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“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

A Precious Faith

Central Truth: Faith produces Christian virtues.

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Topic: Faith: Of Believers; Salvation.

“Giving all diligence, add to your faith” (II Peter 1:5).

Faith is the foundation of all Christian experience. It is being certain of unseen realities, thereby giving substance to our hopes. It is so essential that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). No works, prayers, or sacrifices are accepted before God apart from faith in Him.

Faith is the beginning, the root, from which all spiritual growth develops. So in his list of virtues to be cultivated in the Christian's life, Peter urges, *“Add to your faith.”* Faith is essential, but it is not to be alone.

We can have no other virtues until we have faith. But having faith, we must develop the other virtues recommended in Holy Scripture. The purpose of this series of lessons is to encourage growth in the virtues of II Peter 1:5-7 and Galatians 5:22, 23. The place of faith in that growth process is indicated in the fourfold statement in Holy Scriptures that reads, *“The just shall live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2:4; see also Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

I. FAITH IS BASED ON THE NATURE OF GOD (Ephesians 2:4-7)

A. God is “rich in mercy” (verse 4). Mercy is an overflowing compassion for those who are weak and helpless. God's mercy is *“from everlasting to everlasting”* in its duration (Psalm 103:17), is *“great above the heavens”* in its scope (Psalm 108:4), is *“new every morning”* in its supply (Lamentations 3:23), is the *“delight”* of God in its exercise (Micah

7:18), and is saving in its benefits (Titus 3:5). You can trust God with fullest confidence since He is *“rich in mercy.”*

B. God has “great love” toward us (verse 4). He loves so intensely, so sincerely, and so completely that we can say, *“God is love”* (I John 4:8). Divine love has been called “the characteristic word of Christianity.” It is the deep and constant concern of God toward us, who are so unworthy, by which He commits himself to our temporal and eternal welfare. It is safe for us to trust God who loves us with an everlasting and unconditional love.

C. God has saved us by grace (verse 5). Grace is God's loving-kindness, His unmerited favor, which He has bestowed upon us totally apart from our achievements or merits. His grace is eternal and unconditional. It means that He is devoted to our good and is actively involved in bringing it to pass.

Faith is based on the nature of God. We can trust Him who is merciful, loving, and full of grace. God is kind in spite of our weakness, helpful in spite of our sins, and loving to each of us. Trust Him!

II. FAITH IS THE WAY OF SALVATION (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Ephesians 2:8, 9 is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. It sets forth clearly and concisely the divinely ordained way of salvation from sin and peace with God.

Faith lays hold of free grace. It accepts the completed work of God. It is a simple act of trust. It is not dependent upon any act of human merit. It brings salvation. That is the teaching of Ephesians 2:8, 9. Memorize that passage for the good of your soul and the assurance of your mind.

The Bible uses many expressions to describe the miracle of salvation. It is by believing, coming to Jesus, receiving Christ, confessing sin, repenting, etc. But faith underlies each of them. *“He that cometh to God must believe”* (Hebrews 11:6). All Bible teaching on how to receive salvation is bound up in the words, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”* (Acts 16:31). Those who believe in Jesus can know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Are you trusting Him alone for salvation and security?

III. FAITH ISSUES IN A SANCTIFIED LIFE (Ephesians 2:10)

God has made it possible for every Christian to live *“soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Titus 2:12). He did that by designing us and making us anew into what we are as Christians (Ephesians

2:10). We are His handiwork, His masterpieces. *“his workmanship.”* Moreover, we are *“created in Christ Jesus.”* Made new creatures and placed in Christ, we are able to live sanctified lives.

But God went a step further. He predestined us to live in the practice of good works. His eternal purpose was to prepare a new people who would live holy and helpful lives. He predestined, and we perform according to that divine plan.

Faith makes a difference in conduct. If we truly believe, we are miraculously changed. If we are divinely changed, we have a different lifestyle, one patterned after God our Father. To claim salvation and fail to live a new and improved lifestyle is to deny the very faith which one has professed. True faith issues in a changed life that is marked by good works. God says we are to *“walk”* in them, practice them, and be so employed in them that they become our lifestyle.

IV. FAITH CERTIFIES THE UNSEEN (Hebrews 11:1)

Hebrews 11:1 is the clearest definition of faith to be found in the Bible. It says that faith gives substance to our hopes by making us certain of realities we do not see. It is not a blind leap into the dark. Faith is based on knowledge and is never blind. It is confidence and trust which are based on the knowledge of facts. It is a confident assurance which rests on the solid ground of truth. It is evidence of conviction that what is not perceived by the five senses is as certain as what is made known by them. It is both the conviction and the proof of the reality of the unseen. Therefore, faith reaches beyond sight but not beyond knowledge.

One way to grow in faith is to know what the Bible says about God and His works. One will learn to say with conviction, “All I have seen teaches me to trust God for all I have not seen.” The more you know the truth of God, the more you can trust Him with assured faith. Faith makes certain those eternal realities we have not seen.

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:18).

V. FAITH ADVANCES BELIEVERS (Hebrews 11:2) In what way did the people of former times obtain a good report by faith (verse 2)? There are two possible interpretations of that statement.

1. The people of ancient times had witness borne to them and gained approval because of their faith. Faith affected their lives and made them

better. People (and God!) saw the difference that their faith made and bore witness of their excellent lifestyle.

2. The people of ancient times gave a good testimony through their faith. They are remembered today because of the witness they bore. Which is the ministry of faith in your life today? Both! You are to bear testimony by your faith. When you do, people will notice and bear testimony of your faith also. In both instances God will be glorified, for it is He whom we trust.

The faith of people who lived long ago made them worth remembering today. Your faith expressed today will make you worth remembering in the generations to come. Faith greatens a person. Keep on trusting God.

VI. FAITH UNDERSTANDS THE UNKNOWN (Hebrews 11:3)

One of the great conflicts between many modern scientists and theologians is in a discussion of origins. Where did the earth, the plants, the animals, and humans come from? The scientist who rejects the idea of God's involvement says that it all came by accident. The believing scientist and the theologian say that it all came by the plan and power of God. We call that the theory of evolution versus creation. Faith answers the question of origins.

How can faith help us understand something as unknown as the origin of persons and things? Faith makes us certain of realities we do not see!

There can be no "scientific proof" for either creation or evolution. For there to be such proof, it must be subject to being checked by testing over and over, with the same results being produced by each test. There has been only one creation. No one but God witnessed it, and it can never be repeated. So the evolutionist places faith in his theory of accidents, while the creationist places faith in his knowledge of God.

The Bible affirms a Creator (Genesis 1, 2; Colossians 1:16; John 1:3). A patterned universe confirms a plan behind its operation and a person who plans and performs. God is that person.

The possibility of an ordered system coming by an accidental combination of chemicals in a primeval swamp is about as great as the possibility of an unabridged dictionary being printed as the result of an explosion in a print shop. By faith we understand that God created the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them. Faith understands the unknown.

VII. FAITH APPLIES TO ALL AREAS OF LIFE (Hebrews 11:4)

Hebrews 11 might be called “God's Hall of Fame of Faith.” Approximately twenty people are called by name, and many others are referred to in groups (as “*the elders*” in verse 2 and “*the prophets*” in verse 32). Here is testimony that scores of people from all walks of life found faith valid.

Abel found faith operative in worship. Enoch found faith powerful in daily living. Noah found faith sufficient in times of crises. Abraham found faith effective in choosing a life's vocation. Sarah found faith powerful in the conception and birth of her son. Read through the chapter and see how so many found faith sufficient in so many different situations of life.

Faith works in war, daily living, life-threatening situations, at the door of death, when strength is exhausted, when trials would overwhelm, and in every other circumstance of life. Trust God, whatever your circumstance might be. He was faithful in the past; He is faithful in the present; He will be faithful in the future. It is always safe to trust Him.

VIII. FAITH ELEVATES THE BELIEVER (Hebrews 11:5, 6)

This faith chapter begins by saying that “*by it the elders obtained a good report*” and concludes by saying that “*these all . . . obtained a good report through faith*” (verses 2, 39). For the ancients, it was faith first, faith last, and faith all the way between.

If to “obtain a good report” means to have a good report borne to one, it is evident that a life of faith raises the believer to a higher plane. People of faith are respected in every generation. Their fellowship is sought. Their counsel is valued: Their lifestyle is followed.

Do you want to be a person of good influence? Then let your life be marked by faith — certainty concerning unseen realities. Apart from faith in God you cannot be the kind of person who makes a lasting influence for God and for good. Here is an assignment for this week. (1) Exercise your faith in God by trusting Him to work in your life. (2) Develop your faith in God by reading the Bible and trusting Him in trials. (3) Direct your faith in God. He is the object, so look to Him alone. (4) Record your faith in God. Keep a record of when and for what you trusted Him. Record how He moved on your behalf in response to your faith. (5) Memorize Hebrews 11:6. Remember that to trust God is the height of wisdom and to doubt Him is the extreme of foolishness. “*Add to your faith*” (II Peter 1:5).

Questions for discussion

1. How would you define faith?
2. How can you give diligence to add to your faith?
3. How does the nature of God encourage our faith in Him?
4. How is faith related to salvation from sin?
5. How is faith related to a life of good works?
6. How does faith relate to unseen realities?
7. How does faith explain the existence of the earth?
8. How can faith apply in all areas of life?
9. How can faith expand a person's influence for good?
10. How can you exercise your faith this week?