning of this is astoundingly comforting. We all know that true and unadulterated “righteousness” simply doesn’t exist in any of us. “There is none righteous, no not one!” (Romans 3:10 — Paul was referring to Psalm 14:3.) And, since God cannot look at imperfection (Habakkuk 1:13), this leaves everyone without access to the Most High. How discouraging that could be! And yet, SOMEHOW, we have the assurance that God can “be just AND the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26, NAS) He somehow counts faith as an indication of our sincere desire to be righteous. Because Abraham had such great faith, God promised that in Abraham, and through his “faith-descendants,” all of the families of the earth will be blessed. What a promise! And it was all because of Abraham’s faith.

Mankind has been essentially estranged from God since the time he disobeyed in Eden until the time that Jesus’ work of restoration for the race will be completed. Then Jesus will be able to turn a perfected human race back to God at the end of Christ’s 1000-year reign. (I Corinthians 15:20-28; Acts 3:19-23) Yet, somehow, God manages to use “faith” as a “by-pass arrangement” so that He can arrange varying relationships with human beings during the intervening years.

When Paul decides to define and exemplify “faith” in Hebrews 11, he mentions a long list of pre-Christ ancients who were “justified” to being “friends of God” like Abraham was. (James 2:23). Their “justification” (a standing of friendship with God) was not yet enough to give them eternal life. In Hebrews 11:39, 40, Paul points out that these people will not be “made perfect” without the administrations of Christ’s “body” members in the future. Consequently, we have an understanding of such strange Scriptures as Matthew 11:11 — where Jesus points out that John the Baptist (an ancient who, according to Jesus, has “none greater” than he), will NOT be a part of the first resurrection — those who live and reign with Christ the 1000 years. (Revelation 20:6) These pre-Christ worthy ancients will, instead, be rewarded because of their faith with a “better resurrection” — better than the rest of mankind on the earth. (Hebrews 11:35) They will be made “princes in all the earth” (See Psalm 45:16 and Matthew 8:11.)

PAUL DEFINES FAITH

It is important to consider the true meaning of “faith.” Many people confuse it with credulity — a belief without good reason to believe. (The dictionary defines “credulity” as “willingness to believe or trust too readily; gullibility.”) The fact is, faith is not belief without evidence. This is NOT to say that faith isn’t willing to believe thoroughly, or even rapidly. But faith has a REASON, not just a DESIRE, to trust.

Paul tries to convey this meaning in Hebrews 11:1. Translations vary, but they all have basically the same meaning.

(1) “Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” We must think about that. “Substance” is something we can grab ahold of — something REAL. Thus Paul is saying that faith takes the current place of reality. It isn’t that faith is NOT real! It’s that its objectives have not yet been attained; but it IS as real to us AS IF it were already attained. But Paul wants us to realize that faith is not an unsubstantiated hope, want, or desire. It is our complete conviction of the reality of something which has not yet happened. So, for us, faith IS REALITY; it is “graspable.” — but it is deferred reality.

(2) “Faith is...the evidence of things not seen.” What Paul adds to his definition here is that faith is based on something that IS seen. We call that “evidence.” Paul wants it clearly known that the REASON we have faith is that we have the needed evidence that lets us draw conclusions “beyond all reasonable doubt.” Faith is not uninformed credulity. Faith does not mean that we “fall for things!” It is probably in this area that many fall short in their faith definition. This suggests SO STRONGLY that faith requires that we “dig” into the record in order to remove doubts — to discern evidences. Faith is not “blind belief.” It is “informed belief.” It is NOT saying “I believe” just because we think that saying so will bring us benefits!

To restate Paul’s lesson: FAITH is hoping for something without the possibility of being wrong about the fact that it will be attained. FAITH is the ability to see clearly things that are not yet visible — based on reliable evidences.

Unbelieving people have often looked at people of faith as having an empty hope of “Pie in the sky by and by.” Faith has no connection to such fantasy definitions! But it does take time and effort for its attainment and growth.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Are faith and “belief” the same? Yes. They are virtually interchangeable words. But that means that we must have only beliefs which are based on substantial and reliable evidences.

The ancient, pre-Christ, faith exemplars all had certain basics to their faith. There were certain things that they all believed in common. (1) They all believed that God existed. (2) They all believed that they must pursue righteousness to the extent of their ability. Without that attitude, they knew that they could not approach God on any level. And (3), they all had a confidence that God was going to supply a “way out” of the world’s problems. Whether they called that “way out” a savior, or a Messiah, a promised seed — or any such label, — they all knew that because God had promised it, it would eventually come to pass.

Recall that Romans 3:26 says that God had a way that “He can be just AND the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This hints at the fact that justification in the Old Testament times included the generic need to BELIEVE in a savior. They didn’t know that that savior would be called “Jesus.” They simply knew that a savior would be supplied. As the matter of fact, Jesus, himself, shows that this was true of Abraham. In John 8:56, Jesus said, “Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.” It was totally by faith, by belief, that Abraham saw the day when a savior would deliver and bless the human race. But he knew NOTHING of Jesus as an identity. He only knew of him as a faith item — because God had supplied the evidence that it would happen. Consequently, Abraham was in the category of those who could experience some sort of “justification” — being “made right” in God’s sight due to exemplary faith.

But in the Christian Age, between the two advents of Jesus, there is a greater justification — one which allows a person to gain life NOW as opposed to gaining it in the kingdom. Consequently, there are now TWO kinds of justification possible — TWO kinds of relationship with God — two kinds of faith structure.

If we look with great care at Romans 5:1, 2, we will see that Paul is acknowledging these TWO kinds of faith-justification. Romans 4 had been all about Abraham and his justification by faith. When Chapter 5 begins, Paul shows that WE, TOO, go through that kind of justification FIRST before we get something greater. In verse 1, Paul shows that this initial faith-justification brings us “peace (friendship) with God.” (And, please note, Paul emphasizes one of the three requirements for that justification. He shows that it must include belief in a savior. In the Christian age, that savior has been identified as Jesus.)

But note verse 2. Paul shows that this initial justification to “peace with God” brings us something else. Paul uses the word “ALSO” to help us see this. He says that our “Peace with God” status brought us ALSO “our introduction by faith into THIS GRACE in which WE (true Christians) stand.” This “grace” is the hope of being LIKE Jesus, and being LIKE God! (I John 3:1-3) It is not a relationship of “friendship,” it is a relationship of “sonship.” “Now are we the sons of God.”

The faith needed for THAT relationship is not much different from the faith needed for friendship. But it requires additional commitment. It requires the sacrifice of humanity — the giving up of all hope of ever returning to the earth as a human in the general resurrection of the dead which the world will experience. And, beyond that sacrifice of the human nature, it requires a dedication or consecration to serving God in this life so that everything is aimed at service to God, to His will, and to fellow saints.

There are very many people who are friends of God. But they will not be a part of the “Body of Christ” — the 144,000 individuals who will reign with him. (Revelation 14:1 and 20:6) Thus MANY have a faith consistent with friendship with God. Far fewer have the faith which has resulted in the total dedication of saints.

But those who have “peace with God” and have gone no further have an offer made to them in Zephaniah 2:3. “Seek the LORD all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

This verse “hides” faith. But we have seen, “righteousness” is counted toward a person by faith. So, to “seek righteousness” becomes an admonition to seek faith. And the verse also says, “who have carried out His ordinances.” This shows the requirement for justification to friendship that one must attempt to do all in his power to BE righteous. We are IN the “day of the Lord’s anger.” Things will get worse; but, clearly, the man of faith will be in a better position than others. Once the Peaceable Kingdom arrives, of course, faith will give way to sight. Righteousness will be required — and all the help needed to attain it will be available.

But even saints can have their faith grow. Indeed, they NEED to! We often must marvel at statements such as Jesus made in Matthew 8:26. The disciples were not yet “New Creatures in Christ,” but when they were exposed to being on a sinking ship, they had some fear. Jesus’ response was, “Why are you fearful, you men of little faith?” There is likely no way that any of us would not have some apprehension in that situation — even if we are begotten of the Holy Spirit. And yet, Jesus WANTS us to get to the place where, even under such dire straits, we would have perfect confidence that all is working for our good. (Romans 8:28) We need to build gradually to that kind of faith. The words of the Apostles in Luke 17:5 apply: “Lord, increase our faith!” And the attitude shown in Mark 9:24 is so valuable: “I DO believe; help my unbelief!” Our faith needs intensity!

Where does this certainty and intensity come from? There is only one source, and it is a source which requires time and effort to probe. That source is the Scriptures. As Jesus prayed for us just prior to his crucifixion, “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth,” faith has no other source. In Old Testament times, before there was a written Word, God arranged for angelic messengers to give needed information. But that

passed once the written Word was secured and the Age of Faith came with Jesus. Such direct communications became a thing of the past. Now we have ONLY the written Word as the guide and builder of our faith structure.

WHAT GOOD IS FAITH?

People without faith are not lost. The whole point of Christ's kingdom is to deal with them in terms of the REAL, not in terms of faith. Faith since Eden — and especially during the Christian Age — has been a tool by which God discerns sincerity. Thus, for anyone seeking God NOW, faith is good because it is the ONLY conduit to God's attention.

Faith, however, is not everything now. It is possible to have it without making full use of its benefits. Many people of faith have had it lead them to "justification to friendship" with God. This is an important step. But it is not the ultimate step. The current age is for the singular purpose of finding a "Bride of Christ" — a group of 144,000 individuals who will reign with Christ for his 1000-year kingdom. (Revelation 14:1 and 20:6) Their faith justification has them gaining LIFE (not friendship) at this time. Their faith has taken them, by God's calling, to the higher step of faith justification to sonship. They sacrifice their entire beings — their minds, their wills, their energies, their resources — all in order to serve God's interests and His saints while yet alive in the flesh. Their inheritance will be that of gaining the Divine Nature — being a part of God's own intimate family, dwelling on His plane of existence and in personal and visual fellowship with Him and with Jesus. It is of no wonder that Paul calls this a "High Calling!" And these faithful disciples will have entered this "race" because of their faith in Him who has called them. Faith NOW — especially in its total immersion — is of ultimate good.

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