

Faith Matters

By David H. McKinley

I Corinthians 13:13

I believe the Christian life can be reduced to three simple words: *faith*, *hope* and *love*. When I say, "Christian life," I am not talking about all the things that Christians believe. There are other words I would use to describe the Christian faith. The Christian faith is founded around the person of Jesus Christ—His death, His burial, His resurrection. But when I talk about the Christian life, I am talking about faith, hope and love.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the Apostle Paul writes about the Christian life:

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Notice *faith* is the first word Paul uses. Faith is where it all begins. I am convinced Satan loves nothing more than to confuse people about what faith is, especially at the point of salvation.

If you ask people about faith, you may get a variety of answers. Some people say that faith is a *feeling*. You have probably heard people describe it this way: "I like to go to church because it builds up my faith." They describe faith like we might described courage or fear. They want to experience a "faith feeling." They think their faith is "pumped up" if they get enough "spiritual goose bumps" during the church service. There is a problem with feelings, though. As soon as people get back into the world, suddenly their faith is doused, the "faith feeling" goes away, and they think, "Oh, I've lost my faith." You cannot base your faith on your feelings or emotions.

Other people may describe faith in terms of a *formula*—10 steps to faith. They think that if they keep living according to a formula, their life will one day be one of faith. There is no doubt our faith leads us to understand, believe and practice certain spiritual principles. The Christian life is a principled life; we live it based on the precepts and promises of God's Word. However, faith is not a formula.

For other people, faith is *fantasy*; it is just believing. They think that if people just believe hard enough, they have faith. Sincerity cannot replace faith; hard work cannot replace faith. *Nothing* can take the place of faith. If your faith is not rooted and built on the substance and the evidence of the Word of God and the reality of His truth, then there is no foundation for faith.

What is faith?

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith is commitment based on the substance of God's character; it is action based on the evidence of God's Word. When I ask you to believe in Jesus, I am not asking you to work up a feeling. I am not just saying to follow the footsteps. I am not just saying you

need to believe to believe. I am saying there is truth about whom Christ is and what He came to do. Faith is what matters. Faith is how you begin. Faith is the way you can know you are going to heaven.

Do you realize the Christian life is about what you *know*? Not what “I wish” or “I hope,” but what you know. The Bible tells us that faith—real faith—matters. Why does faith matter? Let me suggest several reasons.

Faith matters because grace demands it.

If salvation is about God’s grace and what He has done for you in the person of Jesus Christ, being received by faith, then grace demands that salvation is by faith and faith alone.

In Romans 4, we read about Abraham, a man of faith. He believed God, and the Bible tells us that his belief—not what he did—was counted to him for righteousness.

Now to one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. To the one who does not work, but trusts in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted to him as righteousness (Romans 4:4-5).

It is not faith if you work for something and you receive it. You are just getting what you are due.

Let’s suppose you agree to do some work around the house for someone. The start and end times are determined, a list of duties are established, and you both agree on a payment amount. The next day you begin the work and work everyday for the specified time. You mow and weed the yard, paint the house, and fix the things that need fixing. When you finish your tasks and the term of your employment, your employer shows up with a beautifully wrapped package and says, “I’m such a good, gracious man; here’s what I’m going to give you.” You open the package and your paycheck is inside. Your employer is not a gracious man and you did not receive a gift. You only received what you deserved.

But on the other hand, let’s suppose you have a week like any other and a person shows up that you haven’t thought about for some time. The person approaches you and says, “You know what? I just want you to know that I love and care about you. I’ve brought this just for you.” You open the beautifully wrapped package and there’s a very generous check inside. This person proved himself to be gracious because he was thinking about you when you weren’t thinking about him. The Bible tells us that God’s grace is like this. God did something for us when we didn’t deserve it.

For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life...Whoever believes in Him [Jesus] is not condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16, 18).

There is no other way but the way of faith. And faith alone is what makes salvation possible. It is by grace through faith.

For by grace you are 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).

The message I share is a message of grace! It is a message that can only be received by faith.

Do you know Jesus? Have you believed on His name? Is faith real in your life? You can't try enough or work hard enough to earn salvation. It is all based on grace through faith. Salvation is based on what God did when He put His Son, Jesus, to death on a cross. Jesus died, was buried and rose again!

Faith matters because life requires it.

Would you agree with me that life doesn't always turn out the way we thought it would? Life has unpredictable moments and out-of-control experiences, doesn't it? We don't have cruise control for our lives like to do for our cars. About the time we think we are cruising through life, we have to hit the brakes, change directions, and make adjustments.

For we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The only way we can endure and get through some of the things that come to us are simply by faith! Not faith in faith or faith in our feelings, but the faith that is based on the substance of God's character and the evidence of His Word.

This past week, Connie and I took a few days vacation and traveled through the mountains of Virginia. Our journeys took us through Battlefield, a little town rich in scenery and Civil War history. Driving down the highway, we suddenly came across a large roadside sign. You know what it said? Battlefield Baptist Church. As I looked at Battlefield Baptist, I realized every church could bear that name because the whole Christian life is a battlefield! We need faith to engage in the conflict and battle of life. We need faith to fight against the pride of life and lust of the flesh. We need faith to overcome this world and Satan's war against the soul.

Faith matters because God accepts it.

Many times, people want to give God everything but their faith. However, the one thing God wants, the one thing He requires and the one thing He accepts is our faith.

And without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

You can't please God apart from faith. The only way anyone can ever please God is by faith, *for whoever draws near to God must believe that He exists and that He will reward those who seek Him.* God honors faith because faith honors God.

It pleased God to crush Him to grieve Him that when His soul was made an offering of sin, He would see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord would prosper His hand (Isaiah 53:10).

Jesus was crucified for the pleasure of God that you could be free from the punishment and the condemnation of sin. When it comes to salvation, it is all about faith.

Do you know Jesus? I am not asking if your church preaches Jesus or if you know about Jesus or if your family believes in Jesus. Do *you* know Jesus? The only thing God accepts from you is faith.

Have you ever been in a store or restaurant and waited as the cashier swiped your credit card for payment? Maybe you stood there, like I have on occasion, and wondered why it was taking so long for the card to be accepted through the system. The cashier looks at the device and then at your card and says, "Oh, I'm sorry. We don't accept this card here." Has that ever happened to you? Some credit cards are accepted, but not your card.

The Bible tells us that God doesn't accept anything but faith—faith based and founded on Jesus and what He came to do for us.

I mentioned I visited some of the mountainous areas of Virginia last week, but I also had the wonderful joy of visiting the new Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, North Carolina. I was most interested and impressed to see how the outward appearance of the library depicts the humble beginnings of Billy's life. Billy grew up on a dairy farm and the library and property gives each guest the experience of being on a dairy farm, complete with barn and silo. However, the barn included one design element not common to most barns I have seen. The doorway is marked with a huge cross. Once inside, a brilliant light shines from the outside and in the open expanse of the area, ceiling beams are etched with the following Scriptures:

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us... (1 John 1:9).

For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves... (Ephesians 2:8).

Through the entrance, guests are presented with the message of the Gospel. And as they leave, a lighted image of the cross leaves room for people to exit one at a time, walking through the way of the cross.

That is what is required from every one of us. Faith is not just a way; it is the *only* way. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. So I ask again... Do you know Jesus?

I grew up looking forward to getting the Sears catalog every year just before Christmas—the big wish book! I took the wish book and thought about all the things I wished and hoped and dreamed I would get.

The Bible is not a wish book; it is a promise book! It is the evidence and the substance of everything you need, everything you long for and everything you hope for. You can know you have life in Jesus Christ! Do you know Him?

Your response to Him must be personal. We don't have a physical cross that you walk through when you leave this building today, but I want you to know you have walked by the way of the cross today. You have heard the message of Christ, and it is important for you to know Him. If you have never received Jesus Christ as your Savior, I want to ask you to respond to Him today. If it is your desire to receive Him as your Lord and Savior, to believe Him as the Son of God, I simply ask you right now to pray in your heart:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Savior, the Son of the living God. Jesus, I believe that You came, You died and You rose because You wanted to give me the gift of eternal life. Jesus, I am a sinner and I am not worthy of this gift. It is only by grace that I can come to You. Jesus, I come with my hands open in faith and I give You my life. I receive the life that You give. Lord Jesus, I pray that You would let me live my life for You. Take my life, dear Jesus.