

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONGOING FAITH

Trusting God in Three Vital Areas

by Guy Moore

It is probably safe to say that the majority of us believe that faith in Christ's gracious atoning work for our sins on the cross and His subsequent resurrection are necessary for salvation. (1Cor. 15:3ff) This has often been referred to as "saving faith." However, consider the possibility that faith is to be a vibrant ongoing dynamic in our lives.

I talk to so many individuals that know faith alone in Christ has saved them, but then they are disillusioned as they try as hard as they can to live out God's commands and are met with continual failure. (see Rom.7) Will power and a dogged determination to do the right thing won't cut it!

In Hebrews 11:1, the writer reveals that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." But what is the meaning of the word "faith" as we see it used here and so often mentioned in the rest of the New Testament? The Greek word for faith is PISTIS which means to trust in, to have confidence in and to believe in. A life under grace is to be motivated not only by God's unconditional love for us, our unconditional love for others, and gratitude to God, but also by an ever-active faith in God's Word and in God Himself to work out His good will and purpose in us. (Phil. 2:13)

In other words, although we need to trust Jesus only once for salvation, we must live our lives as God's children in the same way that we began, that is, by grace through faith.

The Apostle Paul urges us in Colossians 2:6:

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."

We received Christ by grace through faith and we are to walk step-by-step, moment-by-moment by grace through faith. Our lives are to be characterized by an ongoing faith and confidence in God that He will make real in our experience the many promises that He has given to us.

In Hebrews 11:6 we are told that without faith it is impossible to please God, and in Romans 14:23, Paul declares that whatever is not prompted by faith is sin. It is clear from these passages and many others that we must continually trust God to work in us and to do for us what we are powerless to do for ourselves.

Faith and Our Struggle With Sin

For example, with regard to our sins, not only are we to trust God that He has indeed forgiven us of all our transgressions, (Col. 1:14, 2:13-14) but we are also to exercise faith in the fact that we no longer have to be under sin's control. (Col. 3:5, Rom. 6:11-14) God asks us to believe that we are no longer under sin's dominion and that His indwelling Holy Spirit can empower us to act as His obedient children because we know that's who He has made us to be. (1Pet. 1:14) The issue is, will we believe it and respond?

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Recently, I found myself in a particularly painful family situation. I became angry and my heart became embittered against one of my relatives. I had a family member verbally attack the character of one of my siblings, but they refused to go to them to straighten out the situation. I found myself growing resentful and agitated over their lack of maturity, but I then began to stuff it all. It started affecting my sleep, my appetite and my ability to think clearly.

When the Lord began to convict me of my hard heart, I confessed my hurt, anger and disappointment. I knew that I had a choice. I could allow my bitterness to further control me *or* trust God to free me to love and forgive as He has loved and forgiven me. (Col. 3:12-14)

His Spirit began to soften me once again so that I was freed up to enter back into the situation, confront the individual, and speak the truth in a loving manner to all involved.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the firey ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.”

1Peter 4:12

Faith and Our Sufferings

Another area of our lives that requires ongoing faith is that of trials. Because all of us live in sin-cursed bodies in a sin-cursed world, we are assured by Christ himself that we will undergo various trials and temptations. (John 16:33) Since it is given to us not only to believe on Jesus Christ but to also suffer for His sake, (Phil. 1:39) we must endure trials as a testimony to others. (2Cor. 4:8-15)

I find it ironic that after all of these years I am still surprised by the “fiery trials” (1Pet. 4:12) I encounter especially when I think I am doing all the right things. And then Christ reminds me that since He suffered (and He did

do everything right!) then who do I think I am that I should be spared grief, hurt, misunderstanding and rejection?

Not too long ago, word got back to me that a fellow church member had said something hurtful regarding my character and I felt as though my heart had been judged unfairly. I laid awake at night thinking and anguishing over what to do. I finally confessed to God with brutal honesty the hurt and anger I felt.

God met me at my point of pain and began to slowly remind me of the truth that I belong to Him and that I have no control over what others think of me. He brought me to a place of peace where I no longer had to be controlled by the situation. When I choose to trust Him with my pain, He refines me and makes me look more like Christ and the whole process becomes an encouragement to others. People observe and rightly conclude “If he can make it with God’s help then maybe I can too!”

When we face trials, we need to believe that all things truly do work together for our good (Rom. 8:28) even though that is often difficult to see when we are in significant pain. Secondly, we must trust God to give us the sustaining grace we need to persevere. (1Cor. 10:13; 2Cor. 12:9-10) Third, we

need to have faith that the final outcome of all our sufferings is a cause to greatly rejoice. (James 1:2-4)



We need to constantly remind ourselves that this world is not our home and that our true citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20)

There is a day coming when God Himself will wipe away all of our tears and there will be an end to our grief and misery. (Rev.21: 4)

Faith and Our Service

The last area that we will look at that makes ongoing faith essential is that of our particular God-given ministry. Paul explains that before the foundation of the world God chose us and ordained a life of service for each one of us according to His divine plan.

(Eph.1:4-5, 2:8-10, 4:11-16) Our inherent longing for meaning and purpose and our desire to make an impact in this world is bound up with recognizing and accepting by faith that our ministry to others is ordained by God. All of us, not just clergy, are called to a specific ministry according to our spiritual gifts. We need to believe that God will indeed use us as we move boldly into the lives of our church family with His Spirit energizing whatever gifts He has graciously imparted to us.

“As we seek opportunities to minister to others, Paul reminds us that God will “fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power.”

2Thess. 1:11

God has gifted me with a passion and ability to encourage others from His Word, but with all my studies and degrees, I *feel* no more adequate to counsel now as I did when I started more than twenty years ago. However, this is another opportunity for me to trust God and watch Him work. For example, I had a struggling couple come to me whose problems seemed so complex and unresolvable that midway through our conversation I felt like tearing my hair out and throwing in the towel. I silently prayed to the Lord and asked Him

for His wisdom and insight. Slowly, His Spirit began to reveal to us all what needed to happen. I felt privileged to be used of Him as a part of the healing process in the life of this couple.

Scripture tells me that my adequacy is from God who has declared me adequate because of the Holy Spirit He has sent to dwell within me. There is nothing in this world that is as rewarding as being used of God to minister to others.

Where are we to find this kind of faith? From the divine side, our faith comes as a free gift from God. (Rom. 12:3; Gal. 5:22; 2Pet. 1:1) We are incapable of mustering up faith within ourselves, but we can trust God to work it in us. However, on the human side, faith is generated or produced by the Word of God: *“So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”* (Rom. 10:17)

As we study and meditate upon the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit works within our hearts to give us this divine ongoing faith motivation.

In conclusion, to live in the grace of God we need to remember that we only trust Christ once for salvation, but we need to keep on believing in Him regarding our struggle with sin, our suffering and our ministry to others. May our deepest cry ever be, *“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”* (Mark 9:24)

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