

The Substance of Things Hoped For

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

—Hebrews 11:1

ONE OF THE MOST DISTINGUISHING marks of those who desire to draw near to God is faith. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul pointed to this and said, “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 apostle devoted the entire eleventh chapter in Hebrews to list several examples of faith as noted in the worthies of old who were pleasing to God because of their faith. These faithful people lived in pre-Christian times and were worthy of God’s favor since they exhibited great faithfulness to God under exceptional and trying circumstances. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises.” (vs. 13) The promises of which he spoke were those that our Heavenly Father had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was through their lineage that God’s ultimate purpose was to bless all the families of the earth.—Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14

EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY HOPES

The promise to Abraham concerned the earth, as did the repetition of it to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel, and as a nation they were promised earthly blessings if they served God faithfully. "Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store." (Deut. 28:5) However, there were other promises that were not understood during Old Testament times, and these concerned a heavenly salvation. In reference to these promises, Peter wrote, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow."—I Pet. 1:10,11, *New American Standard Bible*

The apostle further stated that even angels did not understand this. "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look."—I Pet. 1:12, *NASB*

Thus we understand the hope of an earthly reward which the worthies of old had been given, and the spiritual blessings which the members of Christ's church have received are very much different. However, faith is one of the identifying traits that is common to both groups.

DEFINING FAITH

In our featured scripture, the Apostle Paul gave us this definition. "Now faith is the assurance of things

hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1, *NASB*) No one can have faith without having something to base it upon. It is more than having a confident assurance of our hopes, because that for which we hope cannot be seen with the human eye.

Faith is a state of mind respecting our Heavenly Father and his promises to us. Paul explains the only way in which we may acquire this quality. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) Before we can have faith, we must have a measure of knowledge. We cannot have faith in something we know nothing about. The only authentic source of knowledge concerning our hope of salvation is found in the Word of God—the source of our faith. Just as knowledge is the foundation for faith, faith is the foundation for our glorious hope. We cannot have hope without faith, and neither can we have faith without knowledge.

All followers of our Lord Jesus have at times realized the need for an increase of faith, and have approached God in prayer with the request, “Lord, Increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5) Faith comes as a gift from God to those who make use of his provisions to obtain and increase it. These provisions include feeding upon his Word and promises, so that we may know his will for us. We submit ourselves to these arrangements and seek to abide by the terms and conditions of our covenant of sacrifice.

A PROPER ATTITUDE

It is not enough for us to say that we believe in God and his promises, and that he is calling out a people of faith for his name and selecting the church of Christ. This belief is of no benefit if we

feel so weak and unimportant that we could never attain to such a high position. Such an attitude would not be pleasing to God. It shows a lack of full assurance of faith in his power to accomplish that which he has begun in us. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."—Phil. 4:7

Creating doubts about our relationship to God is a much used tool of Satan. We must remember that we "are called in one hope of [our] calling." (Eph. 4:4) When God called us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus he knew how weak and imperfect we were. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) Paul proclaims, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." (Col. 1:21-23) "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."—Heb. 4:16

PRAYER

Jesus taught that God is always ready to hear and to answer our prayers. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him

that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"—Matt. 7:7-11

One of the gifts that God is pleased to give us is a full assurance of faith, but such faith does not come instantaneously. It is a matter of growth, like that of a tender plant developing to maturity through a variety of gradual yet important steps. We must not be discouraged because we realize we have weaknesses. It would be a matter of concern if we thought we did not have weaknesses, failings, or shortcomings. Our faith grows as we strive to overcome our weaknesses and to lay hold upon the many wonderful promises of our loving Heavenly Father.

Some of our experiences may be very severe, but each is especially designed by God to provide a much needed lesson. With the passage of time we are able to look back on our experiences and see how we have grown from them. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."—Heb. 12:11

SPIRITUAL FOOD

In addition to prayer, there are other steps we can take to increase our faith. We can study and meditate upon the spiritual things of God. We can study the promises and doctrines, develop character and cultivate the fruits and graces of the Spirit. We must eat the pure and unadulterated food of God's

Word and avoid food that is contaminated with the traditions and theories of men. A balanced diet will enable us to grow into mature Christians. Paul said, "All scripture, divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for that discipline which is in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work."—II Tim. 3:16,17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Spiritual exercise is needed if we are to be strong and healthy. We should be active in telling others about the wonderful truths of the Bible. Jesus taught, "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."—John 4:36-38

In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, Paul said, "Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:13,14) Without spiritual exercise we could lose what we are trying to master. If we want to increase our faith, we must exercise our faith. The more we put our faith into practice, the stronger it will become. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works,

and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (James 2:17,18) It is necessary that we continuously exercise our mind and our spiritual faculties to grow strong as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

Another form of spiritual exercise was addressed by Paul, who said, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” (Col. 2:6,7) One who walks makes progress, but it is also important that they walk in the right direction. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”—I John 1:5-7

SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

When we ask God to increase our faith, we should remember that fellowship with our brethren is one of the means to reach that goal. Love and fellowship with our brethren indicates that we are walking in the light, and are making progress in the right direction. “We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”—I John 3:14

Because we love the brethren, we want to have fellowship with them at every opportunity. We will not voluntarily isolate ourselves from them for that would demonstrate that we have lost a measure of the Spirit of Truth, and that our faith has

grown weak. Christians are like glowing coals of fire. Grouped together they retain the fervency of spirit and the warmth of Christian fellowship and love that each imparts to the other. If the coals are separated, the glow is soon gone and all warmth disappears. The apostle counsels, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."—Heb. 10:23-25

No Christian is self-sufficient. We need the assistance of other members of the body of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." (I Cor. 12:12) If God has placed each member where they are in the body, it is not possible for us to say we do not need their fellowship. Each one is indispensable to us for our development. "He [God] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—Eph. 4:11-13

TESTS OF FAITH

As we progress along the narrow way, our faith will undergo many tests and Satan will try to discourage us. He will seek to emphasize our every weakness

and will point out our own unworthiness. He will put doubts in our mind that we could ever hope to achieve the high honor of receiving a place in Christ's future kingdom. Our faith will be assailed from every quarter, but this should reassure us that God is dealing with us as sons. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"—Heb. 12:6,7

When our faith is being tried, let us remember the words of this scripture. God is developing us according to his purposes, and that we may become mature and be able to perform our function in the wonderful body of the Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."—I Pet. 1:3-7

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10 ■