

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE II: FAITH TOWARD GOD

Hebrews 6:1-2

*[1]Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of **faith toward God**,*

[2]of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Introduction

The next foundational principle here is that of Faith toward God. This offers us a good way of appreciating how Truth works. The first principle which addresses repentance from dead works could not be talked about without mentioning faith toward God. Now that we are going to discuss faith toward God, we will also find that it is inextricably linked to repentance from dead works. The Truth works like that: each like a strand of a web reinforcing every other and linking to every other in very intricate and sophisticated ways.

Repentance from dead works is what leads to faith toward God. Or perhaps it is better to say that faith toward God is expressed in repentance from dead works. The point, however, is that the two work together. As long as we are relying on any human effort or idea or system to recommend ourselves to God, we do not have faith that is pointed toward God. If our faith is toward God, we will be repenting from dead works. Faith in God and dead works are therefore mutually exclusive. This is what Paul teaches in Gal 5:4.

It's a popular enough question, "what is the place of works?" Faith is more easily construed as passive than it should be. After all, there is no action that anyone takes without confidence in something. When we try to sit in a chair, we do so because we believe that the chair will take our weight. When we lay in a bed, it is because we are confident that it is safe to sleep in. When we turn a handle, it is because we fully expect the door to open. When we open our eyes in the morning, we do so taking for granted that we will be able to see everything around us. All of these are things we do on "faith". We really don't often have much reason for the expectations and confidence that we have beyond the fact that things were this way in the past. It could be argued that science demonstrates that certain events are guaranteed because of certain principles. This is true as far as it goes. We do not throw anything up into the air and expect it not to eventually come back down. Science has confirmed the existence of a principle or influence it calls gravity that makes the eventual return of whatever the object to the ground a certainty. However, when we act in confidence that things will turn out the way that scientists are convinced that it will, we are still exercising "faith", in a manner of speaking. Thus, that phenomenon we call faith is not passive.

What Faith Is

Faith is confidence in something. It is not necessarily God toward Whom Faith is exercised. It may be man. It may be an inanimate object. It may be our own imagination even. Faith is not necessarily toward God but whatever it may be toward, it is not a passive adoption of ideas. When we believe in something, we act upon it.

The same way, faith toward God does result in action of some sort. But whatever this action may be, it is not a dead work. A dead work by definition seeks to gain God's approval by offering Him something that originates with us. For example, Cain's offering in Gen 4:3-5 was a dead work. A dead work is arrogant by nature. It assumes that we can impress God with something that originates with us. But God is Perfect and we are not. And He will never compromise His Standards. He may tolerate our weakness and foolishness, but there is a limit to that tolerance. Life was the cost of treason in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve forfeited their lives when they disobeyed God. Only a life given in their place could right things for them. And we all inherited the same burden. So, Cain's life was also forfeit for his own sins. If this was so, why did he bring vegetables to the Lord? Only blood could answer for blood. The Lord offered Adam and Eve coats of skins (Gen 3:21) - that is, an animal was killed for their nakedness to be covered - as a testimony to the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus thousands of years later to cover up all of the sins of humanity (Luke 24:49; Rev 19:8; Is 61:10, 64:6; Zec 3:4; Rev 3:4-5, 17-18). Their acceptance of those coats was their acceptance of God's Promise of Salvation (Gen 3:15). When Abel later offers God a blood sacrifice (Gen 4:4), he was humbly accepting the same Promise. But rather than laying claim to God's Promise, Cain came up with his own idea and offered God "of the fruit of the ground". Note that in the Garden Adam had been cursed with having to strive and struggle to produce his food from the ground and with inescapable futility in such efforts. Still, Cain brings of the fruit of his striving, that is, of God's Curse, to make an offering to God. This is the principle of all dead works: they are born of human effort and human ideas that have nothing to do with God in essence. So, dead works demonstrate no confidence in God but rather witness to a distrust in His Promises.

Faith toward God is the opposite. When we trust God, we act exactly as if His Promises are certain and as if what He says is completely true. That means that Faith is the motivation for obedience to God. Faith therefore identifies itself through the works that it inspires.

James 2:14-26 NASB

[14]What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

[15]If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

[16]and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

[17]Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

[18]But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

[19]You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

[20]But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

[21]Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

[22]You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

[23]and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

[24]You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

[25]In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

[26]For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Faith toward God is confidence in God. When we are confident that God can and should be trusted, then we will do what He tells us to do. Those things He tells us to do are the good works of Faith.

The Good Works of Faith

Ephesians 2:10 NASB

[10]For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Abraham's and Rahab's examples in that passage in James are a strong illustration of what faith in (or toward) God is about and results in. Faith in God does not necessarily lead to a philanthropic lifestyle as many readers of James have assumed James 3:15-16 to mean. Being generous to even the least of believers with whatever we can afford to give counts for much with the Lord, yes (Matt 10:42), but charity is not by a long shot the limits of good works. Abraham's example involved the sacrifice of his son on Mount Moriah. Rahab preserved the lives of Israelite spies. These were acts of Faith because they were what God was commanding of these individuals and therefore what He supplied Grace to them to perform. These things were not their own ideas of what would please God but what they did out of a righteous, healthy fear and respect for God (Josh 2:9-13; Gen 15:6) in obedience to His Commands and His revealed Will.

John 6:28-29 NASB

[28]Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

[29]Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Matthew 17:5 NASB

[5]While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

John 17:3,17 NASB

[3]This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

[17]Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

Choosing to believe in the Lord Jesus is therefore choosing to have Faith toward God. And that too is the same as turning away from all human initiative in seeking to please God. What we do to please God must come from the Lord Himself (Gen 8:22, Jn 1:29). If the Work of God then is that we must believe in the One Who He sent, then our job is to learn the Scriptures since they are how we learn to know the Lord Jesus and think like Him (Jn 5:39; 1 Cor 2:16). And faith comes by hearing or paying heed to the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17).

We learn the Scriptures by reading them and by listening to gifted and prepared teachers whom the Lord has given to the Church to help us understand what we read (Ac 8:30-31; Eph 4:11-16). Without diligent application of oneself to Bible teaching, there is only so much faith that one can have toward God. God has ordained that our Faith in Him will grow only as we submit ourselves to the spiritual training of a gifted and properly equipped Bible teacher (1 Pet 5:1-5; 1 Tim 5:17). Otherwise, we stagnate in faith and run the risk of being seduced or threatened into throwing our faith away (Eph 4:14). Our faith toward God begins with the simple acceptance of the Gospel so that we are born again. But that is faith as small as a mustard seed although it accomplishes what is impossible to man: it makes us children of God (Jn 1:12; Mt 17:20, Lk 17:6). But this faith must grow (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:31-32; Lk 13:18-19; Rom 4:21; 1 Pet 2:2-3; Col 1:9-10; Col 2:6-7).

2 Peter 3:18

[18]but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Jude 1:20

[20]But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Let us then give due attention to faith toward God by being diligent in reading the Bible everyday and seeking Bible teaching to help us understand it so that we can learn to think like the Lord Jesus Christ and thus act to please God having foregone all notions of self-reliance or appeal to any human philosophies and systems which operate independently of God's Truth.

Grace and Peace from the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.