

Characteristics Of Real Faith

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A boy who was asked to define faith responded, "Faith is believing something you know isn't true."

Of course, the young lad's definition of faith is about as far from the truth as one can get. Yet many people regard faith just that way. "Blind faith" it is called.

Indeed, beliefs that have emerged from the human mind without valid evidence to support them can be described as "blind faith."

A visionary youth claims to have received a revelation from an angel, and millions follow his system.

A guru promises peace and fulfillment; and because a little quiet meditation brings a sense of relaxation, multitudes assume they are experiencing genuine spirituality.

Rejecting the final authority of the Bible, a woman emerges with a hodge-podge of metaphysical speculations, and sensitive but self-sufficient folk find the appeal to their pride of do-it-yourself "salvation" psychologically and emotionally irresistible.

On it goes: the procession of religions and spiritual speculations based on "blind faith," with no more substance than the shimmering mirage in the desert that beckons the poor thirsty soul by its empty promises.

By contrast, the term "blind faith" cannot in truth be applied to the Christian revelation. *The faith of the gospel is based on fact.* It is not blind; on the contrary, it is most reasonable. It is exactly the faith demanded by the facts.

Because the facts themselves are not generally seen, belief in them is called faith. Yet the *evidences* of the facts are clear and compelling to the honest mind.

These evidences are of two kinds: determining and resulting. Determining evidences are those revelatory acts of God that establish the truth (*e.g.*, creation, the Scriptures, the resurrection of Jesus Christ). These were sovereign works of God and were not done in response to human faith.

Resulting evidences are the observable facts and life events that happen in response to faith in the true and living God who has revealed Himself (e.g., miracles, answered prayer, Christian experiences).

Resulting evidences are not the *basis* of true faith. They are the products of the power of God that is activated in response to faith—a faith based on God's sovereign self-revelation.

In other words, we believe God not because we see miracles. We see miracles because we believe God—on the basis of His self-revelation. Seeing does not necessarily produce believing; rather, believing produces seeing.

At the tomb of Lazarus Jesus reminded Martha, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Later, after His resurrection, Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Although answered prayer validates and strengthens faith, faith is not based on answered prayer. Faith is based on the *God* who answers prayer.

In the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Bible presents real-life examples of the characteristics of real faith. It tells us about faith not by abstract analysis but by demonstrating faith in the lives of men and women of faith.

These examples demonstrate that faith is not essentially a feeling (although faith does produce feeling, as Romans 15:13 tells us: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit").

Faith is a choice, an act of the will. It is a deliberate, conscious choice to place confidence in God and His word. Unbelief is a sin because it is a deliberate, conscious choice to withhold confidence from God and His word.

Faith is a virtue, a voluntary choice to do something we are commanded and morally obligated to do ("Have faith in God"—Mark 11:22).

Faith is the receiving of the truth, the embracing of the truth, the commitment of oneself to the truth and to the God of truth.

Because choices result in action (and faith is a choice), *faith results in action*.

That is why faith without works is dead (James 2:17). With no action (where action is possible and called for) there is no commitment. With no commitment there is no faith.

This why in Hebrews chapter eleven we see faith in action, and in the actions we see demonstrated some of the characteristics of real faith. Let us look briefly at some of them.

In verse three we read, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

How the physical, material universe came into existence is a question beyond science. It is a matter of faith, and real faith understands that it happened by the word of God. On this subject, it is the only faith that is supported by reason and the evidence. *Something cannot come out of nothing by itself*. And what exists bears the unmistakable evidence of the magnitude of the intelligence and power of the only one and self-revealing God.

Verse four says that Abel offered to God "a more excellent sacrifice," a blood sacrifice. True faith always approaches God by the "more excellent sacrifice," the blood of Jesus.

In verse five we are informed that by faith Enoch was translated because he pleased God. There is no faith without a life that pleases God, and only a life of obedient faith pleases God.

Verse six says that diligence in seeking God is one of the characteristics of real faith. God is not a vending machine. We do not always get the answer the moment we pray. God is working out His purpose in us, and He works in a process of time. When we seek God diligently, we put ourselves in a position and an attitude that opens us up for Him to do something in us and for us that He has purposed to do.

So, don't give up. Demonstrate to God that you mean business. God's answer is yours, and it will come in His way and time. And when the answer comes, you could discover that in the process of diligently seeking Him you received something even more valuable than the thing itself for which you were praying. For one thing, you received a closer relationship with your heavenly Father.

Verse seven says that by faith Noah prepared an ark. Faith prepares for the answer. Make room for the blessing.

Verse eight testifies that by faith Abraham obeyed. "And he went out, not knowing where he was going." Faith obeys. Faith and obedience cannot be separated. Faith is obedient confidence and confident obedience.

Faith is a full surrender to the God of truth and therefore to the whole truth. Faith cannot take the promises of God seriously while ignoring His instructions. Faith takes God seriously in *everything* He has spoken, in His precepts as well as in His promises. A faith that refuses to obey is no faith at all. If it disregards the truth in practice, it is dead.

Faith obeys the will of God without foreseeing all the consequences of its trusting commitment. It sees the path of truth and obligation and plants its feet firmly in it. Abraham did not know exactly where he was headed, but he knew he was on the right road.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac,..." (Verse 17). Of course, this was not the only time Abraham was tested, but it was probably his outstanding trial.

Here was the situation. God had promised to make Abraham a father of many nations and to bless all nations through his seed. This was to happen through a line descending from Isaac. *Then God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering.*

Most people in Abraham's situation would immediately become confused, their faith crushed. "Has God changed His mind? Has He gone back on His word? Can it be that the immutable, changeless God has failed His promises? Is the Holy One commanding me to do something completely contrary to His character?"

Not so Abraham. The apparent contradictions seemed irreconcilable, the questions unanswerable. The whole thing did not compute; yet there is no record that Abraham's faith faltered or that he even hesitated. Abraham proceeded without question or complaint.

Why? *Because Abraham knew the God he served.* He had settled some things in his mind and heart about the character of God. God is love. God is just. God is holy. God is faithful. God knows what He is doing and why He is doing it.

He knew that if he went ahead and sacrificed Isaac (which God did not permit him to do), the God with whom he had walked all those years could take that pile of charred bones and ashes and still fulfill every promise He had made, even if it took raising Isaac from the ashes!

If our faith is to be steadfast and victorious, we must settle the same things in our own minds and hearts. We must place absolute confidence in the character of God. We all go through

circumstances that we do not understand. We don't know why God allows this or that. In such times we can either conclude that God failed and charge Him with folly, or we can confess His faithfulness and declare, "I will hold to God's unchanging hand and trust in Him though I don't understand!"

This kind of victorious, overcoming faith is not gained overnight. It is not built by wishy-washy, careless, half-hearted Christian living, by being "saved one day and backslidden the next." No, a thousand times, no! It comes only by walking consistently and faithfully with God day in and day out, year after year.

And then there was Moses. We read about him in verses twenty three through twenty eight.

Moses exemplified another essential characteristic of real faith—a *proper sense of eternal values*.

Anyone who thinks that he or she has opportunities to "live it up" should take a look at Moses. In the court of Egypt, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses had every means and opportunity at his disposal to achieve the ultimate in self-indulgence. But Moses took a look at the whole thing and made a firm, once-and-for-all value decision. He said in effect, "I don't care what Egypt has to offer. I choose the reproach of Christ. That's worth more than all the treasures and pleasures of Egypt!"

Real faith makes the right eternal value decision. If we are going to be stable, overcoming Christians, we must settle in our hearts once and for all that *Jesus Christ is worth more than the whole world*, and live accordingly!

"And what more shall I say...?" (verse 32). Onward marches the parade of the heroes of faith, until we come to the end of chapter eleven.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has not finished his inspired message. When we read chapter eleven, we must tie it in with the first part of chapter twelve: "Therefore we also..."

Yes, *we also*. The grandstand is full. The champions of faith are in the seats of honor. Now it is our turn to run the race. Let us lay aside every weight, every hindrance to our testimony, everything that keeps us from being our best for God, and especially the sin that so easily ensnares and entangles us, and run patiently the race that is set before every one of us.

And remember: always look to Jesus. He crossed the finish line victoriously at Calvary, and now He is "seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2).

He is the righteous Judge who will meet us at the finish line and reward us with "the crown of righteousness" and escort us to sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

So keep your eyes on Jesus. We might be nearer the finish line than we realize.