

## *Faith and Gold*

Opening Hymn: #174 — “My Faith Looks Up To Thee”

The word faith appears only twice in the Old Testament and 229 times in the New Testament. The two Old Testament texts where the KJV has the word faith [Deut. 32:30; Hab. 2:4] come from Hebrew words normally rendered “truth.” I’m intrigued by two texts in the New Testament:

Ephesians 2:8 By grace are ye saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God:

Hebrews 11:6 Without **faith** it is impossible to please God.

So what is faith really? The Ephesians text seems to say it is the gift of God, yet in Hebrews we are told if we don’t have it, we cannot please God. How can we reconcile these two scriptures?

My dictionary describes faith is a “belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.” If we have faith in God, we believe him, we have a trusting acceptance of his will for us even though our reasons for doing so may not seem logical to others. So is this kind of faith a gift from God? Yes and no.

Romans 10:17 Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Paul in this chapter tells the Romans that no-one can believe unless they hear, and they cannot hear unless a preacher is sent. So without question the “sent preacher” is a gift from God. Two-thirds of this world is non-Christian and most have never heard of the only name under heaven given among men by which we may receive salvation (Acts 4:12, New English). Does “never hear” seem unlikely because knowledge is so easily obtained today? In fact it is very likely. Having knowledge available is not enough; there must be an eager desire for knowledge before it can be absorbed. How much, for example, do **you** know about Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed? It is not that you cannot learn about these people and the religious systems they founded. You can, but only if you have a strong desire to do so.

Yet a strong desire to know God and his plan is not enough. Perhaps one of the most incomprehensible statements of our Lord concerns why he would not speak plainly to the people. Certainly his disciples did not understand why he did that:

Matthew 13:10 The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?  
[verse 13] I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. [verse 15] For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Proverbs 20:12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.

“Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.” This truly is a gift from God. But what you do after you see and after you hear is up to you. Many loved the gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of the Master, but this brought no lasting benefit unless they acted on what they heard. Few did.

Ephesians 2:8 says we are “saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God.” Is salvation the gift of God or is it faith? That we are saved from wrath now (Romans 5:9) and that the world of mankind will be saved later is something that comes only by grace; it is God’s unmerited favor. Brother Russell in the *Question Book* said that faith can also be considered a gift from God at least in one sense:

“We have knowledge of God, and this knowledge which is granted us as a grace or favor brings us to the place where we are enabled to exercise faith. Faith in a great measure rests upon knowledge. Knowledge reveals God’s character; the Divine Revelation makes known to us certain facts respecting God’s purposes, and we see the purposes thus outlined to be in harmony with the character of God. This enables one to believe the promises; and believing them, we are enabled to act upon them. This is faith. So our faith, while it is of ourselves in the sense that we must exercise it, is of God in the sense that he supplies the necessary elements from which that faith is to be compounded.”—*Question Book*, p. 267

### The Trial of Our Faith

1 Peter 1:7 The **trial** of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

The Greek word rendered “trial” appears in just one other place where it is also associated with faith:

James 1:3 Knowing this, that the **trying** of your faith worketh patience.

I never hear other Christians talk about the trying of a Christian’s faith. Perhaps that’s because [whether they say it in so many words or not] most believe that “once in grace, always in grace.” Since they “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” they are saved. Yet the scriptures tell us we must develop the fruits and the graces of the spirit if we are to make our calling and election sure. Faith is an integral part of both.

Galatians 5:22,23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, **faith**, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

2 Peter 1:5-8 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your **faith** virtue ... knowledge ... temperance ... patience ... godliness ... brotherly kindness ... love. 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.

James said that the trying of our faith develops patience, and Peter lists patience as one of the graces of the spirit. So we see there is a good reason for our trials. It makes us into something better than we would be without them.

Peter says the trial of our faith is more precious than of **gold** that perisheth though it be tried with fire. Gold is not put into the fire to punish it. It is subjected to fire to purify it, to make it suitable for fashioning into priceless objects of beauty. Gold has a number of interesting characteristics.

## Gold

Gold is not concentrated in just a single region of the earth; both silver and gold are widely dispersed. It is the first mineral named in the Bible. Genesis 2:11 says there is gold in the land of Havilah, and that the gold is good. Since gold is gold, the word “good” probably means it was found densely concentrated in gold nuggets instead of in microscopic particles as is common today. Gold is the most malleable of all metals (silver is the second most malleable). It can be hammered into an extremely thin sheet which we call gold leaf. Just as a potter moulds clay as he pleases, a goldsmith can work gold into whatever he chooses. One gram of pure gold can be drawn into a thread two miles long. If you had a one ounce pure gold coin, think of it as a pie divided into 27 pieces. One gram equals one piece of that gold “pie.” (One gram of silver can be drawn into a thread half as long.) A text in Lamentations equates wrought gold with pottery:

Lament. 4:2 The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Gold is the least chemically active of all the metals which is why it is the metal of choice for dental work. It does not react with anything you eat. One could say it does not react with the things of this earth. Now suppose you had a gold nugget. How would you separate the gold from the rock? Breaking the rock into small pieces is a start, but it is not good enough. You need a fire, a really hot fire. It requires heat of almost 2000° F to melt gold. Could **you** make a fire that hot? Evidently the ancients could because Genesis 13:2 says “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in **gold**.” Abram lived in the 1900 to 2000 B.C. time frame and was born two years after Noah died.

Gold is a symbol of that which is divine. In the tabernacle only the priests saw the gold. The ordinary people saw only the plain white curtain and the copper altar and laver. We believe gold is also a symbol of the church because the church receives the divine nature. Silver is a symbol of the Great Company. Here are two scriptures:

Malachi 3:3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of **silver**: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as **gold** and **silver**, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

This text equates gold and silver with the “sons of Levi” a group that consisted of a few priests and a lot of non-priests. Numbers 18 says that the Levites had no inheritance in the land; God was their inheritance (vs. 20). Thus the type teaches that both the “gold” and “silver” classes do not receive an earthly inheritance; their reward is in heaven.

Although gold is so highly prized that most of what has ever existed still exists, it is extremely rare. That is what we’d expect of the symbol of the church. A television documentary made the astonishing claim that if all of the world’s gold were to be melted to form a single block, it would form a cube 63-feet on a side, just one-fifth the size of the Washington Monument. [from *L. A. Times* 8/21/01]

2 Tim. 2:20 (New English) In a large house there are dishes and bowls of all kinds: some are made of silver and gold, others of wood and clay: some are for special occasions, others for ordinary use.

The silver and gold refer to classes who have had their faith “tried in the fire” and come forth precious in the sight of the heavenly Father. Thus they receive a place of honor in this “large house.” The wood and clay are precious too, but not to the same degree.

Job 23:10 He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

## Developing Faith

When we considered Ephesians 2:8, we saw it was either salvation that was a gift of God, or that the opportunity to develop faith was a gift of God. There another text which implies that faith is something God gives to some but not others:

1 Cor. 12:7-9 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another **faith** by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit ... [other gifts of the spirit are listed]

From this list are we to conclude that only a few body members had faith just as only a few possessed the gift of healing, or of prophecy, or speaking in or interpreting tongues? Yes, in a sense. Just 24 verses later Paul talks about a unique kind of faith:

1 Cor. 13:2 And though I have all **faith**, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

Jesus himself used a similar expression about that kind of faith:

Matthew 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

I'm sure we have known of a few body members who have shown that kind of exceptional faith as they follow the leadings of the Lord, but such faith is rare. Yet we all must have some faith when we come to God. Otherwise we could not be pleasing to him. A good start is important but it is not enough. We will be given the experiences we need so that our faith grows.

2 Thes. 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because that your **faith** groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

Paul commends the Thessalonians because their faith was growing. In Luke the apostles say to the Lord, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). And that’s exactly what he did. At the time of the crucifixion Peter’s faith fails him and he denies the Lord three times. By the end of his life, Peter has become strong in the faith because he has been developed by his experiences.

Most of us would probably admit that our faith needs improvement. We believe, yet at times we don't.

Matthew 6:33,34 Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.

How much of our time is devoted to “seeking the kingdom of God” and how much of our time is devoted to seeking other things? If we truly believed, if we had a faith that could move mountains, there would be no question about it: we would be “seeking the kingdom of God” all the time and not thinking about the things of tomorrow.

Perhaps the best known definition of faith is found in the first verse of Hebrews 11:

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

The New English Bible reads: “What is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities we do not see.”

The remainder of chapter 11 is filled with many Old Testament examples of faith in action. In all instances we see it wasn't just that the named individuals said they believed God. They all did something to demonstrate that belief. Similarly our conduct should demonstrate our faith so that the world will see that we have been with Jesus and learned of him (Acts 4:13).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Everything we have is a gift from God. The salvation we have received now and the world of mankind receives in the next age is because of God's grace. God has given us opportunities to hear about him through his word and through those who have explained that word to us. Two-thirds of the world today know nothing about the one through whom salvation has been provided.

Faith is so important that it is impossible to please God unless we have it. Paul wrote that faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Our faith starts small but if we are rightly exercised by our experiences it grows. Our faith is said to be tried in the “fire” like gold to make us suitable for a place of honor in God's house. Gold has many characteristics which make it a fitting symbol of the church which will, after her refining experiences have removed all dross, receive the divine nature. Just as the church is precious to God, so is all mankind. Isaiah tells us a day is coming when Jehovah will consider man more precious than gold:

Isaiah 13:12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

May we never lose our faith. It is faith that made us acceptable to God, and it is faith that insures our ultimate salvation:

Hebrews 10:38,39 The just shall live by faith: but if any draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

1 Tim. 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Closing Hymn: #263 — “Simply Trusting”

*[First given at Los Angeles, August, 2001]*

## HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER

Sometimes as we look on, we gaze in wonder  
 Upon the dealings of our gracious God.  
 With those whom o'er and o'er his hand afflicted,  
 Who pass so often 'neath his chastening rod.

Pure gold and well refined, to our poor vision  
 These loved ones seem; and oft we wonder sore  
 Why souls who seem to us each day more saintly  
 Should by his hand be chastened more and more.

But the dear, loving Lord who tries the spirit,  
 Sees in them what no human eye can see—  
 A further fineness where his gracious dealing  
 Has formed the Christ within, in days to be.

As in a portrait by some cunning artist,  
 Which men call perfect—those who praise the skill  
 Of him who warms to life dull, senseless canvas,  
 Impatient that he labors at it still.

Labors, because before his inner vision  
 There floats an ideal he has not attained,  
 And in his heart he holds a steady purpose  
 To labor on until that point is gained.

So with these precious souls. Men see their graces,  
 So far exceeding those of common men,  
 And wonder why a God of loving kindness  
 Should chasten them again and yet again.

Nor will he stay his hand, though our impatience  
 Claim for these souls exemption from the rod,  
 Till, polished, perfected, refined, and holy,  
 Shines out from them the image of their God.

Art thou, beloved, one of this tried number?  
 Hold still, though furnace fires may hotter grow,  
 And when his work in thee is all accomplished,  
 The true life "hid with Christ in God" thou'lt know.

—Helen S. Pepper (Reprints page 4571)