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Fundamentals of Faith

An examination of the Scriptures brings one face to face with the necessity of faith in a life that pleases God. The importance of faith can be seen throughout the Bible, regardless of the dispensation or the specific divine laws then in force. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are among those “men of old” listed in Hebrews chapter 11 who “obtained a good testimony” by their faith (Hebrews 11.2). They represent a wide spectrum of Biblical history and illustrate the fundamental truth that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11.6). Like the men and women of ages past, we too must come to God on the basis of humble, trusting, and submissive faith if we are to receive His favor. Because such faith is critical to our spiritual well-being and eternal welfare, it is imperative that we understand both its nature and its origins.

The same writer who proclaimed the necessity of faith (Hebrews 11.6, quoted above) also defined it for us. Faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1). In other words, it is that which persuades and confirms for us those realities which cannot be observed by natural means. While one cannot physically see God or heaven, he can be nonetheless confident in their existence “by faith.” One can boldly fix his hope on that which is unobservable by the natural eye because it is clearly seen with the spiritual eye. Faith is that which drives one to live in the prescribed way despite being unable to see the One who prescribes it. It is an absolute conviction about unseen spiritual realities that motivates one to live by the higher standards of God’s will.

While our faith must reside in that which cannot be seen, that does not mean that ours is to be a blind faith or an ignorant acceptance, as some falsely charge. Instead

God, the One who demands our faith, has provided evidence for our examination, upon which we can then build that faith. He has given that which we can see to persuade us regarding the greater realities behind it all that we cannot see. For that purpose, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...” (Psalm 19.1-4). In other words, the honest person can observe the magnificence of our world and conclude that a superior creative power has designed and orchestrated it all. So compelling is the evidence provided that men who would deny God’s existence and power are “without excuse” (Romans 1.20).

But while we can know of God’s greatness and conclude our weakness by observing His creative work which surrounds us, we can only learn of His expectations for us as He reveals those to us. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19.7-8). Not only has He made Himself known in creation, but also through the revelation of His word. Our faith in Him and in His will come with our knowledge of His word. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10.17). Indeed, every account of conversion to Christ recorded in the book of Acts involves the preaching of the word (Acts 2.37; 8.12; 14.1; 15.7; 16.32; 18.8; cf. Mark 16.15-16). If one cannot please God without faith, and one cannot have faith without knowledge of God’s word, then one must know God’s word in order to please Him. Ignorant or blind faith is not what God expects or desires.

Contrary to much of the world’s religious teaching, Biblical faith is not an “irresistible grace,” the result of “praying through,” or a miraculous / mysterious “gift” infused into one’s heart by God. Instead, the Bible teaches that it is the natural byproduct of an honest examination of the evidence, both in creation and in the revelation of Scripture, which motivates one to serve the One to Whom the evidence points. It is this kind of informed, trusting, and obedient faith with which one can please God, obtain His favor, and receive His rewards. This is faith “to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10.39).