



The Lost Foundations – Faith Towards God

Introduction

The elementary principles are foundations; and nothing is more foundational to Christianity than faith towards God. Of the six elementary principles, faith towards God is probably the most commonly taught. Consequently, you may be tempted to take a pass on this one.

So, before you decide to do that, let me suggest that foundation inspections are always good. The worse thing that can happen is you find out you have at least one principle covered. On the other hand, there may be something here that connects a couple of dots for you. Or, you may find a new way to explain this principle to those you are discipling. That is my hope and prayer.

The way the writer of Hebrews phrased this principle is interesting to me. Why not “faith in God”? Isn’t that the way we most often connect our faith and God?

The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews to use the word “towards”. This will be key to our gaining a full understanding of the principle. But, before we go there, let’s make sure we understand the meaning of “faith”.

What is Faith?

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

This is one of the richest verses in all of Scripture – God’s description of faith. In order to fully understand it, we must consider the words God has chosen. As we do so, let’s remember that this principle is elementary. No matter how complex it may seem to us, it is considered simple for those who have decided to follow Jesus.

Faith (*pistis*): Conviction of the truth of anything, belief. *Outline of Biblical Usage; Blueletterbible.org*

Substance (*hypostasis*): A setting or placing under, thing put under, substructure, foundation; that which has foundation, is firm; that which has actual existence, a substance, a real being; the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing; the steadfastness of mind, firmness, courage, resolution, confidence, firm trust, assurance. *Outline of Biblical Usage; Blueletterbible.org*

Things hoped for (*elpizō*): To hope; in a religious sense, to wait for salvation with joy and full confidence; hopefully; to trust in. *Outline of Biblical Usage; Blueletterbible.org*

Evidence (*elegchos*): A proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested; conviction. *Outline of Biblical Usage; Blueletterbible.org*

Putting it all together, faith is the conviction of truth, which has foundation on the substantial quality and nature of God; resulting in a steadfastness of mind, courage and assurance; to hope and wait for salvation with joy and full confidence. As such, it is the proof and test of things we cannot see.

Admittedly, this is quite an involved definition. It has to be! Even in its most elementary form, faith is more to us than a word; more than the Christian clichés we wrap around it.

When we think of faith – and use it to describe something we “have” – we should always associate it with conviction, steadfastness, courage, and proof. We should recognize that it includes waiting with joy and full confidence for the things of God that we cannot see.

Faith is more than a feeling; more than a decision. The LORD is its foundation. It is effectual to our becoming the people of God. It is the proof and test of the supernatural. Our faith should be considered often – with joy, confidence and conviction.

And so, let me ask you: Do you have the faith described here? If you are like me, you are still in process. Yes, that's right: Having faith is a process. It is something developed in us through exercise; something we learn to apply more continuously – and to greater affect – as we “grow in our faith”.

For me, knowing I am in process is a relief and an encouragement. In essence, all who are followers of Jesus Christ are growing in their faith towards God. The direction we are growing is important.

Faith Towards God

People have faith in many things, most of them gods of another kind. Some have faith that their team will make the playoffs; or faith in a particular presidential candidate. People of “other faiths” believe in Allah, Buddha and thousands of other deities. Society works hard to train us to have faith in ourselves.

Obviously, faith alone is not enough. The object of our faith is critical.

Similarly, Christian faith can be misdirected. Some Christians have faith in their faith; that it will save them. Others have faith in their Christian Leaders; that they will lead them into salvation. This is faith in the wrong direction.

Faith in faith, and faith in leaders, is not enough.

Jesus told the disciples, “Have faith in God.” So why not the writer of Hebrews? As best as I can tell, this is not a matter of translation.

Faith in God is important faith. But, is there more? The Holy Spirit inspired the use of the word “towards” to encourage and convict us.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Deuteronomy 4:23-24

God's jealousy for His children cannot be overstated. Let's not be deceived: He is not willing to share the pleasure of our faith with anything or anyone. Teams, politicians, leaders, etc. are the carved images of our day. Faith towards the things of this world is faith away from God.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

Our faith and God's pleasure are bound together for eternity. This is the essence of faith towards God: The utter dependence on Him for all that is required for our faith to come alive in our relationship with Him. It is surrendering to His work; trusting Him to know and do what is best.

This life of full faith towards God is His reasonable expectation. Conversely, it is unreasonable for us to expect His reward if we do not have faith fully towards Him.

God bless you with wisdom and courage to put away all other faiths. As you do so, you will discover yourself in motion – in two particular ways. First, you will be turning your attention more towards God.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-3

As you turn your attention (i.e., your mind set), a particularly wonderful thing begins to happen.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2Corinthians 3:18

Faith towards God is the prerequisite condition for our transformation into the image of the glory of the Lord. For me, this has been the most exciting discovering in this lesson. I just love it when an elementary principle opens a door into the mysteries of the kingdom of God!

The second way faith towards God moves us is in the direction – and the way – He would have us go. Here are a few passages that come immediately to mind.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

God has prepared good works for us to walk in. He has a journey in mind – an adventure. Notice the connection here to the lesson on repentance from dead works. Our journey will take us from dead works to God's good works.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Galatians 5:16

The Holy Spirit is our adventure guide. No one knows the things of God like the Spirit of God – including the good works we are to walk in.

Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Mark 1:17

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." John 20:21

Jesus calls us to follow Him into the same mission His Father gave Him. He has promised to lead us out, and to make us become fishers of men along the way. Our part in to turn towards Him and the Father (they are one), listen to their command, and obey.

With every command there will be the faith that works both in us, and out of us. The order is important; for we must be made for the mission – a very exciting proposition.

Faith's Work in the Believer

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Faith is the substance by which we appropriate the grace of God that saves us. Faith itself is a gift of God. It is not something that we generate within ourselves. God gives us the substance that draws us towards Him.

However, we must ask ourselves: How many evangelistic crusades, revivals, and worship services are now focused on "working up faith" in the seeker? This is a dangerous and soulish deception. Faith comes from one source.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4: 4

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

Faith comes (as a gift to those who have ears to hear) by the word of God. Every word that proceeds from God is for our life of faith. This “word” is *rhēma*: that which is or has been uttered by the living voice of God. God takes it upon Himself to apportion a measure of faith to each of His children – for each word that He gives.

Furthermore, that measure of faith will accomplish what He intends.

*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11*

This brings us to the question: What does God intend for faith to accomplish in us? What is the grace of salvation that is appropriated through faith?

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:10

Faith produces righteousness in the believer. Faith moves us towards a right relationship with God.

It is important to recognize that, though they are closely related, righteousness and salvation are not the same thing. Righteousness is “[the] state of him who is as he ought to be, the condition acceptable to God; integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling and acting” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

Righteousness is something we become (2Corinthians 5:21) through the working of faith. It is encouraging to know that the word of God, regarding our relationship with Him, will accomplish what pleases Him.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:13-14

Here we find another great work of faith in the believer: God’s promise of the Holy Spirit is received through faith. What promise? Jesus said it best:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8

The promise of the Holy Spirit is the power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth; witnesses of the power of God unto salvation, and good works. This brings us to the second working of faith.

Faith’s Working Out from the Believer

Much has already been covered, in previous lessons, regarding the work of faith (i.e., good works). So, let me simply touch on a few critical points.

Limiting faith to a decision that gets us a ticket to heaven jeopardizes even that narrow, self-centered purpose; for that faith will die if it is not accompanied by good works (James 2:17). Faith that is dead is not capable of appropriating the grace of God that saves us.

Losing the connection between faith and works has had devastating consequences on the Western church. It is a shame that the church has so divided itself over something Jesus, and the New Testament writers, never separated. Check out the parable of the sheep and goats for a great example.

What has happened to us?

It has become man's way, in the Age of Reason, to understand something by breaking it down into its component parts; and then analyzing the parts separately. This is not God's way!!

Faith and works cannot be understood apart from each other. We must stop trying to do so. We must fight our way back to understanding their interdependence. The word of God shall not be divided!!

Furthermore, every choice we make, every decision, must be from the faith we have been given. To many, this seems to be an impossible attainment. We must remind ourselves that God does not require more from us than He makes possible, by His grace and the life of His Son.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by [the] faith [of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

Here we come to the threshold of kingdom mystery. We will not cross over; but simply note that it is the life of Christ (and the faith of Christ) that enables our obedience to the word of God. Make no mistake about it; God has done everything necessary for us to live abundantly, through faith towards Him; walking in all the good works that He has prepared for us.

Conclusion

And so we come to the end of our searching out this matter of faith towards God. You may be wondering why the Lord, in writing this article, has not put more emphasis on the works themselves. The reason is very simple: The works are to be built on the foundation of our faith towards God.

There is a desperate need in the church today to honor the processes of God. Good building begins with the laying of a solid foundation. Perhaps this explains why our works have become so much less than the works that He did.

Praise God! There is hope for us. Two passages come to mind:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

Faith towards God is faith that is worked out; first, in our joining – not resisting – the work of faith towards God in us; so that, He can work out of us for His glory. Indeed, this is why we were created.

Working It Out

Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to Him, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Psalm 37:4-6

Every redeemed and regenerated follower of Jesus Christ has the heart desire for faith towards God; and the desire to glorify their Father in heaven through His good works.

1. Delight (meaning, "be soft") in the LORD. If you have been trying to build on an incomplete or faulty foundation, confess your sin before God in humble repentance. Receive His forgiveness and trust Him to deliver you from all unrighteousness.

2. Listen for the word of God. Receive the faith He has measured out to you.
3. Ask for the stirring of your heart's desires.
4. Give your way over to Him – surrender, sacrifice and submit.
5. Wait on Him to work in you and through you.
6. Ask Him for the opportunity to obey; being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

He will do great things in you; and use you for His good works – all through your faith towards Him.

Recommended Reading

The following are some of my favorite books on this subject. Most can be found at your local Christian book store, or at one of the many online distributors.

Absolute Surrender; Andrew Murray

The Saving Life of Christ; Major W. Ian Thomas