

MINI STUDY Living by FAITH

The Good News, in conjunction with the Correspondence Course Department, presents brief monthly excursions into the study of the Bible, delving into topics relevant to the development and increased understanding of future members of the God Family. Bible study is one means by which Christians are renewed daily (II Cor. 4:16), so let's refresh ourselves with more of the precious truths of God's Word!

Instructions: The format of these ministudies is similar to that of the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course. Look up and read in your Bible the scripture references given in answer to the questions. Comments following the questions elaborate on the scriptures just read. That's all there is to it! (These studies are based on the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated.)

What is faith? Exactly what kind of faith do we need to please God - - to live the obedient, overcoming Christian life outlined in the Bible and be born as glorified son,, of God in the ruling Family of God?

First, we must understand that faith is not the power of positive thinking - trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. In other words, trying to improve and overcome by your own strength alone.

Many people also make the mistake of confusing faith with emotions. They try to work up faith, which to them means an emotional feeling. These feelings are not the evidence of having faith. They are in the class of what can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled or felt - in other words, they're of the flesh.

Faith is a spiritual matter --- not physical! Let's understand God's definition of the kind of faith required for salvation, and how we may receive and retain it.

1. Are Spirit-begotten Christians to walk -live their lives -- try faith? II Cor. 5:7; Rom. 1:17.

2. Do they seek and look forward to obtaining promises and rewards that are not seen? Col. 3:1-2. Did Paul elsewhere verify the fact that

Christians seek after the real, but unseen eternal rewards and promises of God? II Cor. 4:18.

3. Do the above scriptures confirm God's definition of faith found in Hebrews 11:1?

Faith is the "substance" - more accurately the assurance or confidence - "of things hoped for." Before you receive what you hope for, you already have it in substance, and that substance - that assurance or confidence that you shall possess it - is faith! Faith is your evidence that you shall have what you do not yet see.

4. Is it possible to please God without faith? Heb. 11:6.

As this verse explains, faith toward God is expressed in absolute recognition that God exists and that He blesses us both in this life and in the life to come - as long as we sincerely serve and obey Him. This faith is acquired. You cannot cause yourself to have that kind of faith through autosuggestion! (More about acquiring this faith later.)

5. Must obedience to God and other good works clearly accompany one's faith in order to make it alive and acceptable to God? Read James 2, verses 14-26.

6. How does one demonstrate his faith? Verse 18. What does one's faith become if it is not accompanied by works? Verses 17, 20, 26.

Some have let a dead faith creep into their lives. Faith to them has become a mere belief in Christ's existence and His sacrifice for the sins of mankind. They have lost sight of the fact that there is something God requires them to do!

We dare not allow ourselves to drift into a passive condition. We are not excused from keeping God's commandments (Matt. 19:17-19) - from striving to live a righteous life (Matt. 5:48). We're not excused from overcoming, growing in spiritual character and enduring in spite of opposition, persecution, trial and test unto the end. God expects us to actually do these things in order to inherit eternal life.

7. Did Noah express living faith when he obeyed God by building the ark He had commanded? Heb. 11:7. Was there any physical evidence that a flood would come? Same verse.

MINI STUDY

(Notice the words, "things not seen as yet.")

Noah had a trust and confidence in the invisible God to perform what He had promised. And he proved his faith by his works! Faith and obedience went hand in hand to produce living faith,

8. Did God prove righteous Abraham to be faithful or full of faith? Neh. 9:7-8. What did Abraham do to prove his faith? Gen. 22:1-14; Jas. 2:21-23.

God tested Abraham's willingness to obey in and through faith. Abraham had the kind of faithful obedience God requires of all Christians. But what a sad lack of that kind of living faith there is today! All too many do not believe God will keep His promises. Consequently they don't really want to obey Him.

One of the most thrilling examples of living faith is that of Daniel's three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Recall that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had erected a great golden image and ordered everyone to worship his idol at certain designated times. Those who refused were to be thrown alive into a fiery furnace (Dan. 3:1-6).

9. What did Nebuchadnezzar do when informed by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego that they would not worship his golden idol? Dan. 3:18-23.

What would you have done had you been in their place? Would you have said, "Well, I have to bow down to this image - I have to do it or be killed"? And perhaps you may have excused yourself thus, "I don't think God would be fair if He punished me for bowing down before this idol, when He knows I am forced to do it."

Yes, it's easy to use human reasoning to excuse disobedience to God. But God isn't looking for chances to punish us, but rather for opportunities to save us through faith in His power!

These three young men knew that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). By faith they knew that God makes it possible for us to obey Him.

Notice that God allowed them to go beyond the point of human help. No one could help now, but God. He had to see that they would not only be willing to say they would

go all the way, but He allowed them to go all the way before He saved them from the trial. He expected them to go that one step further - to back up their words by their actions.

10. To his amazement, what did the king find when he looked into the furnace? Verses 24-25. What did Nebuchadnezzar say to the three men as they and one "like the Son of God" walked around in the midst of the fire? Verses 26-28. (Notice the words, "delivered his servants that trusted in Him" in verse 28).

This is an astounding example of living faith! A faith that trusted God to make it possible to obey His law!

God tells us through Paul that He will never test us beyond what we are able to bear (I Cor. 10:13). Yet it would seem that if anybody ever came to the breaking point, these men did! But they never even broached their breaking point in this trial because they had absolute faith in God. And the God they faithfully obeyed did intervene to save them!

Let's understand now exactly how it is possible for us to have the living faith necessary to please God.

11. Is the faith through which we receive salvation a gift from God? Eph. 2:8. Is this faith an attribute of the Holy Spirit that all true Christians must possess? Gal. 5:22. Is this faith in reality the faith of Jesus Christ? Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:22.

12. Did Paul plainly state that Christ lived in him? Gal. 2:20. How did Christ live in him? Phil. 2:5; Rom. 8:9-10. Then did Paul live by the very faith of Christ? Notice Galatians 2:20 once again.

Paul didn't live by his own faith. Jesus Christ dwelt in Paul through the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God from Christ implanted in Paul's mind the same kind of faith that can be in your mind! That faith - the very faith of Jesus Christ - will enable you to live a righteous life of obedience to God as did the apostle Paul and all of the righteous men and women of God.

If we were able, of ourselves, to supply the faith to obey God, we would earn our own salvation. It would be the result of self-righteousnesses that are as "filthy rags" to God (Isa. 64:6).

But the above scriptures speak only of the faith of Christ. Yes, Christ's faith -- not your faith. Jesus had living, active, dynamic faith - God's faith! And Christ in us imparts His own strong faith to you and me that trusts God to make our spiritual obedience possible!

13. Since our receiving of God's promises hinges on the faith of Jesus Christ at work in our lives; how do we assure our continued receipt of the Holy Spirit and the faith of Jesus Christ? Acts 5:32; Rom. 12:1-2. Is this how Paul retained the faith of Christ? Gal. 2:20.

It is by yielding to God, and asking Him daily in earnest, persevering prayer to give us the faith of Christ to trust and obey Him that we shall indeed have it. - Prepared by Richard H Sedlaciak