



Part 3

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Faith Toward God

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:21 NKJV

We start this section with a clear theme, which is that Repentance from dead works is partnered with faith *toward* God. We turn away from one thing toward another, from our old lives with their dead works and toward God.

Faith is what enables us to do the turning! It is the only way we can make the turn. It is well beyond the scope of our studies to examine this great subject in detail and therefore we shall focus our thoughts on how faith enables Christ the Cornerstone to be laid properly in our lives.



1 Who Is God

Faith is such a widespread used word in the world today that we should be clear that we define who or what we mean by God. Most of the world's population would consider themselves to have 'faith' in a deity.

1.1 Creation, the 'Reflection' of God

God is unknowable unless He chooses to reveal Himself to us. He is outside time and space for He created them and they exist in Him. However God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through the universe He created, which reflects aspects of His eternal glory and declares this to us, as David described,

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. **2** Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

Psalm 19:1-2, ESVUK¹

The Apostle **Paul** described this self-revelation of God, which he says is self-evident in the creation.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. **20** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

Romans 1:19-20, ESVUK

1.2 Christ The 'Face' Of God

However, most of the world's theists would have no problem with these Scriptures. The Bible is referring here to a general perception that there is a Creator who made the universe. It does not mean that we have a connection to, or have begun yet to know, this Creator personally. The writer to the Hebrews is not referring to this general perception of God. The letter to the Hebrews starts with the following words.

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us **by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he

¹ All quotations from the English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK) © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, unless otherwise stated.

created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Hebrews 1:1-3, ESVUK

Jesus is the perfect expression of the Father. As we have already seen, begotten of the Father – of the very same substance. God decided to reveal Himself to us through His Son, just as He created everything through Him². The Father has decreed that we should know Him through the Son. Jesus made this clear to His disciples that our faith toward God must be **through** Him,

6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **7** If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” **9** Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? **10** Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. **11** Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

John 14:9, ESVUK

In the book of Acts, when Luke describes the Philippian jailer being saved with his household, he shows us the same truth that belief toward God is only *through* Christ,

Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” **31** And they said, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be saved, you and your household.” **34** ... And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had **believed in God**.

Acts 16:30,31&34

² John 1:3, Col 1:16

2 What Is 'Faith'?



Our natural starting point in asking what the Bible means by the word Faith. We have already said that faith toward God can only happen through the medium of the Son. Jesus is the gateway to God.

So now we have defined the source of our faith, we should now turn our focus on what faith actually is.

2.1 Biblical Words And Concepts Of Faith

The Old and New Testament's words and concepts of faith are broadly similar with the latter building upon the former in line with the progressive self-revelation of God through His Word to man. Faith is essentially man's reaction to God's self-revelation to him. The words the Bible uses are: -

Old Testament

- **Aman** - The most significant Hebrew word for faith in the OT, a root word that denotes reliability, stability, and firmness. *Aman* concretely meant to support or to uphold, as for example the strong arms of a parent would uphold an infant.³
- **Yare** - Usually translated "to fear", this word occurs more often in the OT than *aman*, although the two express very similar concepts.⁴ This element of faith can be seen in Noah's actions for example,

By **faith** Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in **reverent fear** constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Hebrews 11:7, ESVUK

New Testament

- **Pistis** - The dominant NT term for faith is the Koine Greek word *pistis*, usually translated "faith." It conveys the idea of trust, a firm internal conviction regarding the truthfulness of someone or some claim. The verb *pisteuo* is often translated 'I believe' or 'I trust'.⁵

³ Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., Butler, T. C., & Latta, B. (2003). *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (547). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

These words in of themselves, are still fairly neutral and far from the 'Principles of Christ'. So we need to press in to see how these relate to Christ Himself and join us to Him. The concept of faith though has within it the idea of trusting which hinges on the object of that trust being trustworthy, dependable and reliable.

2.2 The Ingredients Of Faith

The Scriptures provide us with a most concise definition of what 'faith' in the sense of faith toward God means,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1, ESVUK

We have several ingredients here which are necessary for faith to be present: -

- **Assurance** – The Greek word here is *hupostasis* (coming from *hupo* – underneath or foundational, and *histemi* – to make firm or to stand⁶) carries the thought of underpinning something. In this case, underpinning our 'hope' is the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ has set His seal of ownership and guarantee of our salvation⁷. Paul told the Corinthians that they were *established* in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit⁸.
- **Hope** – Christ Himself is the source of our hope. He has promised us a great reward for a life of perpetual trust in Him, from the moment of our rebirth to the moment of our face to face meeting with Him. John's great statement about believing in Christ⁹ uses the continuous tense so that it is he who *keeps on believing*.
- **Conviction** – This speaks of a belief in the physical facts of Christ's death and resurrection, not just a philosophy He taught. As Paul told the Corinthians, if Christ was not raised from the dead then we have believed in vain. The Greek word, *Elegchos* means 'a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested'.
- **Things Not Seen** – Things not seen and yet promised by God in Christ. It is because they are not seen that faith involves our hope,

⁶ *Histemi* carries a similar thought to *Sunistao* used by Paul in his letter to the Colossians, describing all things as being 'held together' in Christ.

⁷ Ephesians 1:12-14

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:22

⁹ John 3:16

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

Romans 8:24, ESVUK

Putting these things together shows us that Biblical faith (i.e., in Christ) is essentially being established, in the sense of being underpinned in our foundations, by the hope which is borne from our being convinced of the evidence of who Christ is. Although our conviction is born out of material facts about Christ, we have received those facts by faith and not by sight. As Jesus said to Thomas who insisted on physical proof to be the springboard of his faith that his Master had indeed returned,

Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

John 20:29

2.3 Faith Is 'Seeing'

'Faith toward God' must therefore involve perception of the unseen. God is unseen and has chosen to remain so, which means that in order to relate to Him we have to perceive Him spiritually, that is not primarily with our physical senses in the natural, but through spiritual eyes.

This is why the Scripture says,

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Hebrews 11:6, ESVUK

The reason is because if we do not relate to God through faith, that is through our spirits, then we remain nothing more than animated creatures, dominated by the natural and unable to perceive the spiritual – debased. We were created to be spiritual, as well as physical.

This ability to perceive unseen things, is both foundational to us in the sense that it is necessary for the Cornerstone of Christ to be first laid in our lives, but it will also determine the extent to which we are able to mature into His image (i.e., Christ is formed within us).

Paul refers to this spiritual perception in writing to the Corinthians about facing physical hardships,

17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as **we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen**. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, ESVUK

The challenge of the physical, Paul says, provides us with the opportunity to look beyond it, to the unseen, the spiritual reality overlaying the physical and **it is this** that is so fundamental in our maturity.

The key factors in the life of the Christian therefore, are firstly if their lives present them with the need to look beyond the physical and secondly if it does, how do they react to this challenge? How do they cooperate with the providential hand of God in their lives? This brings us to the next thing we need to consider about faith.

2.4 Faith Is A Gift That Can Grow

The Bible tells us that faith is a gift from God. We cannot take credit for this, it is saving faith. We are only responsible for responding to this gift from God,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast..

Ephesians 2:8-9, ESVUK

However from that point on we carry a responsibility for what we do with that faith. It is a seed which we have to allow God to plant in the depths of our hearts, which requires watering and nurturing. There are two principal ways God enables this to happen in our lives: -

- **Honing the Gift**

Faith needs exercising like a muscle. It is our choice whether we choose to take that exercise or not. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this principle in his build up to our passage on foundations. He is addressing the issue of failing to mature and grow and points out that a prerequisite for this is exercising the gift within them,

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 5:14, ESVUK

Although the writer is referring here to the gift of discernment, all gifts function through the faith of the believer. And this like all the gifts of the

Spirit requires practice to grow – both the faith required needs to grow and the gift itself needs to be honed and finely tuned. Paul told the Corinthians that they would move in the gifts in proportion to their faith,

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

Romans 12:6, NIVUK

- **Expanding the Gift**

As well as our choice to exercise in the area of faith, the Lord also allows challenges to come against us, both to test our faith in Him and again to allow the faith muscle to be flexed and built up, like a body-builder. In some respects honing our gift of faith is easier because we are choosing to step out etc. In contrast the providential hand of God allows challenges into our lives rarely at moments of convenience! The Lord's brother, James encouraged believers under pressures to hold fast and allow their faith to be tested and to grow,

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12, ESVUK

The Apostle John made a similar encouragement to the believers in his letters,

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:4-5, ESVUK

One of our own prime ministers, David Lloyd-George, once said of faith,

Faith is idle when circumstances are right, only when they are adverse is one's faith in God exercised. Faith, like muscle, grows strong and supple with exercise.¹⁰

¹⁰ Quotation from Prime Minister David Lloyd George; Tan, P. L. (1996) -. Encyclopaedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.



3 The Fruit Of Faith

3.1 Faith is our Springboard into Action

As we have said it is through faith that we *function* in the Kingdom of God, because it is not a predominantly physical Kingdom but one sourced from its King in the unseen realm. Nonetheless, its impact on the physical realm will be unmistakable and undeniable.

Faith must always be the source of our actions. The writer to the Hebrews devotes a whole chapter to recalling the exploits of those of the household of faith, showing us how moving in faith meant they were able to achieve all sorts of things for God.

The writer to the Hebrews later shows us how many things have been done from faith in Him ...

- **Abel** to worship God
- **Enoch** to receive God's provision
- **Noah** to have prophetic insight
- **Abraham** to obey God's call and leave behind the old
- **Sarah** to receive God's miracle working power
- **Isaac** to declare and invoke the blessings of God
- **Jacob** to pass on the inherited promise of God's blessings
- **Joseph** to give directions for the exodus of Israel
- **Moses** to refuse the enemy's claim on him and his people, breaking free of the past
- **The Israelites** to achieve what was impossible for the Egyptians to do, walking through the Red Sea
- **Joshua** to bring down the strongholds of Jericho
- **Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets** to
 - Conquer kingdoms
 - Enforce justice

- Obtain promises
- Stop the mouths of lions
- Quench the power of fire
- Escape the edge of the sword
- Be made strong out of weakness
- Become mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight
- Help women to receive back their dead by resurrection
- Endure torture, refusing to accept release, suffer mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment
- Face with heads held high being stoned, sawn in two, and being killed with the sword.
- Suffer living in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated and wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

It doesn't get more action-packed than any of that! All of these heroes were commended for their **faith**. It was their springboard into action.

3.2 Faith Is Our Seedbed

Faith provides a seedbed in our lives, in which other things germinate within us. It is the accelerant or the fertilizer if you will. Here are just three of the main fruits that sprout from the seedbed of faith.

- **Hope**

Faith produces hope in our lives,

Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

Romans 5:2, NLT

The reason that hope is part of the Bible's own definition of faith¹¹ is because hope is like a destination point which faith opens our eyes to. The destination is our eternal hope in Christ, against which Paul weighed everything he went through in this life against,

¹¹ Hebrews 11:1

17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, ESVUK

Like a boat sailing for the shore, hope is a distant point toward which the ship is steered. It keeps our course steady and true,

The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope.

Colossians 1:4, The Message

- **Joy**

Faith produces joy in our lives,

He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

Acts 16:34, NLT

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

1 Peter 1:8, NIVUK

The joy of the Lord is our strength.¹²

- **Peace**

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13, NLT

Here we see all three elements combined together.

¹² Nehemiah 8:10

3.3 Faith Is Our Foundation To Build Upon

The reason why faith is one of the foundation stones in our lives, aside from the fact that it is how we lay hold of Christ the cornerstone, is because it is upon this stone in our lives that God can build many other aspects of our character in the process of maturing into sons of God. As Peter urges the early churches to ensure that they *build upon the foundation of faith* in their lives,

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, **6** and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, **7** and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

8 For **if these qualities are yours and are increasing**, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:5-8, ESVUK

We are born again to be ever increasing in maturity and the bedrock of that growth Peter tells us is **FAITH**. Just as breathing is fundamental to our continual physical development, keeping our heart and brain alive, so the spiritual breath of faith is to enable our spirits to grow and develop.