Laying the Foundation

LIVING BY FAITH

Catechism Two, Lesson 12

Reading: 1 Peter 1

1. What Does The Bible Mean By Saying “The Just Shall Live By Faith”?

This statement occurs four times in the King James Version. In each context more meaning is added to it. Basically, it means that we not only begin our walk with God by exercising faith toward God, but we continue walking with Him in the same way. Faith, like repentance, is something we will go on using the rest of our lives. Once the foundation has been laid, faith becomes our new principle of life. The basic attitude of faith is trustful receptivity. We continue to receive from God in this way.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col. 2:6, 7).

A. Living by faith means living expectantly toward God.

We have not received all of God’s promises yet, but what we have received should strengthen our hope and anticipation for what is to come. What God has promised all of us as His children, and what He has spoken to us individually, will surely come to pass if we wait for it. Waiting means more than allowing time to pass; it means actively adhering to the promises, giving ourselves to them, and allowing them to shape our expectation.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up [swollen with impatient pride] is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith (Hab. 2:3, 4).

B. Living by faith means growing in reliance on God as knowledge of Him increases.

The more revelation of God we receive through His Word, the more we have to lean upon or trust. Each time we experience the faithfulness of God to His promises, the easier it becomes to anticipate that He will fulfill the other things He has said He will do for us. Faith begets faith. The gospel plays no favorites.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written. The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16, 17).

C. Living by faith means release from all self-effort.

We no longer attempt to add anything to the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ. What God accepts is good enough for us. We allow the blood to speak peace within and are not tricked into some subtle means of trying to earn God’s grace.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them (Gal. 3:11, 12).

D. Living by faith is mixing believing with patience.

One of the hardest pressures to endure is that of waiting a long time. In fact, such waiting does not come naturally to man. It is a fruit of the Spirit called long-suffering or patient endurance. Allowing God to develop this characteristic in us causes us to have a strong anchor when it comes to times of testing. We are able to hold steady in God, and at the same time maintain boldness in prayer.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him (Heb. 10:35–38).

2. Does “Living By Faith” Mean We Do Not Need Employment?

No. Since the beginning, God has considered meaningful employment a necessity for man. It is a common error today, especially among charismatics and younger believers, to think that not needing to work for gain is evidence of greater faith. This is not a new mistake. The apostles had to deal with those who were creating trouble through idleness even in the early Church. The Middle Ages produced “mendicant Friars” and other pious people who wandered in the streets and lived from the gifts of others. Such an idea is completely foreign to the Bible. The Church is seen as a community of believers in which each one has something to contribute both personally and financially.

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing (2 Thess. 3:10–13).

… they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, [lazy, useless, barren], wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not (1Tim. 5:12, 13).

3. Does Believing “Once” Secure Our Salvation Eternally?

The very nature of faith includes continuance. Once we are persuaded to place our full reliance upon Christ, this reliance grows. Since our faith responds to an objective God, changes occur and continue to occur within us. The depth and intensity of our persuasion is increased by the working of the Holy Spirit within us. God builds into our character the patience and courage needed to persevere in faith. Faith that only “began” and never went on, may turn out to have been only an emotional stirring. Biblica faith touched the whole man and sets into motion a growth process.

The doctrine of continuance in faith is called “perseverence” and is much disputed among theologians. Our English word “perseverence” comes from the Latin perseverare and is synonymous with persistence and steadfastness. The Greek word, proskartereo is a little clearer in meaning: “to persist in adherence to a thing, to be intently engaged in, to remain constantly in a place; to continually attend upon.”

Two eminent theologians have taken opposite views regarding the doctrine of perseverence, and ever since the Christian Church has been divided into two camps: the Calvinistic and the Arminian, each named after its founder. John Calvin (1509–1564) was a contemporary of Martin Luther. His influence resulted in spreading the Reformation in Switzerland. He wrote many important books but is most known for his doctrinal treatise, The Institutes of the Christian Religion. The well-known “five points of Calvinism” are often summarized by the simple acrostic “TULIP”:

(1) Total depravity—man’s whole nature was ruined by sin; he is completely helpless in regard to salvation.

(2) Unconditional election—God chose a remnant from among mankind according to His sovereign will.

(3) Limited redemption—Christ’s atoning death, burial, and resurrection applies only to the elect.

(4) Irresistible regenerating grace—All those whom God has elected will be called, justified, and will be carried to completion of salvation through the initiative of God.

(5) Perseverence of the elect—All those in whom God has initiated salvation will continue; they are kept eternally secure by God.

These points are closely intertwined and depend upon one another.

Many people opposed Calvin’s views and claimed that they could lead to antinomianism, the idea that grace allows us to do whatever we wish since our salvation is eternally secure in Christ. The foremost opponent to Calvinism was a Dutch theologian named Jacob Arminius (1560–1609). Arminius did not speak and write as much as his followers later published in his name. The five counterpoints of Arminianism attempted to restore an emphasis on man’s free will in response to God’s persuading grace:

(1) God determined before the foundation of the world to save those who believe on Christ and persevere in faith until the end.

(2) Christ’s redemption is for all, but only those who will believe actually appropriate the benefits of salvation.

(3) Sinful man must be born again and renewed before he can understand, think, will, or do anything God considers good.

(4) Apart from God’s grace, man is helpless; but it is up to him whether or not to respond to God’s grace—it is not irresistible.

(5) Victory over sin becomes available to all who are made partakers of Christ by faith; true believers will be overcomers.

Both sides of this argument are based on Scripture. The reason this can be is that in Scripture this doctrine is paradoxical. Both emphases are there. In cases like this we must be careful to examine the entire Bible to see how each Scripture relates to all others on the same subject. Balance is essential.

The Bible teaches that continuance is a spontaneous and natural result of faith:

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren (Acts 1:14).

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

4. Does Faith Keep Us Secure In Christ?

Yes. The same God who initiated faith in us by His work of persuasion, continues to work within us. He enables us to invest our faith more and more in Himself and causes us to express our faith in obedience. Our security is guaranteed in the eternal nature of God Himself, the object of our faith.

Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5).

Our faith is securely anchored in God’s lasting work of redemption. Our salvation is guaranteed through:

(1) The blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Heb. 9:12).

(2) The everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20, 21).

(3) Christ’s continuing work as our high priest (Heb. 7:21, 25).

(4) The earnest of redemption, the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14).

(5) The unchanging decree or word of the Lord (1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

(6) Our position of being hid in Christ (Col. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17).

(7) God’s enduring love freely shown to us in Christ (Rom. 8:38, 39).

We can afford to put our weight down on Christ and allow Him to complete the work within us that He has begun.

5. How Can We Help Ourselves To Continue In Faith?

We must remain open to the persuading work of the Holy Spirit. We must respond with our whole being and totally invest ourselves in God’s promises. This means that we will live our life now as if we could already see the things promised for the future. The Bible gives many examples of such personal investment of faith in God’s word:

(1) Abraham left his secure life in Ur of the Chaldees for a land he had never seen that God promised to his seed.

(2) Noah invested 120 years building the ark, when no one had ever seen rain before.

(3) Moses refused to remain identified with Egypt, but chose to become a part of God’s suffering people because he believed God’s promise of deliverance.

(4) Jeremiah purchased the field of Anathoth immediately after prophesying Judah’s 70 years of captivity in Babylon. He believed they would again return to the land according to God’s word. He expressed his confidence by purchasing real estate.

We can add to our faith practical virtues. Faith is itself one of the three cardinal virtues: faith, hope, and charity (or love) listed in 1 Corinthians 13:13. But it is also the beginning virtue which produces Christian character and makes us fruitful rather than barren.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue … knowledge … temperance … patience … godliness … brotherly kindness … charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5–8).

Home Study: Lessons 7–12

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is “living by faith”?

Vocabulary:

1. Arminianism—

2. Assumption—

3. Assurance—

4. Calvinism—

5. Eternal security—

6. Faith—

7. Forgiveness—

8. Imputation—

9. Justification—

10. Patience—

11. Perseverence—

12. Pistis (Greek)—

13. Redemption—

14. Righteousness—