

Lessons on Faith

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

—Hebrews 11:1

WE CAN PERHAPS PARAPHRASE our opening text in this way: “Faith is the basis, and the conviction, concerning things hoped for, as well as for things not seen, based

on the divine promises of God’s Word.” True faith has real substance, a mental substance or basis, so to speak, which stimulates and guides the mind of the child of God. The essence of faith’s substance consists in receiving what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. Such faith should motivate us to loving obedience and to good works. (Eph. 2:10; Matt. 5:16; James 2:14-26) The personal trust we have in God, day by day, is one of the primary means by which we will obtain salvation. This faith is centered in our Lord Jesus Christ, “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”—Rom. 4:24,25, *English Standard Version*

FAITH GIVES ASSURANCE

Our walk by faith began when, with the first elements of trust and belief in God, we saw his character, and that of his beloved Son, though only

in a limited measure. Gradually, as we were drawn closer to God, we were privileged to know more of him, to grow in appreciation of his wonderful plan, having our feet set upon the solid ground of truth. (Eph. 3:17-19) These elements of faith are so important that we are told in Hebrews 11:6, "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."

As defined earlier, faith includes the "substance" of instruction and teachings found in God's Word, for the special benefit of the footstep followers of Jesus. Faith makes it possible for God's people to have conviction concerning his plans and purposes, and to act upon them in accordance with his will. "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." (I John 5:14) In short, faith acts as a fundamental working principle in the lives of the Lord's consecrated people.

Faith in the many wonderful promises of the Bible provides much assurance to the followers of our Lord. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Luke 12:32; Ps. 46:1; Rom. 8:31) These and many other promises from the Word of God should strengthen our assurance that the Heavenly Father will provide us, if we trust in him, all the necessary guidance and direction in order that we may grow to spiritual maturity. Thus, with the substance and evidence of God's Word and his overruling in our lives, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."—Heb. 10:22

FAITH CALLS FOR PERSEVERANCE

As we grow in faith, we should recall life's experiences, including its joys and sorrows, by which we are to become stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might. (Eph. 6:10) To become strong requires continual exercise, training and perseverance. In our spiritual training, we should be energized by God's Word, and by our relationship with him through Christ. We have the same favors, promises and inspiring hopes that Jesus and the apostles had. Yet, to fully attain these, we must persevere day by day. Paul stated, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."—Heb. 10:23; 3:14

Our desire should be that we continue to serve God with our whole heart, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, ... But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (I Pet. 5:7-10) All in the school of Christ must come to appreciate that the trials of the present, and those still to come upon them, are manifestations of divine favor. For this reason, the allurements of this world are not for those who strive to walk in the Lord's footsteps, and their temptations must be resisted.—I Cor. 1:27,28; Luke 16:13

We will have many tests to show the depth of our loyalty toward God. These will come throughout our

Christian walk. Therefore, we must hold fast to the glorious Truth not only in letter—words and actions—but also in spirit—disposition and character. An important part of our perseverance is that of having the humble attitude shown in Paul’s words concerning himself: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13,14) We must focus our energy upon the things that will draw us closer to God. This includes striving to keep our hearts and minds full of the precious gems found in God’s Holy Word. Concerning those things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy, Paul says, “think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8,9

A consideration of the importance of perseverance is not complete without mentioning the role of the important privilege of prayer. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18) A child of God must have an active prayer life, “with all perseverance,” communing with him concerning our daily experiences and asking for his help and guidance in them, being motivated by a desire to do his will in all things.

FAITH INSPIRES GRATITUDE

We should be ever thankful to our Heavenly Father, for we owe our all to him through his only begotten Son, Christ Jesus. (I Cor. 8:6) We recall the words

of Paul, “Know ye not that ... ye are not your own? For ye are bought [and paid for] with a price: therefore glorify your God.” (I Cor. 6:19,20) Our understanding of this shows us that our time, talents, influence, means, and all that we might consider precious, or in any proper degree valuable, belongs to the Lord, even life itself.

Our Heavenly Father cares for us and loves us dearly. All pure, lovely, and true things originate from the “Father of lights,” and come to us through Jesus. (James 1:17) God is concerned with, and about, even the smallest matters in our life. (Matt. 10:29-31) He is pleased to oversee by his divine providence everything in which we are involved. Our faith and trust in God should cause us to be ever mindful of the privilege of coming to him through our Lord and Master for help and encouragement, comfort, consolation, guidance and rest. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28) Our faith should inspire gratitude of heart, and engender within us peace and rest in God, knowing that he is strong and mighty toward us. “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.”—Ps. 29:11

With gratitude we realize that Christ Jesus is our heavenly friend, and our comforter. His character is so in harmony with that of the Heavenly Father that the Apostle Paul refers to him as “the brightness of his [God’s] glory, and the express image of his [God’s] person.” (Heb. 1:3) Our depth of faith compels us to follow the example of the Apostle Paul when he declared himself a follower of Christ. (I Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1,2) Developing the

character traits and disposition of Christ will lead the footstep follower of the Master to be a humble, loving, and tenderhearted person, as he was. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (I Pet. 5:6,7) Each day that we are privileged to walk in the narrow way, our attitude should be as that expressed in the words of Psalm 116:12-14: "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people."

As children of God, we should be ever thankful to our Father for his providential care and overruling in all aspects of our lives. We must also realize through the eye of faith that he has everything under control and in full harmony with his wonderful plan. This should inspire all of us to strive to fulfill our consecration vows, even unto death, knowing that if faithful we will attain to glory, honor and immortality. (Rom. 2:7) Trusting in him completely, as partakers of his grace through Christ Jesus, we can truly say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."—II Cor. 9:15

FAITH LEADS TO MUTUAL LOVE

"Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (I Cor. 13:13) Charity, as spoken of by Paul in this chapter, is more properly translated as love—love that is completely unselfish, not desiring anything in return. This kind of love can be demonstrated by acts of kindness, providing assistance, engaging in sacrificial service

on behalf of others, and even by acts of goodwill toward our fellow man. The apostle further tells us about this divine love. “Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love is not boastful; is not puffed up; acts not unbecomingly, seeks not that which is not her own; is not provoked to anger; does not impute evil; rejoices not with iniquity, but rejoices with the truth; covers all things; believes all things; hopes for all things; endures all things. Love fails not at any time.”—I Cor. 13:4-8, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

Our hearts should be kept full of the love of God to such an extent that there will be no room for unkind thoughts toward others, even those who we may consider our enemies. We should remember that God “first loved us,” and did so “while we were yet sinners.” (I John 4:19; Rom. 5:8) We can do no less than show our love toward the Heavenly Father and his Son Christ Jesus by loving our brethren, our neighbors, and all mankind. Love is the ultimate mark of true holiness, and God has instructed us, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.”—I Pet. 1:16

The Scriptures give us these additional admonitions concerning love. “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood.” “Let brotherly love continue.” (I Pet. 2:17; Heb. 13:1) We note in these words that brotherly love is not merely to be given at certain times or under limited circumstances, but it is to continue. The word translated “continue” in the above text means “not to depart, ... to be held, kept continually.” When our minds are enriched by this understanding we are led to the realization that “a friend loveth at all times.”—Prov. 17:17

FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE

“Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:1,2, *International Standard Version*) Here we are exhorted to look back at the experiences of the faithful ones of the Old Testament, as well as Jesus and the apostles, all of whom constitute a great “cloud of witnesses.” We should consider what they endured and how faithful and loyal they were to God, even in the most difficult of experiences.

Their endurance should inspire us to greater faithfulness in running our race, and take to heart the many Scriptural admonitions which address the need for constant endurance. “All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.”—II Cor. 4:15-17; Rev. 3:12

As the church will be the temple of God, perfect on the heavenly plane, so all those begotten of the Holy Spirit as “new creatures,” must realize that God is dealing with them, and claim the promise,

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (II Cor. 5:17; Rev. 3:21) The attainment of this goal is made possible by God’s providential care over us, and through patient endurance on our part. We recall the words spoken to Abraham because of his faith in God, and his endurance. “And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”—Heb. 6:15

We are told: “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. 12:3) The mind is a special battleground for each of us. The “old man” of our fallen nature is in continual conflict with the “new man.” (Col. 3:9,10) Our flesh’s resistance to sacrifice is also part of this battle. Rather than succumb to these fleshly influences, however, we should rejoice that our Lord has invited us to walk in his footsteps, and to endure as he did. Let us drink of the cup he drank of and be baptized with the baptism he was baptized with. (Mark 10:38,39) Thus, when we endure hard experiences, or are scorned by others, we can remember the words, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, ... Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”—Matt. 5:11,12

FINAL VICTORY THROUGH FAITH

The Apostle John wrote: “All that has been begotten by God overcomes the world; and this is that victory which overcomes the world—our faith.” (I John 5:4, *Diaglott*) We note that although faith is necessary to gain this victory, our triumph is only

made possible by the conquering power of God. It is he who has begotten us, and it is his Holy Spirit that, through our begetting, leads us to victory. Guided by God's spirit, we know that all things will work together for our ultimate good. (Rom. 8:28) Therefore, we are to be submissive to the will of our Heavenly Father and his Son, Christ Jesus, and continually put our faith and trust in them, even when the way seems dark and foreboding. This is the ultimate progression of going from "faith to faith"—to implicitly trust our loving and all-wise God even where we cannot trace him. This is how the righteous "live by faith."—Rom. 1:17

Only those who, from faith to faith, are fully baptized into the sacrificial death of our Lord will be granted a share with him in glory as his joint-heirs, and as members of the great prophet, priest, king, mediator, and judge of the world in the Messianic kingdom. (Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:10-12; Rev. 3:21) The final members of Christ's body will all soon be raised up in glory and become sharers in the "first resurrection." (Rev. 20:6) Having been faithful unto death, the promise given by Jesus in the upper room will be fulfilled: "I will ... receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3) Then will come the glorious fulfillment of the prayer that has been uttered for nearly two thousand years: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10 ■