

Faith and Gold

***“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 Peter 1:7***

THE WORD “FAITH” appears only twice in the *King James* translation of the Old Testament, but is found in 229 verses of the New Testament. The two Old Testament texts where the word faith is used are Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2:4, in which it is translated from Hebrew words signifying “faithful” and “truth.” Two interesting

Scriptures in the New Testament which speak about faith are these: “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;” and “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”—Eph. 2:8; Heb. 11:6

Ephesians 2:8 seems to say that faith is a gift from God, yet in Hebrews 11:6 we are told that if we do not have faith, we cannot please God. As we consider whether these statements are in conflict or not, we note one dictionary definition of faith, as follows: “a belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.” If we have faith in God, we will believe him, and have a trusting acceptance of

his will for us, even though our reasons for doing so may not seem logical to others. Is this kind of faith, we might ask, a gift from God, or does it come from within an individual's heart and mind?

THE SOURCE OF FAITH

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) The Apostle Paul in this verse tells us that no one can believe unless they hear. In the same context, he also says that no one can hear unless “a preacher” is “sent.” (vss. 14,15) Thus, without question the “sent preacher” is a gift from God. Two-thirds of the world's population is non-Christian, and it is likely that a majority of these have never heard of the only “name under heaven given among men” by which there is “salvation.” (Acts 4:12) It might at first seem unlikely that so many have never heard the Bible's message of salvation, since knowledge is so easily obtained today. However, simply having knowledge available is not enough. There must also be a desire and hunger for knowledge before it can be absorbed.

By way of example, most professed Christians likely know very little about Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed. It is not that we have no ready access to information about these people and the religious systems they founded. Such information abounds, and is at our fingertips, but it only becomes knowledge to us if we have a strong desire to delve into its understanding. In the case of God's plan of salvation, as laid out in the Bible, a strong desire to know about these things is necessary. However, merely having a desire to know is not all that is necessary in order to have faith which will “please God.”

Jesus' disciples did not understand why he did not speak plainly to the people. They asked, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10) Jesus answered his disciples, saying, "Speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . . For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—vss. 13,15-17

In the Book of Proverbs, we read: "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them." (Prov. 20:12) This truly is a gift from God. However, what we do after we see and hear is up to us. Many loved the "gracious words which proceeded" out of the mouth of the Master. Even his enemies marveled that no one ever "spake like this man." (Luke 4:22; John 7:46) Yet, this brought no lasting benefit unless they acted on what they heard—few did.

Noting again Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8, he says we are "saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Although faith might be considered in a certain sense to be a gift from God, being "saved"—that is, salvation—is most certainly a gift. In another place, Paul emphatically states that those who now follow in the footsteps of

Jesus are “justified by his blood,” and “saved from wrath through him.” (Rom. 5:9) The world of mankind will be saved later by the merit of the same blood. These arrangements pertaining to salvation are things that come only “by grace,”—unmerited favor from God—a gift to us and all mankind.

Finally, we quote the following comments, which also indicate that faith can be considered a gift from God. “We have knowledge of God, and this knowledge, which is granted us as a grace or favor, brings us to the place where we are enabled to exercise faith. Faith in a great measure rests upon knowledge. Knowledge reveals God’s character; the Divine Revelation makes known to us certain facts respecting God’s purposes, and we see the purposes thus outlined to be in harmony with the character of God. This enables one to believe the promises; and believing them, we are enabled to act upon them. This is faith. Our faith, while it is of ourselves in the sense that we must exercise it, is of God in the sense that he supplies the necessary elements from which that faith is to be compounded.”—*What Pastor Russell Said*, pp. 266,267

THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH

In our opening text, the Apostle Peter speaks of the “trial” of our faith, and that it is “more precious than of gold that perisheth.” The Greek word translated “trial” in this verse is used in only one other place in the New Testament, where it is also associated with faith. We quote: “The trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness and patience . . . do a thorough work.” (James 1:3,4,

The Amplified New Testament) Rarely do most professed Christians talk about the trying, or proving, of their faith. This is evidently because many incorrectly believe that “once in grace, always in grace,” and since they profess belief in Jesus Christ, they claim they are saved, with no particular need of further development.

Yet, the Scriptures tell us we must develop certain character fruitage if we are to make our calling and election sure. Faith is an integral part of this. The Apostle Paul stated: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22,23) To this, Peter added: “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; . . . knowledge; . . . temperance; . . . patience; . . . godliness; . . . brotherly kindness; . . . charity [love]. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:5-8

There are good reasons for our trials. In the above verses, James says that the trial of our faith develops patience, and Peter lists patience as one of the qualities we are to “add” to our faith. Trials of faith make us into something better than we would be without them. They are, as our opening text states, of greater value than gold which is “tried with fire.” Gold is not put into the fire to hurt it, but to purify it, and to make it suitable for fashioning into priceless objects of beauty.

GOLD

Gold has several interesting characteristics. It is not concentrated in just a single region of the earth.

Both silver and gold are widely dispersed. Gold is the first mineral named in the Bible. Genesis 2:11,12 says there was gold in the land of Havilah, and that the gold in that land was good. Since gold is valuable in any form, the word “good” perhaps means it was found densely concentrated in gold nuggets instead of small particles or flakes as is common today.

Gold is the most malleable of all metals. It can be hammered into an extremely thin sheet, which is called “gold leaf.” Just as a potter molds clay as he pleases, a goldsmith can work gold into whatever he chooses. One gram of pure gold can be drawn into a thread two miles long. A text in Lamentations equates the malleability of gold with pottery: “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!”—Lam. 4:2

Gold is the least chemically active of all the metals. This means that its beauty, luster, and intrinsic value are not decreased, regardless of what other minerals, metals, rocks, or elements, may be found with it or attached to it. One could go so far to say that it does not react in a negative manner to anything of this earth.

If one had a gold nugget, which was found embedded in a rock, it might at first be partially separated by breaking the rock into small pieces, but this is not enough. A very hot fire is needed. It requires heat of almost 2000° F to melt gold, and thus separate it from the impurities surrounding it. Evidently, man’s ability to generate heat of this magnitude goes back a long time. Genesis 13:2 says, “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” To be considered rich in silver and gold must

have necessitated the ability to melt these precious metals, detaching them from various impure substances, that they might attain such high value.

GOLD AND SILVER SYMBOLIC

Gold is a symbol of that which is divine. In Israel's Tabernacle arrangement, gold was only used inside the Holy and Most Holy compartments. Therefore, only the priests saw the gold. This was appropriate, since, as Paul says, they were "accomplishing the service of God," the divine Creator. (Heb. 9:6) We believe gold is also a symbol of the Gospel Age church, because they are promised to be "partakers of the divine nature." (II Pet. 1:4) Silver, which is very precious, but of lesser value than gold, is an apt symbol of the "great multitude," who, as John points out, are not pictured on the throne, as is the church, but are "before the throne."—Rev. 7:9

Other scriptures are in harmony with these thoughts. Speaking prophetically of Jesus, Malachi said, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness." (Mal. 3:3) This text equates gold and silver with the "sons of Levi," a group that consisted of a few priests and many non-priests. They all, however, were used by God as servants of the Tabernacle in various capacities.

Similarly, in the Book of Numbers, we are told that the Levites had no inheritance in Israel's land. "I am thy part and thine inheritance," God said. (Num. 18:20) Thus, these typical arrangements point forward and teach that both the "gold" and "silver"

classes of the present Gospel Age do not receive an earthly inheritance, but their reward is in heaven.

“In a large house there are dishes and bowls of all kinds: some are made of silver and gold, others of wood and clay; some are for special occasions, others for ordinary use.” (II Tim. 2:20, *Good News Bible*) In this verse, the silver and gold refer to classes who have had their faith “tried with fire,” and come forth precious in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Thus, they receive a place of honor in this “large house.” The wood and clay have value, too, but not to the same degree. “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”—Job 23:10

DEVELOPING FAITH

Earlier, when considering Ephesians 2:8, we saw that salvation is a gift of God, and that the resulting opportunity to develop faith is also a gift from him. There is another text which implies that faith given by God can be apparent in varying degrees: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.” (I Cor. 12:7-9) Paul continues in verse 10, listing the gifts of miracle-working, prophecy, discerning of spirits, ability to speak in diverse languages, and interpretation of languages.

From this list, we might conclude that only a few had the gift of faith, just as only a few possessed the gift of healing, or of prophecy, or speaking or interpreting other languages. In one sense, this is true. At

the beginning of the very next chapter, the Apostle Paul talks about a unique kind of faith, describing it as “faith, so that I could remove mountains.” (I Cor. 13:2) Jesus used a similar expression about that degree of faith, when speaking to his disciples, he said, “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

Many of us have known consecrated believers who have shown that kind of exceptional faith, as they follow the leadings of the Lord. Such mature and fully developed faith, however, is rare. Nevertheless, we all must have some degree of faith when we come to God. A good start in faith is vitally important, but it is not enough. Faith must be developed and crystallized.

Each of us is being given the experiences we need so that our faith grows. “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” (II Thess. 1:3) Here Paul commends the Thessalonian brethren because their faith was growing. During his earthly ministry, the apostles requested of Jesus, “Increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5) This is exactly what he did. In the hours before Jesus’ crucifixion, Peter’s faith failed him to the point where he denied the Lord three times. By the end of his life, however, Peter had become strong in the faith, because he had been developed by his experiences.

Most of us would probably concede that our faith needs further improvement. At times, we believe fully, but at other times our faith weakens. Jesus

said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow”—that is, do not be overanxious about it—“for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.”—Matt. 6:33,34

It is good that we each consider how much of our time is devoted to seeking the kingdom of God, and how much is devoted to seeking other things. If we truly believe, if we have a faith that could move mountains, there should be no question about it. We would be seeking “first the kingdom of God” all of the time, and not be anxious about the things of tomorrow.

The most well-known Scriptural definition of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” This verse in the *New International Version* reads: “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

The remainder of Hebrews chapter 11 is filled with many Old Testament examples of faith in action. In all instances, we see it was not merely that the named individuals said they believed God. They all did something to demonstrate their faith, and went through a process of development to reach that point. Similarly, as we are developed in the “school of Christ,” our conduct should demonstrate our faith, so that the world will see that we have “been with Jesus” and learned of him.—Acts 4:13

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Everything we have is gift from God. The salvation we have received now, and which the world of mankind will receive in the next age, is because of

God's grace. God has given us opportunities to hear about him through his Word and through those who have explained that Word to us. Two-thirds of the world today know virtually nothing about the one through whom salvation has been provided—Jesus.

Faith is so important that it is impossible to please God unless we have it. The Apostle Paul wrote that faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Our faith starts small but if we are rightly exercised by our experiences it grows. Our faith is said to be "tried with fire" like gold, to make us suitable for a place of honor in God's house.

Gold has many characteristics which make it a fitting symbol of the church. Each member of this "little flock" of faithful believers, after receiving refining experiences to remove all dross, will receive the divine nature. Just as the church is precious to the Heavenly Father, so is all mankind. The Prophet Isaiah tells us a day is coming when God will consider man more precious than gold: "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."—Isa. 13:12

May we never lose our faith. It is faith that made us acceptable to God, and it is faith that insures our ultimate salvation. "The just shall live by faith: but if any draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!"—Heb. 10:38,39; I Tim. 6:12; I John 5:4

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