

CHAPTER X

AND NOW FAITH IS ...

THE BIBLICAL DEMAND: Only Faith Will Do!

It is one thing to know the truth but it is quite another to put the truth into practice. The desire to be a successful Christian is not enough. Nor is it sufficient to give an intellectual assent to the Scripture. The Biblical demand is quite clear - only faith will do! ... " *Without faith it is impossible to please Him ...* " (Hebrews 11:6).

Therefore, the issue is not this or that sin; it is not our money, nor our talent, nor our time, nor our work, nor is it even the various doctrines we accept. The issue is not our prayer life and its length; it is not our service for Christ and its amount; it is not our Bible study and its depth; it is not our sincerity and its transparency - **the issue is faith.**

What is this necessary ingredient which acts as a catalyst between knowledge and practice? What is it that God demands of me?

Faith will never be understood as long as it is considered to be, and investigated as, an abstract idea or an isolated virtue. Faith is inseparably related to genuine Christianity. While the term may be used in a great variety of ways, such as putting one's faith in a person, an instrument, or a medicine, in the Biblical sense faith is much more strictly defined. It is not enough to say that the person who believes in a false religion has faith. Of course he has faith, but it is condemned by the Bible as false. The Biblical Christian and the Buddhist both have faith, but the faith of the former is true and faith of the latter is spurious, even though his sincerity may be beyond reproach.

Biblical Christianity revolves around the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Biblical faith is inseparably related to correct belief and action regarding Jesus Christ.

Biblical Christianity is rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in history. Therefore, Biblical faith is inseparably related to correct belief and action regarding the atonement.

Biblical Christianity is based upon the revelation of God in the Scriptures. Therefore, Biblical faith is inseparably related to correct belief and action regarding the Bible.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful to ask about a definition of Biblical faith. While there are many facets to faith, a definition would include at least the following points: **"Faith is the response of the total person to God as a Person in loving submission, trust, and obedience; in and through the Person of Jesus Christ as the Revelation of God and Redeemer of mankind, who as the Sovereign Lord offers Himself to the believer, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, as his daily sufficiency"**.

THE BIBLICAL EXPLANATION (1): Faith Is A Decision To Respond Correctly To God.

Faith is not a feeling - but a decision. This is what is meant by the word "response" in the above definition. Faith is, therefore, a correct response to God. Unbelief and doubt are the opposite of faith. They are incorrect responses to God.

God has revealed Himself. What we choose to do with Him and His Word is very important. When we make a choice to obey the commandments of God and to claim His promises, we have made a decision. It is a correct

response to the God of the Word. It is faith. When we choose to disobey God through His commandments and to reject His promises, we have also made a decision, but it is an incorrect response to the God of the Word. It is doubt and unbelief.

In Hebrews 11 we are given a series of illustrations of faith. A number of individuals are described in many circumstances of life, all making a decision to respond harmoniously to God and His Word. Moses is a good example of such decision-making. In verses 24-28 there are five words which illustrate his response to God. These words are "refused," "choosing," "esteeming," "forsook," and "kept." Each indicates a decision on the part of Moses. God had revealed His will to Moses: he was not to stay in Egypt; he was to lead the Israelites into Canaan. These five words indicate how he responded to God by making the right decisions to obey God's Word. This is what the Bible means by "faith."

How the Christian feels about his faith and ability to live by faith has nothing to do with it. The all-important factor is his choice and decision.

Faith has three very clear characteristics. The first is that of **submission to God and His Word**. Without this necessary ingredient it is ridiculous for us to think we can make a correct decision of faith. Any lack of concern for the will of God and all decisions to disobey the Word of God not only bring a disruption of fellowship in the life of the Christian but make a decision of faith, in the area of his insubordination, impossible.

The second characteristic of faith is the **practice of obedience**. Genuine faith is a correct response to God and this is always inseparable from obedience in daily life. This is one reason why it is so difficult for us to live by faith when

we do not wish to obey God. It is absurd for us to try to exercise faith about a matter when we are apathetic about obeying God or when we have made the decision not to obey! This is part of the theme of Hebrews 11. Each illustration of faith in that chapter is also an illustration of obedience. Faith is not primarily a sense of dependency on God. It is a decision to submit to God through His Word and to put the Word of God into daily practice.

The third characteristic of faith is that of **trust**. This is also a necessary ingredient for Biblical faith. It is the inseparable companion to submission and the practice of obedience. When Moses made the decision to submit to the directive of God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and sought to obey God, he did so in trust. He trusted God to give him wisdom and strength to obey and also trusted God to make the journey possible. At the very least, this trust involved making the Israelites willing to go, dealing with Pharaoh and his armies, opening the Red Sea, and supplying food and water.

God expects us to trust Him. When we choose to obey His Word, and put that choice into daily obedience, God pledges Himself to make His will possible. Abraham expressed this trust in the words, "*And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform*" (Romans 4:21). This third characteristic of faith was also expressed by Paul. During the storm at sea he said, "*Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me*" (Acts 27:25).

God is worthy of our trust. He is the Truth. What He has promised He will fulfill and what He has commanded He will make possible.

THE BIBLICAL EXPLANATION (2): Faith Has A Person As Its Object - God.

Biblical faith is not to be confused with personal self-confidence, nor is it a trust in the goodness of man. We have not been told to put faith in the Church, nor in a group of religious ideas. We are to trust God.

Only God is the object of Biblical faith. In the hour of the disciples' greatest need, the Lord Jesus simply asked them to trust Him (John 14:1). The message of the Bible is unmistakable on this point. "*Abraham believed God ...*" (Romans 4:3). "*Have faith in God*" (Mark 11:22). It was the Lord Jesus Who said, "*And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?*" (John 8:46).

This simple truth can be an immeasurable help in the Christian life. Faith is not blind. It is not an ambiguous trust in some abstract entity. It is not a leap in the dark. God is the object of faith. Because of His revelation, God and His will can be known and acted upon (John 17:3). There may be times when God will ask us to trust Him without the benefit of inner assurance or compatible circumstances. This, undoubtedly, was true of Job (13:15) and Abraham (Romans 4:16-21). But even this is not "blind faith." These men believed God and His Word, in spite of the adverse circumstances. They are presented to us as examples.

This truth of having God as the object of faith includes one of the most encouraging facets of the Christian life. It is a cure for that nagging question which constantly plagues the serious Christian regarding the amount and the strength of his faith. When we face a difficult situation we often ask, "I wonder if I have enough faith to cope with this?" or, "Is my faith strong enough to endure?" The comforting factor in all of this is that such questions are irrelevant. The amount of faith is not the issue. When the Lord Jesus called the faith of the woman of Canaan "great," He was referring to the clear-cut decisions she had made and the persistence with

which she maintained them (Matthew 15:21-28). The issue is not how we feel about the amount of our faith; it is whether we will exercise faith! It is whether we will make the right decisions.

This is also true concerning the strength of faith. Since God is the object of faith, He is the source of faith's strength. The exhortation is, "*be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might*" (Ephesians 6:10). When Paul said, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13), he was including his ability to believe God. Abraham was commended by God for having a "strong" faith (Romans 4:19, 20). What is meant by this passage is that Abraham made the right decisions in regard to the revealed will of God and persisted in those decisions. The term "strong" is in contrast to the term "weak in faith" in verse 19. There Abraham is commended for not allowing adverse circumstances to hinder his response to the known will of God.

The strength of faith does not reside in the Christian. We may not use the excuse of weakness. When we state or imply, "I didn't have enough faith," or "My faith wasn't strong enough," we are simply blaming God for our failure or we are confessing our ignorance in understanding Biblical faith. When we want to make the right decision of faith and desire to practice the accompanying will of God, we will receive all the strength we need from God!

THE BIBLICAL EXPLANATION (3): Faith Has A Context - Love.

In Galatians 5:6, the Apostle Paul stated, "*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*" What does "avail" to bring the grace and power of God into our lives? By use of the term "*circumcision*" the Apostle Paul indicated that

all the legalism and ceremonialism of the Jewish Christians availed nothing. And by use of the word "*uncircumcision*" he specified the ecstatic emotional religious experiences of the Gentiles as also unavailing.

We must accept this frank evaluation. No amount of mere rule-keeping, Bible study, church attendance, Christian service, or emotional experience will "avail" in our lives - unless it is a genuine expression of faith and love.

The issue is again shown to be faith. And here we are told that the context of faith, that which makes faith "work," is love. Without love, according to the Apostle Paul, faith does not "work; it is "inactive."

Now we understand that the correct response to God has two clearly discernible aspects. The two sides to this response are faith and love. Both are necessary. One does not exist without the other. These two are often united in the Bible (I Corinthians 13:13; I Thessalonians 1:3; I Timothy 1:5).

What is this love which provides the necessary context for faith? It is love for God! To love God means to give Him His rightful place in our daily life. It is to recognize Him for Who He is and to live consistently in harmony with Him. This is the reason why love and obedience are always inseparably related in the Bible (John 14:15; I John 5:3).

The failure to love God genuinely is the most serious hindrance to faith in the life of all Christians. We cannot be unconcerned about the will of God and then expect to be able to claim the promises of God. Any and all failures to give God His rightful place strip us of the discernment and ability to make a decision of faith. Because of this truth, the terms "repent" and "confess" are often coupled with the word "believe" in the Bible. Before we can believe, sin - the result of lack of love - must be dealt with.

Faith cannot exist as a daily experience without the reality of love as a daily experience. Faith and love are mutually dependent. This is the answer to the question of why faith is necessary to please God (Hebrews 11:6) and yet love for God is the first commandment (Matthew 22:37).

When we choose to disobey God, by the sin of either commission or omission, we manifest our failure to love Him adequately. Such a choice will leave us without the ability to fellowship with God and to respond to Him by faith. The degree of loss is determined by the seriousness of the choice to disobey.

THE BIBLICAL EXPLANATION (4): Faith Has A Basis - The Scripture.

Faith is a decision to respond correctly to God. The content of that decision and response is determined by the Scripture. This is clearly seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The sacrifice which Abel offered had been specified by God as the only one acceptable. Abel's offering was a correct response to God's revelation. Noah built the ark in response to divine directives. Abraham left his homeland and traveled toward Palestine as a response to God's command. The Word of God was the basis of their faith.

In this way faith is rooted in the Scripture. We have been commanded to mix the Word of God with faith (Hebrews 4:1-3). We fulfill the commandment by the persistent effort to put the Word of God into practice in all areas of life as an expression of our love for God. Our failure to read, to study, and to understand the Scriptures will result in a serious handicap in the expression of our faith and the obedience which should follow. How can we obey God when we do not know His commandments? How can we claim His promises when we do not know their content? How can we believe when we do not know what to believe?

(Romans 10:14). *"So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

The first step, therefore, toward pleasing God in the expression of faith and love, is **an inquiry into the Word of God**. Since the Scripture is the basis of our faith, it is necessarily the basis of all of the other facets of our Christian life. Without an understanding of the Word and will of God, grace, peace, power and progress become an impossibility.

The importance of this truth is paramount. No amount of pious effort can be substituted for a simple understanding of the Bible. All efforts to make progress in the Christian life will be thwarted until serious steps are consistently and persistently taken, in becoming familiar with the basic message and themes of the Bible.

THE BIBLICAL EXHORTATION: The Steps In A Decision Of Faith.

Progress in the Christian life is usually a step by step process. This is particularly true in the area of sanctification. When we are led by the Holy Spirit to the recognition of some sin in our life, then it is important that we know what to do with that sin. One of the clearest statements in this regard is found in I John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* In order to mix this Word of God with faith (Hebrews 4:1-3), we must obey God - in a very personal and practical manner - and put the verse into practice.

The first step is to **confess the sin - as a sin!** If we are not willing to do this, there is no need to start praying. No amount of weeping, lamenting, and making of resolutions can take the place of a simple honest confession. When we have disobeyed God and acted out of harmony with His Word, we must in a very specific, pointed, sincere, thor-

ough, and honest way confess our sin for what it really is. We must bluntly name ourselves and our sin. If we have sinned through gossip or doubt or laziness or immorality, we must confess it as such. "Lord, I confess to You that I am a gossip and I have used my tongue to hurt my friend," would be a good way to begin. This confession is a decision, an enactment of faith.

The second step is to **forsake the sin**. This is also a decision. It is the only correct decision which we can make following an acknowledgment of sin. There is no other alternative. This also must be a sincere and honest choice in the presence of God. Any pretense here will destroy all hope of divine help. We must take a stand against our sin and then deliberately and consistently carry out our decision. When Augustine was 32 years old, he suddenly realized the reason he was not a Christian was due to his reluctance to forsake his sin. He confessed that from his early youth he had been praying, "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet." (*Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book VIII, Paragraph 17).

The third step is to **believe God's promise of forgiveness and cleansing**. We must face ourselves with the reality of God's Word and what this verse (I John 1:9) means today in a very personal and practical way. In the light of our sin, we must come to a clear understanding of what divine forgiveness and cleansing will mean in our lives. And then we must believe God and fully take Him at His Word.

The fourth step is to **receive Jesus Christ into our lives as the specific cleansing and enablement which our sin demands**. Jesus Christ is not only our Savior He is our Sanctification and Power (I Corinthians 1:24, 30). In our salvation we made a decision of faith in receiving Him into our lives as our Savior. He came and performed the work

of salvation. This initial step in the Christian life is spoken of in the Bible as the blueprint for how we are to progress in daily life (Colossians 2:6). Therefore, when we are in need of a specific cleansing and enablement, it is well to be exact in our decision of faith. If we need help in the area of gossip, it would be well to say, "Heavenly Father, having confessed my sin to You of being a gossip and having promised to forsake my sin entirely, I do now deliberately and in faith receive Jesus Christ into my life as my cleansing from gossip and as my enablement to live above this sin."

The fifth step is to **take God at His Word and live accordingly**. He has promised to forgive us and to cleanse us from our sin when we genuinely confess. Having confessed our sin as an act of faith, we must now rely upon the faithfulness and justice of God. If we have confessed, we are forgiven and we have been cleansed. When temptation comes, as it surely will, we must simply maintain our decision of faith, believing that the sin has already been dealt with, and refuse the temptation. As long as we continue this dependence on God and genuinely desire to be free from that sin, we will have the continuing grace and power of God to be free (John 8:32, 36). The promise of God is clear. He has said that if we respond to Him obediently in faith and love, He will come and work in us by His grace and power (Romans 6:16-18; Philipians 2:12, 13; I Peter 1:22).

One more thought must be considered here. Many times I John 1:9 does not work in our life because we only confess the manifestation of our sin and do not include its root! When you sin, stop and ask the question, "Why am I doing this? What has prompted me to sin in this way? What am I expecting to get out of this sin?" Such questions may uncover the root of the sin manifested in some sinful thought and action. To be set free, we must confess our sin - root and all.

This definition of faith as has been described in this chapter is summarized in Diagram 15.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS: Accept The Truth - Faith Is Not A Feeling But A Decision! deliberately Choose To Respond To God. honestly Surrender To God And His Word, Sincerely Face Your Need, And Make The Correct Decision Of Obedience In Complete Trust.

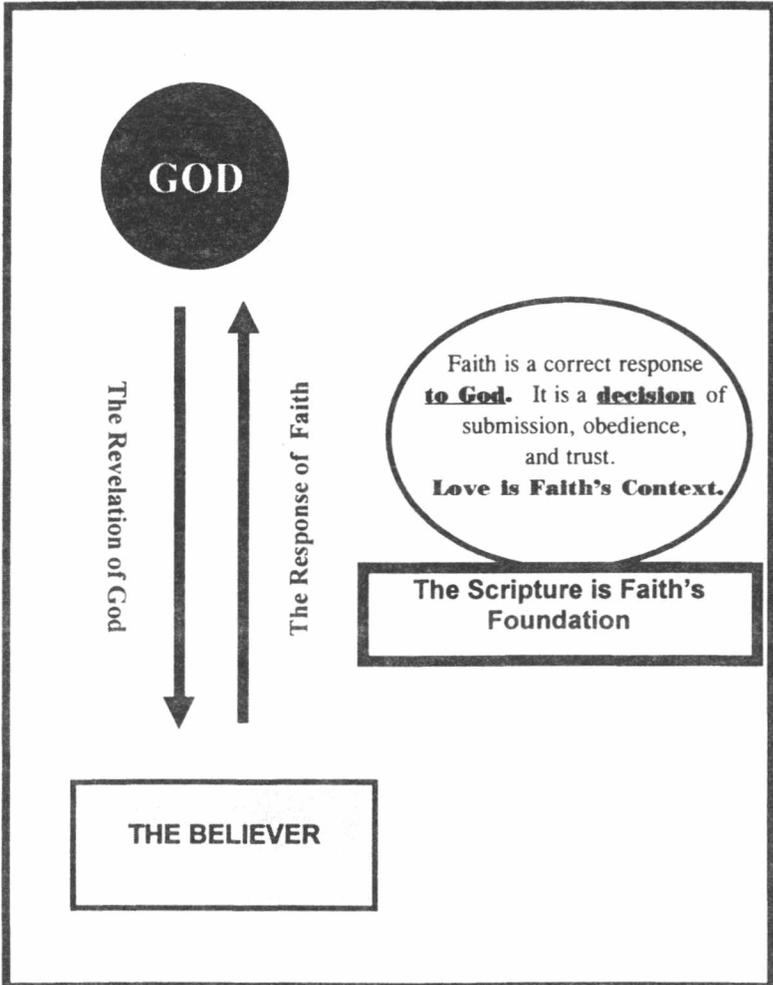


Diagram 15: The Believer responding to God in Faith