

Living by Faith

“The just shall live by his faith.” **FAITH IS THE ABILITY TO** believe as true that which

—*Habakkuk 2:4* cannot be demonstrated to the physical senses. Accordingly, the Scriptures define faith as the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) Faith in the existence of God is a good example of this ability. We cannot see God nor hear his voice. We cannot touch him. Nevertheless, when we think of the vast universe around us, our reason tells us that there must be a supreme intelligent Creator. We accept the testimony of our reason and believe that God exists.

This is faith in its simplest form, but true Christian faith goes beyond this. We not only believe that God exists, but we have faith in his character attributes of justice, love, wisdom, and power. We have faith in his divine purposes as they pertain to us individually and to his people collectively. We also have faith in his plan for the world in general. This is the minimum of faith which one must possess in order to approach God and receive blessings from him. Paul wrote, “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

We do not need to exercise faith in the existence of our next door neighbor, because we can see him. Yet, if we are to enjoy a friendly relationship with our neighbor we must have faith in him, and he in us. We would have to know that he is truthful, honest, upright, and dependable, and he would have to be assured of the same concerning us. Similarly, if we are to enjoy a close relationship with the great God of the universe, we must believe not only that “he is,” but also that we can depend upon him to fulfill all his gracious promises.

When Adam and Eve fell from perfection, their children were born into sin, with the resulting condemnation to death passing on to their entire progeny. Because of this the Bible tells us that “there is none righteous, no, not one,” and “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:10,23) However, among the fallen race there have been some who exercised faith in God despite their physical and mental imperfections. Some of these God has invited to cooperate with him, thus giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their faith.

Abram was one of these—whose name God later changed to Abraham. God asked him to leave his own people and to go into a land that he would show him. A wonderful promise was associated with this call. God said to him, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:1-3) Abraham believed this promise, and demonstrated his faith by obedience to God’s request. (vs. 4) Paul observes that when Abraham received this call, he “obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”—Heb. 11:8

Abraham was richly rewarded for living by his faith. “He believed in the LORD; and he counted it

to him for righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6) Paul quotes these words in Romans 4:3, and in verse 22 adds that his faith was “reckoned” for righteousness. (*Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Abraham, like all other members of the fallen and condemned race, was imperfect. It was impossible for him to live up to the divine standard of righteousness, yet he had strong faith in God and in his promises. God counted Abraham’s faith as an evidence of his integrity, knowing that he would serve him to the best of his imperfect ability.

Because of Abraham’s faith, he was called “the Friend of God.” (James 2:23) Here was a genuine basis for friendship. Abraham “believed God,” and because he did, God had confidence in him. This beautiful friendship continued throughout Abraham’s lifetime. On various occasions God spoke to him, reiterating and enlarging upon the original promise made to him.—Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 17:6; 18:18

Abraham’s faith in these promises caused him to look for a “city,” or government, “which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Finally, when put to the supreme test, Abraham’s faith was such that he believed God would raise his son, Isaac, from the dead. Willingly offering up “his only begotten son” as a sacrifice, Abraham indeed “received him in a figure” from death. Because he obeyed God’s voice in this great test of faith, God enlarged still further on his promises to him.—Heb. 11:10,17-19; Gen. 22:15-18

FAITH COMES FROM GOD’S WORD

Paul wrote, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) The inference here

is that an active, demonstrated faith, based on hearing the instructions of God, is what he is pleased to “count” as righteousness. The Bible mentions some of these who God thus honored—Abel, Enoch, and Noah, prior to the Flood. Following this, there were Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. (Heb. 11:4-22) These, and no doubt others not named, were especially blessed by God because of their faith.

Beginning with the death of Jacob, God chose his twelve sons and their families, and began to deal with them as a nation—Israel. Through his servant Moses, another man of faith, God gave Israel his Law. (vss. 23-29) God sent his judges, teachers, and prophets to the nation of Israel, to give them an opportunity to know his plan as it was then due to be understood, and to cooperate therein. Only a few responded in obedience, because they believed God.

Some of these faithful ones received marvelous evidences of God’s favor. They “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Some even “received their dead raised to life again.”—vss. 32-35

Strong faith was essential in these victorious experiences, and it enabled them to see the overruling providences of God in connection with them. For example, Daniel 3:14-27 gives the account of the three Hebrews who “quenched the violence of fire” through their faith. They told King Nebuchadnezzar that the God whom they served was able to deliver them, but also said that even if God permitted them to die in the fiery furnace, they

would not bow down to the image which the king had set up. Their faith was not that God would deliver them, but simply in God. They believed that whatever God did would be right. It is this type of faith that God counts for righteousness.

In contrast, Paul speaks of others who “had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”—Heb. 11:36-38

To pass through experiences such as these required a faith that could trust God even though there was no visible evidence of his care and protection. It was faith in the promises of God pertaining to the future that sustained them. They endured these things in order that they “might obtain a better resurrection.” (vs. 35) Their concern was in the fulfillment of God’s plans and purposes. Like Abraham, with respect to Isaac, they believed that God was able, and would raise them from the dead in his own due time. This was the faith that was counted to them for righteousness.

While the whole nation of Israel was selected by God as his typical people, only a few individuals “obtained a good report,” and were counted as righteous in the sight of God. (vs. 39) They did this by their faith, which was demonstrated by their obedience under the most trying circumstances. Because they thus proved their worthiness, these faithful “fathers” will be made “princes in all the earth” during the promised Messianic kingdom.—Ps. 45:16

FAITH IN THE GOSPEL AGE

The attribute of faith is unchanged from age to age in the plan of God. It was true in the past as well as now that it is impossible to please God and enjoy friendship with him without faith. Those who are able to live by faith are rewarded with whatever blessings the Lord may be dispensing at the time. Jesus said to the woman he cured of a disease of severe bleeding, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." When healing two blind men, Jesus told them, "According to your faith be it unto you." They exercised faith and received their sight.—Matt. 9:20-22,27-30

The Bible reveals that there are degrees of faith. The disciples had faith to believe that Jesus was their Messiah. However, on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee they became fearful. (Mark 4:40) On another occasion, Peter demonstrated faith by walking on the water toward Jesus, but when he became afraid and began to sink, Jesus rescued him and said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:29-31) These and other similar incidents prompted the disciples to finally say to Jesus, "Increase our faith."—Luke 17:5

Paul wrote, "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." (Rom. 1:16,17) Herein is indicated that the "gospel of Christ" is received by faith, but it is revealed gradually, as faith is able to receive and act upon it. The apostles are examples of this "faith to faith" revealment and receiving of the Gospel. Even before hearing of Jesus they knew something of

the Messianic promises and had faith in them. When they came into contact with Jesus and his wonderful ministry, they believed that he was the Messiah, leaving all to follow him. Based upon this further revelation of faith, God specially dealt with them.

In his prayer, Jesus said to his Father concerning his apostles, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." (John 17:6) These men were wholly dedicated to God. They had faith in his Word, and were obedient to it. Prior to Pentecost, they did not clearly understand many of the details of God's plan, but they believed and obeyed that which they did know. Because of this, God looked upon them as his people. "Thine they were," said Jesus. Like Abraham, they were God's friends, and how richly their faith was rewarded!

KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY

Faith that opens the door to a relationship with God is not blind belief. It is faith in the plans and purposes of God to the extent he has revealed them. It was Abraham's faith in the promises given to him that constituted the basis for his friendship with God. This was true of the apostles, and is still true today. During the Gospel Age, God has revealed his purposes through his Word. The purpose of this, even as in the past, is to invite cooperation in the outworking of his plan. During the present age, this cooperation is manifested through association with Jesus, and under his headship. Jesus said, however, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44) This shows that there is a certain selection on God's part. He

is not at the present time drawing the whole world, but only those whom he chooses.

God chooses those whom he knows are able to exercise faith in him and in his promises. In addition to their ability to exercise faith, these are also humble of heart and willing to learn. The first evidence of God's drawing power in their lives may well be in an experience, or series of experiences, which cause them to realize the futility and worthlessness of the material values so highly esteemed by the world in general. Their hearts thus prepared, they are brought into contact with the Word of truth. This also is by the providence of God in the exercise of his drawing power. When they hear his Word, or read it, and their minds and hearts begin to respond to it, God is pleased, for this was the object of the exercise of his drawing power in their lives.

One of the first things learned from the Word of truth is the fact that all are sinners—members of a sin-cursed and dying race. If faith lays hold upon this fact, and the heart properly responds, the result will be repentance. Like the publican of Jesus' parable who went up to the temple to pray, those who repent will cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:10-13) The Lord is indeed merciful, for his providences have been working to bring about this very state of repentance. If God loved the whole world of sinners so much that he sent his Son to be the Redeemer, surely his love goes out much more to those who, when learning of his gracious provision through Christ, begin to respond to his drawing power and demonstrate their faith by repenting of their sins, and asking for forgiveness.

Although Jesus said that no one could come to him unless drawn by the Father, he also explained that only through him could anyone have access to the Father. (John 14:6) This means that the truth by which God “draws” points the way to Jesus and to the redeeming merit of his shed blood. During this Gospel Age the only object of being drawn to God through the Redeemer is to become disciples of Christ. To be Christ’s disciple means to follow in his footsteps of self-sacrifice. It means to deny self and to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus into death. It means to be “planted together in the likeness of his death.”—Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:3-5

The footstep followers of Jesus walk in a path that is difficult to tread. It is a “narrow” way. (Matt. 7:14) To walk in this path means shame, ignominy, persecution, affliction, suffering, and death. In Revelation 20:4 it is described as being “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God.” Even though the word “beheaded” is used symbolically, it denotes suffering and the loss of life.

These are some of the sobering facts that are revealed to those whom God is drawing. After repenting of their sins, they realize that they are now faced with the necessity of making a decision as to whether or not they will accept the invitation to become disciples of Christ and share in his sufferings. (II Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 3:7-10) God wants them to weigh this matter very carefully. This is indicated by Jesus in his parable concerning the man who was to build a tower. He would be very foolish, the parable teaches, unless he first of all sat down and counted the cost.—Luke 14:28-30

UNDERSTANDING INCREASES

Not long before his death, Jesus asked his disciples if they were able to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice. They had reached this decision in their hearts, and replied, "We are able." (Matt. 20:22) Indeed, at the beginning, when they became Jesus' disciples, they had given up all to follow him. (Mark 10:28) There were many things which they did not understand, and could not until begotten of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. There were also many tests which would come upon them. Yet, their hearts responded in obedience to the truths which they did understand.

No one who is drawn by God and responds through repentance and full consecration has, at first, a full understanding of his will. Just as the apostles needed the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God more perfectly to them, so it is with all who dedicate their lives to his service. The only difference is that the apostles had to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost, upon acceptance of the full surrender and consecration of each one whom God has drawn, he immediately blesses them with the Holy Spirit and its enlightening influence.

At this point in God's loving dealings, a whole bounty of riches is opened up as the result of faith. From righteous Abel to John the Baptist, those who believed God, and upon the basis of living by their faith were dedicated to the doing of his will, were taken into his care as friends. He loved them, watched over them, gave them a limited vision of his loving Messianic purpose, and provided them hope of a resurrection. Yet, so far as the present

life was concerned, they remained under the condemnation to death which had come upon the whole world.

This was a necessity, for the price of redemption from sin and death had not yet been provided. It is true, however, that God's dealings with the Ancient Worthies were because of his great plan of redemption through Christ. The Heavenly Father was pleased to take to himself as friends those whom he knew would qualify to receive life through the blood of Christ. Because God saw their deep faith and earnest endeavors to prove worthy, he intended that they would, in due time, be "made perfect" in the "better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35,40

Beginning at Jesus' First Advent, a new feature of God's plan began to operate. This has been the age of sacrifice—"better sacrifices" than those of past ages, prior to Christ. (Heb. 9:23) Jesus was "made flesh," "crowned with glory and honour" of human perfection, in order that he might give himself in death "a ransom for all." (John 1:14; Heb. 2:9; I Tim. 2:6) Subsequently, his followers have been invited to "present" themselves "a living sacrifice."—Rom. 12:1

It is possible for these to offer an acceptable sacrifice to God only because they are made free from Adamic condemnation through the meritorious blood of Christ. (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14) When Paul speaks of their bodies being offered as "a living sacrifice," it can be so only because they are no longer reckoned by God as being under death condemnation. Rather, through faith in Jesus as their Redeemer, they have been made alive in him—"justified by his blood."—Rom. 5:8,9

What a glorious result of faith this is! From God's standpoint it is as though, through accepting Jesus as our Redeemer, we have been restored to perfection of life such as the world will enjoy at the close of the Messianic kingdom. Through faith, we are reckoned as having a righteous, "justified" life to offer in sacrifice, even as Jesus did. This is a blessing of faith which the Ancient Worthies did not enjoy. To us, however, it means that we can offer a sacrifice considered "holy, acceptable unto God," and in a manner harmonious with his will, lay down our lives both for the brethren and in the interest of God's plan for the whole world of mankind.—Rom. 12:1; I John 3:16

NO CONDEMNATION

Paul reminds us of how we were motivated by "the love of Christ" to dedicate ourselves fully to God's service. He speaks of one who has taken this step as being "in Christ, . . . a new creature," and a member of his symbolic "body." (II Cor. 5:14,15,17; I Cor. 12:27) In another place the apostle writes that to those who are "in Christ Jesus" there is "no condemnation." (Rom. 8:1) Surely, to have "no condemnation" is another wonderful result of living by faith!

In Romans 8:2, Paul reiterates this blessed condition, stating that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Later in this chapter, Paul further explains, saying, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption [sonship],

whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—vss. 14-17

The privilege of sonship with our Heavenly Father has also come to us through faith. Abraham received the blessing of friendship because he believed the truth of God’s plan which was then revealed and due to be understood. We receive the honor of sonship through our belief in the more complete revealment of the divine purpose that has come to us. In this further unfolding, we see the truth concerning Jesus’ death—that he was “an atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2, *Weymouth New Testament*) We see him raised from the dead, giving evidence that the Heavenly Father was well pleased with his sacrifice, and proving also God’s ability to fulfill his promises pertaining to the resurrection of the dead.—I Cor. 15:20-22

By faith we accept this further understanding of truth. We believe that Jesus was “raised . . . for our justification” to life, and that he “ever liveth to make intercession” for us. (Rom. 4:25; Heb. 7:25) Living by faith in these truths day by day, we are able to go “boldly unto the throne of grace,” and there “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—Heb. 4:16

“PEACE WITH GOD”

Again Paul wrote, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(Rom. 5:1) Abraham, and all the faithful ones of old, had “peace” in the sense that they were God’s friends. Their faith in God’s promises removed fear and anxiety from their hearts. However, to have the “peace with God” referred to by the apostle implies separation, through justification, from the condemned and dying family of Adam. Now, through faith in Christ, demonstrated by presenting ourselves in full consecration to God, we may enjoy this rich reward of “peace with God.”

“By whom also,” Paul continues, “we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (vs. 2) Indeed, faith has opened the door to this further “grace,” or favor—the glorious hope of sharing the glory of God. “And not only this,” Paul adds, “but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”—vss. 3-5, *New American Standard Bible*

Our opening text, “the just shall live by his faith,” is quoted in the New Testament in various contexts. The first of these is in a verse quoted earlier which speaks of God being revealed “from faith to faith.” In this same verse, Paul then tells us how this progressive development of faith is to occur: “as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:17) In Galatians 3:11, emphasizing fallen man’s inability to keep God’s perfect law, the apostle again quotes these words, stating, “No man is justified by the law in the sight of God.” Rather, he says, “The just shall live by faith.”

Finally, Paul quotes this statement again: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” (Heb. 10:38) Living by faith, as mentioned here, means that faith in God and in his promises is a way of life. It is the only way that a Christian can live day by day with rejoicing, and truly be at peace with God. If we “draw back” from a life of faith, he will “have no pleasure” in us.

Living by faith, the abundant mercy and love of God are our daily portion. Living by faith is to live free from condemnation. Living by faith is to rejoice in the hope of sharing in the glory of God. Living by faith we triumph in tribulation. Living by faith we are led by the Spirit of God and enjoy the blessings belonging to the sons of God.

Living by faith we can go boldly to the throne of grace to receive strength for our every time of need. By faith we know that “all things work together for good” because we love God and are “the called according to his purpose.” By faith we know that nothing can “separate us from the love of Christ,” and that since “God be for us,” nothing can be successfully “against us.”—Rom 8:28,31,35-39

Living by faith we dwell in the “secret place of the most High,” and are sheltered under the “shadow of the Almighty,” safely “under his wings.” (Ps. 91:1,4) Surely, the just do live by faith, and the Lord finds pleasure in them as they lay hold more firmly upon his promises, zealously devoting themselves to the doing of his will, and realizing that “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4 ■