

Increase My Faith

Building My Invincible Faith

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In the professional world, the concepts of continuing education and growth are of utmost importance. Professionals, such as teachers, doctors and business people, understand these concepts and, as expected, achieve very positive results from investing in them. They realize that in order to keep up with current trends, to face and conquer new challenges and to stay ahead of the competition, they must discipline themselves to continue learning, applying, evaluating and modifying. Seemingly, ample concentration on continual development will prove beneficial to any company or institution.

God, whose wisdom far exceeds that of humanity (Isa. 55:8-9), has always emphasized the importance of continual development to maintain spiritual focus among those who would worship and serve Him. In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Moses declared to the Israelites:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

[All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] God's people, both young and old, were to be constantly focused on His statutes and commands. The passing down of these truths from generation to generation would assure their knowledge of who they were, from whence they had come and in which direction they were headed (Deut. 6:20-25). However, failure to regularly teach and review these truths would lead to the removal of Jehovah and His expectations from their thoughts and actions, give advantage to satanic influence, and result in a miserable existence (Deut. 6:10-12; 4:5-28). In fact, Israel experienced this problem early on as they inhabited the land of promise (Judg. 2:10-19).

By honoring God's commands, one is able to build the proper character and maintain the right focus to make the moral, ethical and spiritual decisions that will glorify heaven, protect from the wiles of Satan and bless one's life, now and eternally. It is no wonder why such emphasis is placed on continual development throughout the New Testament (e.g. Eph. 4:15; Heb. 5:12-6:4; 1 Pet. 2:2), particularly in Peter's second epistle. Satan is well aware of his eternal destiny (Matt. 25:41), and he is attempting relentlessly to overthrow the faith of Christ's followers to increase the number of those who will join him in his damnation. However, Peter offers Christians a sure formula that, when employed, will build an invincible faith.

FAITH: THE FIRM FOUNDATION

Anything built in absence of a solid foundation will soon be brought to shambles, whether physical or spiritual in nature. As He concluded His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 7, Jesus contrasted doers of His words with

BUILDING MY INVINCIBLE FAITH

those who only hear them, by using an illustration of two builders. One builder was credited as being wise while the other was judged foolish, all due to the foundation upon which they chose to build their houses. For, after being tested by the winds and rain of the storm, the house built on the sand fell, but the other house "...did not fall, **for it was founded on the rock**" (vv. 24-27, emp. added).

Likewise, in order to have a true relationship with God, one must begin with a firm foundation of faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 11:6; John 14:6; 8:24). Paul declared, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Belief in Jesus as the Christ, the chosen Son of the Most High, and His vicarious sacrifice on man's behalf is absolutely essential to redemption. Equally as important is the proper understanding and acceptance of the one church—the spiritual kingdom of God—and its role in God's redemptive scheme. Philip the evangelist preached both "...the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" to the Samaritans in Acts 8:12. There are many who profess Christianity, yet fail to acknowledge that one cannot be a Christian (i.e. cannot be saved, cannot be a disciple of Christ, cannot have one's sins forgiven, cannot have the hope of eternal life) without being added to the church by the Lord Himself! Luke recorded that "...**the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved**" (Acts 2:47b, emp. added).

As we examine the opening chapter of the second epistle of Peter, we note that Peter addresses "...those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1). Although "faith" is often viewed from a subjective viewpoint—referring to one's personal belief, trust or confidence in someone or something else—it does not

carry this idea in the passage under consideration. The meaning of the word “obtained” used in this verse helps us to see this, for in its original form it denotes “something received by lot” (Vine 439). Additionally, the fact that the source of this “like precious” or equally valuable faith is **our God and Savior Jesus Christ**, rather than human effort, requires an objective understanding in this case. In simple terms, it is the body of teachings concerning the gospel message of salvation, and it includes one’s complete obedience to this message. Recall the events that transpired in Acts 2 following Peter’s proclamation of the gospel and the giving of Divine instructions for obediently responding to it: they were commanded to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (v. 38), and those who gladly acknowledged Peter’s words were baptized and added to the apostles’ number (v. 41). As a result, the Holy Spirit refers to these obedient individuals as “all who believed” (v. 44) and “those who were being saved” whom “the Lord added to the church” (v. 47). Yes, this is a comprehensive understanding of the equally valuable faith Peter spoke of that was preached/taught by the apostles (Gal. 1:23) and had been received/obeyed by both Jews and Gentiles in order to be reconciled to God in one body, which is the church (Eph. 2:16; 1:22-23). But is the journey complete at the point of being added to the body of Christ? Are we fully covered and fully protected from Satan’s crafty attempts to take advantage of us and regain our allegiance simply because we are now members of Christ’s church? What must we do in order to be established in the faith of Christ to the extent that we do not give in to Satan and give up our crown of eternal life?

FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH!

How legalistic does this idea sound? While there are many who would agree that it does, Jesus reminds us not to judge based on appearance, "...but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Therefore, a closer look at the words of the inspired apostle will help us to see that there is nothing legalistic about this idea at all. In fact, the concept that "faith is not enough" is strongly embedded in Peter's exhortation, as we shall observe in our continued examination of second Peter chapter one.

Having explored Peter's use of "faith" in verse one, we understand that both Jews and Gentiles have been brought to the very same point in the spiritual quest for reconciliation and eternal life. Both have also been divinely equipped with everything sufficient to live righteously in this world (2 Pet. 1:3) and are recipients of "exceedingly great and precious promises" through which both "may be partakers of the divine nature" (v. 4). Consequently, every child of God is expected to give steady attention and effort towards his/her spiritual growth. Peter expresses this very thought beginning in verse 5: "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith..." As alien sinners, being delivered from the guilt and stain of sin and being added to the Lord's church is just the beginning. Unfortunately, too many Christians have failed to understand this truth and have fallen victim to Satan's influence. However, an invincible faith can be established, if one will give earnest heed to Peter's command in adding to their faith seven specific qualities, commonly referred to as the "Christian Graces" (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

According to Peter in verse five, the character of a sincere follower of Christ is to include **virtue**. This quality

refers to moral goodness or courage demonstrated through one's thoughts, words and actions on a daily basis. We must be willing to say, practice and stand up for what is morally right, especially in an age when a lot of people believe that all things are relative and that the rightness or wrongness of a matter changes based on the circumstances (situation ethics). All it takes is for a person to honestly consider how problematic our society is and that person cannot help but attribute a vast portion of it to a lack of concern for moral goodness. Growth in this area occurs when the willing Christian becomes more aware of his/her surroundings. Of course, this would include concern for the people with whom we spend time, as well as the kind of activities and information to which we expose our minds. Paul aptly recorded, "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Cor. 15:33). Solomon also offered wise words when he said, "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

Verse five also reveals that the Christian's character must include **knowledge**. Here, knowledge signifies a working acquaintance with truth, especially that which is spiritual in nature. To the Jews who believed Him, Jesus declared, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). From an ongoing investigation of and sincere desire to know more about the Lord's will, as it is revealed in the Bible, stems the achievement of greater knowledge, by which one is able to consistently demonstrate his/her true allegiance to Jesus Christ. It is only this absolute, objective and attainable truth that can liberate a person from the prisons of self-pity, hatred, envy, pride, selfishness, mediocrity and every other tool of Satan that hinders us from excelling. Peter

BUILDING MY INVINCIBLE FAITH

reminds us to "...grow in the grace and **knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**" (2 Pet. 3:18a, emp. added).

Peter continues in verse six with three more qualities that are to be added to one's faith. As one ascertains a greater level of spiritual knowledge and makes application of the same, he/she is then able to exercise greater **self-control**. In so many ways, societal standards teach us that it's okay to point the finger of blame at the Devil, at the influence of alcohol or drugs, at the failure to take one's meds or at the conduct of anyone other than self, rather than taking responsibility for one's own actions. However, as Christians we are expected to march by the beat of a different drum! On one occasion the apostle Paul stated, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24-25). In the original language, the word "walk," as used here, is a military term that means to walk in rank (i.e. to keep step; to conform). Paul's conclusion in this section of the Galatian letter is that when a Christian disciplines himself/herself to live in accordance to the Spirit's teachings, he/she will not seek to satisfy the sensuous desires of the flesh. God wants us to shun the excuses and exercise self-control at all times, whether in public or private. It may be helpful to avoid certain places, things and people when we know that we have a weakness for them. Consequently, eternal life depends on our ability to control self, and the zealous Paul understood this. That's why he told the Corinthians, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Perseverance is the next character trait to be added, which stems from self-control. Subsequently, as Christians become more self-disciplined, they will become more

patient while facing life's challenges, whether they are physical, spiritual, emotional or otherwise. We are reminded of the patience Job exercised in awaiting Divine deliverance (Jas. 5:11). However, the meaning is a little broader than just patiently dealing with misfortune that falls one's way. The late Guy N. Woods, a notable gospel preacher, scholar and debater, insightfully remarked, "...it suggests somewhat more than mere resignation to life's difficulties. It includes the idea of positive resistance of evils and a steadfast bearing up under them" (151). On this note, James reminds us of "...the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience" (Jas. 5:10). Taking an uncompromising stand for moral and spiritual truth (e.g. maintaining that homosexuality is a sin or that adding mechanical instruments of music to God's worship defiles it) can, and generally does, stir major opposition, as well as derogatory names to go along with it. But in either case, we must still stand firm and trust in God, for Jesus stated, "By your patience possess your souls" (Luke 21:19).

Peter then adds in verse six, "...to perseverance godliness." **Godliness** means righteousness. It is reverence or deep piety towards God. Simply put, it is the earnest desire to be "godlike." This **should not** be understood as an attempt to place oneself on the same plane as God Almighty in any respect, but rather to exhibit more of the traits that characterize God and His Son (cf. Matt. 5:48). It is not uncommon for earthly children, particularly boys, to want to resemble and act like their fathers, even desiring to follow in their shoes. In a spiritual sense, this quality describes the very same idea in that we should be seeking to resemble and act like our heavenly Father, even following in the footsteps of His Son

BUILDING MY INVINCIBLE FAITH

and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Peter challenges Christians to do so as he recorded:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully...For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, Nor was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:19, 21-23).

Of course, to grow in godliness requires that we seek to have the very same mindset that Jesus had—a mind characterized by love, humility, obedience and compassion (Phil. 2:1-8; 1 Pet. 4:1-2).

Second Peter 1:7 covers the final two qualities that are to be added to one's faith. **Brotherly kindness** comes from a Greek word that literally means, "fond of one's brethren." It is love maintained and demonstrated toward fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In 1 John 5:1, the Holy Spirit, by the pen of the apostle John, teaches us that everyone who believes in the Messiahship of Jesus "...is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him." In as much as we are willing to openly express the love we possess for our heavenly Father, we must, without hesitation, openly express the same love for one another. Too often, we encounter brethren who speak of how much they love the Lord, yet act contrary to the truth pointed out by the apostle John in name calling, criticizing others, refusing to acknowledge the presence of one another, betraying one another, using pulpits and brotherhood journals as platforms to belittle each other, and refusing to make an

attempt to reconcile differences, just to name a few. Instead, we need to give extra attention to Scriptures that encourage us to "...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you" (Eph. 4:32) and to "...consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). We must recognize that we are not all on the same level spiritually and exercise forbearance toward the weak (Eph. 4:2). One sure way of accomplishing these things is to follow Paul's exhortation to the church in Philippi:

...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:2-4).

Last, but certainly not least, is that uniting principle which holds everything else together in a Christian's life—**charity or love**. In Colossians 3:14, Paul stated, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." Love, as used by both Peter and Paul in these passages, is translated from the commonly known Greek word, "agape," and is unconditional in nature. Just as God unhesitatingly demonstrated His love for the spiritual well-being of all humanity in that He gave His only begotten Son to die in our stead (John 3:16), this kind of love requires that we hold in our best interests the well-being of all humanity and not just our fellow brethren. The New Testament commands us to especially do good to our brethren (Gal. 6:10), but note the first part of this same scripture. Paul recorded, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all...**" (emp. added). Do you mean I have to love those who hate me, who spread

BUILDING MY INVINCIBLE FAITH

rumors about me, who try to use and abuse me? According to Matthew 5:43-48, **ABSOLUTELY AND POSITIVELY YES!!** We may very well hate the sinful behavior or lifestyle of others, nevertheless, they still have a soul that needs to be saved from the everlasting flames of hell. Therefore, without intentionally putting ourselves in a position to be taken further advantage of, we should seek to help these individuals however we can in order to lead them to Christ. You never know the effect that doing good toward a person, when it is least expected, can have on him/her. The Christian's willingness to continually follow the Holy Scriptures in building upon his/her faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and ultimately demonstrating unconditional love towards all people, saved or not, is a true sign of spiritual maturity and evidence of an invincible faith.

BLESSED ASSURANCES

But is it really possible for one to build an invincible or unconquerable faith? This question seems to be within reason, especially when we consider the number of Christians, young and old, who continue to struggle with sinful and immoral conduct. And what about those of our fellowship who have been attending Bible classes, gospel meetings and revivals for years and are still struggling with basic doctrinal concepts, such as the "one church" and its implications taught under the New Testament system of faith? Of course, this is not a unique problem because the Hebrews writer had to tell the recipients of his epistle, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Heb. 5:12). **The**

truth is that Christians can develop an invincible faith and we are assured of such by God's Word!!

The inspired apostle offers three Divine assurances to Christians, which prove unequivocally that developing an invincible faith is possible. First, Peter states, "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8). Evidence of an invincible faith, according to this verse, is the Christian's assurance of a fruitful existence in the kingdom of Christ. Jesus said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8). Producing good works, as illustrated in the life of Christ and defined by God's Word, is one of the reasons for which we have been added to the church (Eph. 2:10). However, we will not be successful in doing so if we fail to observe the stated conditions. According to Peter, our fruitfulness is contingent upon two things: (1) making the seven graces an integral part of our Christian character, and (2) seeing to the continual increase of each character trait throughout our spiritual walk. With total focus on accomplishing these two things, we can avoid becoming inactive, lazy, idle and useless in Christ's church. Failure to diligently work on one's Christian development results in a lack of spiritual discernment, a loss of hope and a blatant disregard for the sacrificial work of Christ on the individual's behalf (2 Pet. 1:9).

Further evidence is found in 2 Peter 1:10, where Peter makes a very bold, yet reassuring statement. He says, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, **for if you do these things you will never stumble**" (emp. added). With urgency and persistence, every child of God must seek to secure his/her position in God's kingdom. The possibility for

BUILDING MY INVINCIBLE FAITH

reconciliation (achieving a state of righteousness) is purely by the will and power of God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8-11), and God calls man to this possibility by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14). But the “election” (or selection by God, Acts 2:47) that Peter speaks of is dependent upon man’s obedient response to the conditions of reconciliation, which include **faith in the gospel message** (John 8:24; Rom. 10:17), **repentance** (Acts 17:30), **confession** (Matt. 10:32; 16:13-16) and **baptism** (Mark 16:15-16). Therefore, by earnestly working at maintaining our state of righteousness before God through our efforts to mature (2 Pet. 1:5-7), Peter assures us that we will never trip and fall away from the path of righteousness, regardless of the various challenges to our faith.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ultimately, a home in heaven is our goal, where “God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). This eternal resting place is guaranteed to every obedient child of God, according to the inspired apostle. As he completes his thought from verse 10 into verse 11, he declares, “...for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The word “so” in this verse is translated from a Greek word that literally means, “in this way.” In what way, then, will an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Christ be supplied? Answer: In the very same way that a Christian is able to make his calling and election sure and avoid falling (v. 10); in the very same way that keeps a Christian from becoming spiritually blind (v. 9); in the very same way that will make a Christian fruitful in the knowledge of Christ

rather than barren (v. 8); and that is by possessing and increasing in virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (vv. 5-7). Undoubtedly, heaven has been prepared for only those who have prepared themselves to resist Satan in this spiritual war by developing an invincible faith.

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