

I. FAITH

The aim of this book is to carefully bring out some of the more important principles of spiritual growth, in order to help build upon a sound Biblical foundation in Christ. He can honor no other.

The Holy Spirit has Paul write to each of us, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5a), and the recommendation is certainly not out of order at the very inception of this series of studies. First of all, we must remind ourselves that "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6a). Moreover, and this is all-important, true faith must be based solely upon scriptural FACTS, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Unless our faith is established upon facts, it is no more than conjecture, superstition, speculation, or presumption.

Hebrews 11:1 leaves no question about this: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith standing on the FACTS of the Word of God substantiates and gives evidence of things not seen. And everyone knows that evidence must be founded upon facts. All of us started on this principle when we were born again -- our belief stood directly upon the eternal fact of the redeeming death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This is the faith by which we began, and it is the same faith by which we are to "stand" (1 Corinthians 16:13); and "walk" (2 Corinthians 5:7); and "live" (Galatians 2:20b). "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Colossians 2:6).

Since true faith is anchored upon scriptural facts, we are certainly not to be influenced by IMPRESSIONS. George Mueller said, "Impressions have neither one thing nor the other to do with faith. Faith has to do with the Word of God. It is not impressions, strong or weak, which will make the difference. We have to do with the Written Word and not ourselves or our impressions."

Then, too, PROBABILITIES are the big temptation when it comes to exercising faith. Too often the attitude is, "It doesn't seem probable that he will ever be saved." "The way things are going, I wonder if the Lord really loves me." But Mueller wrote: "Many people are willing to believe regarding those things that seem probable to them. Faith has nothing to do with probabilities. The province of faith begins where probabilities cease and sight and sense fail. Appearances are not to be taken into account. The question is -- whether God has spoken it in His Word.

Alexander R. Hay adds to this by saying, "Faith must be based upon CERTAINTY. There must be definite knowledge of God's purpose and will. Without that there can be no true faith. For faith is not a force that we exercise or a striving to believe that something shall be, thinking that if we believe hard enough it will come to pass." That may be positive thinking, but certainly not Biblical faith.

Evan Hopkins writes: "Faith needs facts to REST upon. Presumption can take fancy instead of fact. God in His Word reveals to us the facts with which faith has to deal." It is upon this basis that J.B. Stoney can say, "Real faith is always increased by opposition, while false confidence is damaged and discouraged by it." There can be no steadfastness apart from immovable facts. Peter's burden was, "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 Peter 1:7).

Once we begin to reckon (count) on facts, our Father begins to build us up in the faith. From his profoundly simple trust in God, Mueller was able to say that "God delights to increase the faith of His children. We ought, instead of wanting no trials before victory, no exercise for patience, to be willing to take them from God's hand as a means. I say -- and say it deliberately -- trials, obstacles, difficulties, and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith."

On this same subject, James McConkey wrote: "Faith is DEPENDENCE upon God. And this God-dependence only begins when self-dependence ends. And self-dependence only comes to its end, with some of us, when sorrow, suffering, affliction, broken plans and hopes bring us to that place of self-helplessness and defeat. And only then do we find that we have learned the lesson of faith; to find our tiny craft of life rushing onward to a blessed victory of life and power and service undreamt of in the days of our fleshly strength and self-reliance."

J.B. Stoney agrees by saying, "It is a great thing to LEARN faith: that is, simple dependence upon God. It will comfort you much to be assured that the Lord is teaching you dependence upon Himself, and it is very remarkable that faith is necessary in EVERYTHING. 'The just shall live by faith,' not only in your circumstances, but in everything. I believe the Lord allows many things to happen on purpose to make us feel our need of Him. The more you find Him in your sorrows or wants, the more you will be attached to Him and drawn away from this place where the sorrows are, to Him in the place where He is." "Set your affection on things above" (Colossians 3:2a).

Actually, we cannot trust anyone further than we know him. So we must not only learn the facts involved, but ever more intimately come to know the One who presents and upholds them! "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:2-4).