



► Fundamentals of Faith

By Ben Godwin



Faith is defined as “belief in, trust in and loyalty to God.” Surprisingly, the word faith is only used two times in the Old Testament. In one reference (Dt. 32:20) it is used in a rebuke to the children of Israel for their lack of faith. In the other reference (Hab. 2:4) it is used prophetically concerning New Covenant justification. However, the synonyms trust and believe are used 107 times and 19 times respectively. There were many faith-filled people under the Old Will who achieved great feats through faith. (See Hebrews 11.) Those individuals, however, seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. In fact, a whole generation of Israelites grieved God and missed Canaan Land due to their unbelief. (See Ps. 95:10-11, Heb. 3:19) In most of the 245 New Testament references, the Greek word *pistis* is translated faith. It means “assurance, belief, fidelity or moral conviction.” Saint Augustine said, “Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe.” An unknown author stated that, “faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible.” Bible Commentator Herbert Lockyer wrote, “Reason is the eye of the soul and faith is the eye of the spirit. Faith does not contradict reason, but rises superior to it. What reason cannot understand, faith accepts... Faith trusts God where reason cannot trace Him.”

The Importance of Faith

Faith is absolutely essential to our salvation and spiritual development—“*But 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) Without faith a person cannot be saved. Jesus made it very clear that “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (Mk.16:16) Paul added that “*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*” (Ro. 14:23) Everything we receive from God is obtained and maintained through faith. Faith is required for salvation (Ac. 16:31, Ro. 10:9-10, Eph. 2:8, 2 Tim. 3:15), healing (Mt. 9:22, 29, Ac. 14:9), justification (Ro. 5:1, Gal. 2:16; 3:11), Spirit Baptism (Gal. 3:14), casting out devils (Mt. 17:18-20), sanctification (Ac. 26:18), righteousness (Heb. 11:7), etc.

You might say that faith is the frequency of God. Just as a radio must be tuned in to the right frequency to receive a signal, our faith tunes us in to the spiritual realm, allowing us to perceive and receive God’s blessings and benefits. In all of life’s peaks and valleys we are reminded that we must “walk by faith and not by sight.” (2 Cor. 5:7) As Jesus explained to Thomas, we of the New Covenant are more blessed than even the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry, “*because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*” (Jn. 20:29)

Faith is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity that is absolutely essential. “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*” (Heb 6:1-2) The importance of faith cannot be overstated. It is a prerequisite to the new birth and to all subsequent spiritual development. The reason the Bible in general, and the Gospels in particular, were written is to bring us to a point of believing that facilitates receiving. “*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*” (Jn. 20:30-31)

The Bible doesn't prescribe an abstract belief in a vague notion of God's existence. "*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*" (Ja. 2:19-20) James labels that kind of faith as dead (useless or barren). In fact, Peter provided a list of eight other virtues that should be diligently added to our faith so that it is not rendered fruitless. (2 Pt. 1:5-8) Biblical faith requires a specifically targeted faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ that opens the door to all spiritual blessings. James cites the examples of Abraham and Rahab whose faith was evidenced by their works. (Ja. 2:21-26) Faith serves as a spiritual catalyst (spark plug) that motivates people to act upon the Word of God and to see its promised benefits become a living and personal reality.

Increasing Your Faith

Scripture informs us that "*God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" (Ro. 12:3) It doesn't specify how large or small that "measure" is. But God has given us a certain capacity to believe in Him. All faith, great or small, has its origin in God. Faith is a gift of grace from the "author and finisher of our faith." (Heb. 12:2) Our measure of faith can be increased in two main ways: (1) By using the faith we have. When the disciples asked, "*Lord, Increase our faith*" (Lu. 17:5), Jesus responded by saying, "*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.*" (Lu. 17:6) In other words, it doesn't take much faith to do great things for God. But if we utilize the measure of faith we have, as a tiny mustard seed planted in the ground, it will not remain small but will increase rapidly. (See 2 Cor. 10:14-15, 2 Th. 1:3) Faith, like a muscle, if exercised, develops stronger; if left unused, it will weaken and atrophy. (2) By hearing the Word of God. "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Ro. 10:17) The more we feed our heart and mind the Word of God, the larger capacity we will have to believe that what God has done for others, He will also do for us.

Levels of Faith

Besides the proportion of faith (Ro. 12:3-6) given to every believer, there are also varying levels of faith, depending on the spiritual maturity of the individual. On one occasion, Jesus calmed the stormy sea and reproved His disciples for having no faith. (Mk. 4:40) Paul observed "*for all men have not faith*" (2 Th. 3:2) and prayed for the same church concerning their lack thereof. (1 Th. 3:10) Jesus often rebuked His disciples for exhibiting little faith. (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) Paul exhorted the Roman Church "*Him that is weak in the faith receive.*" (Ro. 14:1) By contrast, Abraham, "*being not weak in faith...staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*" (Ro. 4:19-20) Strong faith takes God at His Word despite circumstantial evidence to the contrary. Abraham's obedience and determination to believe God for the impossible earned him the title "the father of all them that believe." (Ro. 4:11)

Interestingly, there are two people referred to in the Bible as having **great faith**, both of whom were Gentiles. The Centurion, who understood and believed in the power of the spoken word, was told by Jesus, "*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*" (See Mt. 8:5-10.) The second example is the Syrophenician Woman who persistently sought Jesus to deliver her demonized daughter. Even when Jesus ignored her and spoke harshly to her, she said, "*Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table.*" Jesus was so impressed with her aggressive approach that He replied, "*O woman, great is thy faith.*" (See Mt. 15:22-28) Stephen, one of the seven Spirit-filled deacons and the first martyr of the early church, and Barnabus, Paul's missionary companion, were both spoken of as being "full of faith." (Ac. 6:5, 8; 11:24) Furthermore, James described poor believers as "rich in faith" and "heirs of the kingdom." (Ja. 2:5) Throughout Scripture God responded to and rewarded bold, aggressive faith. As someone said, don't be afraid to step out on a limb—that is where the fruit is!

The Fight of Faith

Paul admonished Timothy to “**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.**” (1 Tim. 6:12) Faith has a vital role in spiritual warfare. Spiritual growth and progress comes by fighting “the good fight of faith.” It takes faith to utilize the keys of the kingdom, exercise our authority over the enemy and resist the devil. (See Mt. 16:19; 18:18, Lu. 10:19, Ja. 4:7.) The same faith that initially enables us to be born of God also enables us to overcome for, “*whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*” (1 Jn. 5:4) Paul emphasized to the Ephesians, who like the Colossians were known for their faith (See Col. 1:4, Eph. 1:15), that faith is the most important part of our spiritual armor. “**Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.**” (Eph. 6:16) Paul also wrote, “*but let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*” (1 Th. 5:8) Why did Paul stress using faith above all the other parts of our armor? (Eph. 6:13-17) Because without faith, none of the other weapons work effectively.

Satan’s fiery darts are often lies, questions and doubts about the content and veracity of God’s Word? Notice that when Satan tempted Eve, his strategy was to undermine God’s Word by planting seeds of doubt. “*Hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*” (Gen. 3:1) “*Ye shall not surely die...*” (Gen. 3:4) Faith, like a wet shield quenching a flaming arrow, extinguishes Satan’s crafty lies. Jesus modeled this technique in spiritual warfare. He responded to every temptation of the enemy with unwavering faith in God’s revealed Word by emphatically stating, “*it is written...*” Just as light dispels darkness, so faith dissipates doubt. We can combat the invasion of sickness in our bodies with faith as well. “**And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.**” (Ja. 5:15) Furthermore, faith in the name of Jesus is confirmed by the following: “**And these signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.**” (Mk. 16:17-18) As you can see, faith is a formidable weapon in our arsenal. We learn from the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 that faith can enable us to overcome and/or endure any opposition. (See Heb. 11:33-40.)

Contending for the Faith

Jude exhorted the early church to “**earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.**” (Ju. 3) To contend means “to fight for or stoutly defend.” In this usage, the phrase “the faith” doesn’t refer to the attribute of faith, but rather the specific body of teaching or doctrine presented to the church by the Apostles. As defenders of the faith, we should vigorously proclaim sound doctrine and boldly condemn heresy. But before we can effectively *defend* the faith we must first accurately *know* the faith. In the early church a large number of Levitical priests followed the faith (Ac. 6:7), churches were established in the faith (Ac. 16:5), the fivefold ministry was set in order until we are brought into the unity of the faith (See. Eph. 4:11-13), Christians were urged to continue in the faith (Col. 1:23) and to be “rooted and built up” and “established in the faith.” (Col. 2:7) Paul warned, “*in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.*” (1 Tim. 4:1) According to Paul, if a man fails to provide for his own family, “*he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.*” (1 Tim. 5:8) We are further cautioned that the influence of evil men, the love of money, empty chatter and oppositions of science (opposing arguments of supposed knowledge) can all cause people to err from the faith. (See. Ac. 13:8, 1 Tim. 6:10, 20-21.) May we all be able to testify at the end of our journey, like Paul, that we have “*fought a good fight...finished [our] course...kept the faith.*” (2 Tim. 4:7)

The Testing of Faith

*“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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”* (1 Pt. 1:7, See also Ja. 1:2-4) The most precious and strongest metals are those refined in the hottest fires. Job declared, *“when He hath **tried me**, I shall come forth as gold.”* (Jb. 23:10) We can’t have a testimony without having a test! Abraham’s faith was tested when God required that he offer his son Isaac on the altar. Hebrews 11:17, 19 states, *“By faith Abraham, **when he was tried**, offered up Isaac...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...”* God also tests our faith with impossibilities. Before Jesus fed the multitude, He asked Philip where they could buy bread to feed so many. *“And this He said to **prove him**...”* (Jn. 6:6) Jesus knew what He would do, but He wanted Philip to trust Him for supernatural provision. Tested faith learns to do the possible and to rely upon God to do the impossible.

Hebrews eleven expresses the difference between overcoming faith and enduring faith. The writer tells of both the great victories achieved through faith and the horrific hardships endured by faith. It is important to notice that the Patriarchs didn’t receive everything they believed God for, but they continued believing regardless. *“And these all, having obtained a good report **through faith**, received not the promises.”* (Heb. 11:39) Mature faith enables us to overcome some things and to endure other things. It is often said that if God doesn’t move your mountain, He will give you grace to climb it! No matter what happens in life, don’t let your faith waiver. Jesus said to Peter, *“I have prayed for thee, **that thy faith fail not**: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”* (Lu. 22:32) You, like Peter, may fail, but don’t let your faith fail. In life, we will be tested by God, by Satan, and by circumstances. Whatever you face, let your faith be unshakably anchored in the rock of ages. In the words of an old, familiar hymn: “Though all hell assails me, I shall not be moved, Jesus never fails me, I shall not be moved. Just like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved.” Faith provides an unshakeable foundation for your life that will carry you through time and into eternity.