

Increase Our Faith

*“The apostles said
unto the Lord,
Increase our faith.”
—Luke 17:5*

As the end of another year approaches, it is appropriate that we examine the important subject of faith. The word

faith appears 247 times in the *King James Version* of the Bible. Perhaps surprisingly, all but two of these occurrences are in the New Testament, and of all the New Testament usages, 216 are after the Day of Pentecost. Only 29 times does the word appear in the Gospel accounts, and in the Gospel of John the word faith does not appear at all. It is also interesting to note that nearly half of the New Testament uses of the word faith are in one of three books—Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Thus, to gain a greater appreciation of this subject, one may turn to these three epistles of Paul as primary sources of information and understanding concerning faith.

Before turning to the New Testament, however, we wish to first look at the Old Testament record. Though faith does not seem at first to be stressed in the Old Testament writings, yet the two references

recorded show the importance God placed upon it. The first usage were God's words directed to the nation of Israel, chiding them for their lack of faith. "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut. 32:20) The other Old Testament reference to faith is in the writings of the Prophet Habakkuk. "The just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) The Apostle Paul comments on both of these verses in the New Testament. Although not a direct reference to the Deuteronomy scripture, Paul says that Israel did not attain righteousness "because they sought it not by faith." (Rom. 9:32) The Habakkuk scripture Paul quotes directly three separate times in his writings—in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. We realize, then, that although the vast majority of the scriptural references to faith are in the New Testament, the basis of this important subject was established by God much earlier.

Keys to Understanding Faith

At the outset of our lesson, we wish to list four key points concerning faith. First, since man's creation, faith has been an absolute requirement for anyone to have a standing with God and to inherit his promises, whether earthly or heavenly. (Heb. 11:6) Second, the Mosaic Law did not stress faith, but works—the keeping of commandments and ceremonies. (Eph. 2:15) Third, those who were pleasing to God in Old Testament times—the Ancient Worthies—were acceptable to him not because they were able to keep the Law, but because of their faith. (Rom. 4:13; Heb. 11:1,2) Fourth, to

God's people living after Pentecost, there is an inseparable link between faith and spirit begetting at the beginning of the Christian walk, as well as in the daily operation of the Holy Spirit and the progression of faith until the end of that walk. (I Cor. 12:7-9; Gal. 3:14) This last point helps us to realize how remarkable was the faith of the Ancient Worthies. They were not begotten of the Holy Spirit, but yet they had great faith.

The key to the faith in the ancient heroes of the Old Testament was that it was a process, a development, not just a momentary belief. Faith to them became a way of life. It governed their whole outlook on the world they lived in and their place in it. Abraham, for example, looked for a city having a divine foundation, built by God, having faith that God had a plan for something in the future that would be a better arrangement for him and the rest of the world than the fallen conditions which existed in his day.—Heb. 11:10

Similarly, for the child of God now, the development of faith is also a process. Faith at the time of the begetting of the Holy Spirit is required in a measure, but it is only at a starting point, still undeveloped and untested. The development of faith begins at consecration and spirit begetting, but does not end until death and spirit birth. True faith is not saying we are "saved" or "born again," then mostly forgetting about it, and believing somehow that makes us a Christian. On the contrary, it is faith and its development and progression after spirit begetting that is the key to being a true Christian. As Paul states: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to

every one that believeth. ... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16,17) The *New International Version* translates a portion of verse 17 as “righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” In other words, living by faith and progressing “from faith to faith” is an ongoing process throughout the Christian life, not merely a momentary belief.

Faith Still Necessary

The question might be asked, “Do we still need faith?” After all, we have more knowledge of God’s plan of salvation now than at any previous time. Many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled or are in process of fulfillment. We have today a seemingly endless supply of Bible helps and related study material. Perhaps faith is not as vital today as it once was. Jesus, pointing forward to our day, asked a related question, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) Although he did not answer this question directly, Jesus implied by his words that faith would indeed still be needed in our day, and additionally that he would not find it in abundance. This fact, by itself, should help us realize the great importance of faith in our time, when there is so little of it left in the earth. Although we do see more clearly God’s great plan of salvation than at any other previous time, this should not in any way discount the need for faith. In fact, the more things we see and know, the more we should realize how much we still do not know, or understand fully, and that is where faith comes into the picture. Paul’s

words should still echo loudly within us: “We walk by faith, not by sight.”—II Cor. 5:7

For example, Abraham saw and knew certain things even in his day. He knew that God could perform miracles, such as the birth of a son when he and Sarah were beyond childbearing years. Abraham also knew that God could deliver from the dead, as evidenced by his intervention in the sacrifice of Isaac. (Rom. 4:16-21; Heb. 11:17-19) These things Abraham saw and appreciated with his literal eyes. Beyond this, though, he saw with the eye of faith a time in the future when, through a seed, all families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) He did not know how or when it would come about but had faith it would come to pass. We today also see many things, but not all is fully known yet. We see a great time of trouble going on about us, but many of the details of events yet future we do not know. (Dan. 12:1) We see and appreciate the fact that the numbers of the body of Christ on this side of the veil are diminishing, but we do not know the day nor the hour that the last member will enter into glory. These, and other things, we see partially, but we have faith that they all will be brought to completion according to God’s arrangement.—I Cor. 13:12

It may be said that we will need more faith as we prepare to enter 2026 than Abraham needed in his day, more than the Early Church needed, more than the saints who lived at the beginning of the harvest needed, and more than we ourselves needed in the year past. We may be sure that an increasing measure and development of faith, according to the circumstances and experiences of

the Lord's people living at each point in time, is needed in order to be found fully pleasing to God.

Two Parts of Faith—Substance and Evidence

Some elements of the Christian's development are not specifically defined in the Scriptures, but faith is. Paul gives us its definition: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) We notice here that faith is not the "things hoped for," nor is it the "things not seen." It is, rather, the "substance" and "evidence" of these things. That which we "hope for" is the fulfillment of God's plan, not only for his church, but also in due time for the entire world. Faith, Paul says, is the "substance" of what we hope for. The word substance here means "a setting under, or support." The support, or substance, of our hope is the Word of God, the Bible. It is this foundation of truth which provides us the substance of our hope. Paul speaks of it this way in another place: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."—Heb. 6:19

The second aspect of faith, according to Paul, is "the evidence of things not seen." Those things which we do not see, generally speaking, are those which lie in the future, whether it be tomorrow, next week, next year, or many years hence. In all of these cases, we do not know the specific experiences in our life that will come to pass. The word evidence signifies "a proof or proving." The proof of what lies in the future, as it relates to faith, is shown by God's performance in the past. In other words, we can look back on our experiences and on

those of mankind in general and see that God has performed flawlessly up to this very moment and has executed every minute detail of his plan perfectly. Herein lies the proof that assures us concerning those things ahead of us—that which we do not see. Because of the evidence, or proof, of God's past performance, which we can see, we now have faith in the future execution of his plan, that which we cannot fully see.

These two aspects of faith—substance and evidence—can also be viewed in connection with God's performance. The substance part of faith we might refer to as “the faith”—the truth of God's plan and its fulfillment. (Jude 1:3) The evidence aspect of faith we could refer to as “our faith.” These are the experiences of life that have been, are now, and will be in the future, overruled in conjunction with God's arrangements for each one of his children. Viewing this, we know that he will perfectly execute in all things in the future, just as he has in the past.

Two types of experiences help us develop this two-part faith structure. First, we have learning experiences. These help us develop the substance aspect of faith. Such experiences might include things such as personal study, attending various meetings and gatherings of the Lord's people, personal meditation and prayer, and fellowship with fellow Christians. The evidence aspect of faith might be said to be developed by application experiences. These would include experiences such as dealing with the world, our job, going through various trials and tests, our responses to these experiences, how we respond to the world's experiences, and

how we deal with the uncertainties of life. Through both learning and application experiences our faith must grow, develop, and increase as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Increasing Our Faith

In our scripture text at the beginning of this lesson, the disciples made a request that Jesus increase their faith. He did not respond definitively, but rather stated what increased faith could accomplish. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.” (Luke 17:6) A similar statement is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matt. 17:20) In both these statements we notice that increased faith has to do with accomplishments not possible to a human being—illustrated by such things as moving a tree or a mountain simply by speaking to it. To further emphasize these seemingly impossible feats, he likens such faith to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. (Mark 4:31) Jesus, in fact, is stating that if we have faith represented by something even as small as a grain of mustard seed, humanly impossible things can be done.

Increasing our faith, then, has to do with knowing and having confidence that God can do things not possible by human power, whether directly related to us or to the fulfillment of his plan in general. Jesus did not grant to his disciples this request

because he knew that such increases in faith would come about through experience, and over a period of time, not by a miracle on his part or any immediate action he could take. Put simply, increased faith does not come about overnight, nor unknowingly. Increased faith came to the disciples—and comes to us also—by knowing more about God, his plan, his truth, the “substance” of our hopes, and by recognizing and appreciating more and more his leading in the past and present, which are the “evidence” we have to meet the future, unseen experiences of life.

Little Faith and Great Faith

If faith is to increase, it must mean that we sometimes do not possess it as fully as we should. This was also true of our Lord’s disciples during his earthly ministry. On four separate occasions Jesus told them they were “of little faith.” (Matt. 6:26-30; 8:25,26; 14:28-32; 16:5-10) Space does not permit elaboration in detail of these scriptures, except to summarize the problems that inhibited the disciples’ faith and, at times, ours.

In the foregoing accounts, faith was lacking due to: anxiety over current and future temporal needs, including those which may not even come to pass; fear during the storms of life which come upon God’s children from time to time; inability to maintain trust and confidence when passing through experiences that are completely beyond fleshly control; and fleshly reasoning, in particular the forgetting of how the Lord has guided past experiences.

The solutions to these examples of the need for increased faith are: replacing anxiety over temporal

things with the seeking of spiritual things; remembering that the Lord controls the storms of life which come upon us and will make them calm not a moment later than he sees it best for our spiritual development; developing continuance and constancy in our experiences, realizing that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us; and calling to mind the evidence we have of God's perfect performance in all the past experiences of our life. All of these remedies will increase our faith, just as they did in the case of Jesus' disciples.—Matt. 6:33; Ps. 107:29; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 1:6

The Scriptures contain many wonderful examples of faith. Most notable is the account in Hebrews chapter 11, of the many faithful ones of old. These not only had faith, but their faith increased as their life progressed, even unto death. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11:13) We too, must die in faith, knowing that only then will we, if faithful, receive our promised inheritance. We are also pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and "our citizenship is in heaven." (Phil. 3:20, *Revised Version*) We have given up earthly claims and privileges and seek a "better country ... an heavenly."—Heb. 11:16; I Pet. 2:11

Goals for the New Year

As we close 2025 and enter into a New Year, it is imperative that we remember the great importance of increasing and maturing in our faith structure. To that end, let us make the following resolutions

for the coming year:

1. Be active for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. Work hard in all these areas, knowing that an active Christian life is one of the keys to increased faith.—I Tim. 6:18; Tit. 3:8

2. Keep the focus of our meditation on the Word of God and those many helps which we have available to us at the present time. The study of God's Word can never have any other impact than to increase the substance of our faith structure.—John 5:39; II Tim. 2:15

3. Do not get caught up in or be anxious about the world's myriad problems, nor their solution, which only Christ's kingdom will bring about. If conditions in the world seem to take us away from the Word of God, or the peace of God, then perhaps it is time to turn off the television or radio; get away from the constant bombardment of news and opinions via electronic and social media; and avoid those things written by man's human reasoning that propose unworkable solutions. Remember that God has all things under his control and we need not worry.—Phil. 4:6,7, *NIV*; I Pet. 5:7

4. Do continue to watch, remembering that there is a difference between watching and being caught up and anxious about things going on in the world. A watcher in the watchtower is "above the fray," not fighting in the battles of this world, but watching to see God's power as it is used to defeat his enemies. Watch to see the unfolding and fulfillment of prophecy. This will also increase our faith.—I Cor. 16:13; I Pet. 4:7

5. Be happy and rejoice. Be positive about your life in the Lord, be positive about your fellow brethren, be positive and firm in the Truth, and be positive

about the glorious outcome of God's plan. View all of life's experiences through the prism of God's great plan of salvation, and the result will be increased faith.—Phil. 4:4; I Thess. 5:16

Faith must guide us to our last breath. For any of us, this might be today, tomorrow, next month, next year, or many years from now. Regardless, however, of our life's remaining days, faith will always be necessary. With developed and increased faith, it does not matter how long or how short our life may be, nor what happens along the way, because we will be fully equipped, spiritually, to be victorious. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4

"You must never forget those past days when you had received the light and went through such a great and painful struggle. It was partly because everyone's eye was on you as you endured harsh words and hard experiences, partly because you threw in your lot with those who suffered much the same. You sympathised with those who were put in prison and you were cheerful when your own goods were confiscated, for you knew that you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven. Don't throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised. For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back, ... but men who maintain [increase] their faith until the salvation of their souls is complete!"—Heb. 10:32-39, *J. B. Phillips New Testament* ■