

Faith of the Heart

Man cannot by his own strength believe. The apostle says: “for all men have not faith (2 Thess. 3:2). Faith is a gift of God; it is God’s work in us. Jesus was once asked, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? He then answered, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28, 29). The apostle also says: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake? (Phil. 1:29).

How is faith received and what effect does it have? Paul writes to the Thessalonians that, “knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake? (1 Thess. 1:4,5).

“So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10).

The first and most precious blessing of faith is the forgiveness of sins, whereby we receive the Holy Spirit and the righteousness, or holiness of Christ. For this reason, God says: “Be ye holy as I am holy.” It is difficult for a person to believe that though sinful, one can be holy as God. Here we see the two portions, of which the apostle says, one portion is earthly, and the other like the Lord of Heaven himself.

Carnal Wisdom and God’s Wisdom

Because the natural mind or carnal wisdom belongs to our earthly part, it cannot be used to comprehend faith. An unbelieving person easily may thin: “After I comprehend spiritual matters, I will repent and will want to believe.” But the apostle says: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). He also says: “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Cor. 2:18). How can this happen to a person who considers himself to be wise?

One with an awakened conscience realizes his foolishness; with a sinful and ungodly life, he has drawn God’s wrath on himself. At this point, the miraculous faith that God gives to the remorseful sinner comes to help. Concerning this faith, the apostle says: He that “believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).

Foundation Received by Faith and Correct Understanding

Through repentance and the absolution from sin, one receives a foundation which stands through life and death. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

What are these things not seen? We certainly have not seen Jesus in human form, although He said He would be with His own to the end of the world. We have not seen angels, although the Bible confirms that they are serving spirits, sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. Perhaps, though, you have experienced how they have served you. We have not seen heaven, which we hope to reach one day, though, as Peter says: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious? (1Pet. 2:3). We are able to feel, in part, that happiness awaiting in heaven. An unbeliever does not see the preciousness of God’s kingdom here on earth

unless, as Jesus told Nicodemus, he receives the grace of rebirth. Even though we do not see faith with the natural eyes and do not comprehend it with our carnal minds, we nevertheless trust in it.

How have we received this confidence? It results because we have received the Holy Spirit, which has opened our understanding of the written Word of God. The same spirit of God testifies, with our spirit that we are translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear son. Peter writes that God through trials purifies the gold of faith. He also encouraged the believers of his time in faith, even though they had not seen Jesus here on earth: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8,9).

Caring for the Life of Faith

Jesus said: "And what I say unto you I say unto all "Watch" (Mark 13:37). If one does not watch, it can happen as it did to a minister of the Sardis congregation in John's Revelation. He was a Christian by name but was spiritually dead-only the outward Christian customs remained. It is therefore important that we hear God's spoken Word, for the gospel is also the power of God for remaining in faith. Prayer, the direct conversation with God, is also important. Singing songs and hymns is also important; the apostle says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19).

Paul instructs that keeping faith and good conscience is an important matter. James also speaks about taking care of the conscience when one has fallen into sin and the conscience becomes troubled. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). When we receive the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name and blood, the troubled conscience is healed and again becomes happy. Reading the Bible and other Christian literature also strengthens our faith. The God-given holy sacraments also strengthen us.

The Fruits of Faith

The most precious fruit of faith is love toward God and toward believing brothers and sisters. Brotherly love is often in danger of breaking down between older, as well as young believers. If a person offends a brother or sister, there is reason to repent and to ask for forgiveness from the offended one. In this way, brotherly love is preserved and everyone feels that God's kingdom truly is their comforting spiritual home.