

Have Faith in God

By Jim Davis

The Apostle Paul prays for the believers in Philippians 1:9 that their “love would abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.” According to Proverbs 29:15, the child who gets his own way brings shame. Therefore, the Lord and good parents do not express their love by allowing their children to have every pleasure that they want. They use knowledge and exercise discernment with each expression of their love. To exaggerate the point, a parent would not spend \$115,000 to buy his eight-year old son a Porsche with a 3.6 liter 415 hp Twin-Turbo charged engine. Giving someone what he wants when it may destroy him or destroy others is not true love. Real love must be based upon the truth. The truth is that the gift is too powerful for him and they are not mature enough to appreciate its value. It is the same with faith. Real faith must be based upon the truth.

Today we receive many mixed signals about faith. Word of Faith and Prosperity Theology claim that if we truly believe that God is able, and if we verbally claim the object of our desire, then we will have it. Some teachers that fly the Christian banner claim that we should “frame our worlds into existence.” Abusing Scripture, they twist the words of Christ into an exercise of the human will with the promise of attaining whatever we think we want. One passage that is often abused is Mark 11:23-24 where Jesus said,

Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.

Luke 17:6 is a related passage.

And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.”

How do we properly develop a healthy faith and trust in God? How do we balance the exercise of determination of will with yieldedness and submission to the Lord? Can we both wait on God and be decisive people? Being self-willed and presumptuous is a dangerous problem for us but on the opposite extreme is timidity and fear of making a decision. Both extremes are self-centered and focused upon the flesh. True faith is both forceful and decisive in action and yet yielded and dependent upon the Lord.

When we hear Jesus’ statements, there are some basic things that we must consider. Do we believe that God is able? And do we believe that God is willing? He can break or change any of the rules of His natural creation if He chooses. No one can stop God’s hand or thwart His purposes. He does according to His will. The Lord is God and He is able to do whatever He wills. Both passages above are spoken in the context of the unbelief of Israel’s religious leaders and Christ’s desire to teach His disciples to believe. Mark 11:22 says, “have faith in God.” In Luke 17:5 the disciples’ request is “increase our faith.” Jesus’ teaching in both contexts focuses upon the object of our faith. It can be as tiny as a mustard seed as long as it is upon God.

In general we struggle less with what He is able to do than with the concern for what He is willing to do and when He is willing to do it. Jesus is not giving a lesson in telekinesis. He does however say “all things” that we pray for we are not to doubt but ask and believe and it will be granted to us. The faith that Christ was speaking of has to do with our petitions to God to miraculously transform our material/physical world or our present circum-

stances and accomplish something that is humanly impossible.

Here are some Scriptural qualifications for petitioning God. When we check these principles they should bring us the confidence that He is willing to answer our prayers. Plus we can rest in the assurance that it is the Lord that is framing our worlds into existence and not our sinful selves.

1. We are to ask.

We are to ask! It seems the obvious but James 4:2 says: “you do not have because you do not ask.” How easy it is for us to complain and simply forget or refuse to ask God for our need.

2. We are to ask believing.

We are to ask believing. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:3). In this context faith is active and it signifies trusting or relying. It is a firm persuasion or conviction based upon hearing God's word. The object of faith should always be God, Christ, the Bible, and spiritual truth. Having faith in God means that we trust in His sovereign power and untainted goodness. When we ask believing we are acknowledging that God is God and it honors Him.

3. We are to ask without doubt.

Doubt is contrasted with belief. Doubt causes one to waver and be double-minded or unstable (James 1:6-8). It is based upon sight and natural senses rather than upon faith in hearing God's word. When Thomas doubted that Christ was resurrected from the grave he had to see him and touch his scars to believe (Luke 20:25).

4. We are to ask with persistence.

Luke 18:1 says that Jesus “was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” Faith is demonstrated by persistence. Waiting on God brings proper perspective on the value of our request. The patience heightens our anticipation. It allows time for the development of character needed to handle the responsibility of God's gift. It increases our appreciation of the Giver of the gift. Persistence guards us against self-reliance and magnifies God's glory.

5. We are to ask without improper motives.

A loving father delights to give to his children but there are some rules as stated in Scripture. “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). James 4:3 says, “You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend it upon your desires.” If everyone randomly willed whatever they wanted into existence there would be chaos unless you removed selfish pride and sin. Eight-year olds would drive Porsches leaving destruction everywhere. It is sometimes best for us that we do not receive what we think we want. And yet sometimes the Lord answers our request to our disadvantage that we may learn about our improper motives. Psalm 106:15 says, “He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.” The qualification according to John 15:7 is that “you abide in Me and My words abide in you then you shall ask what you wish and it shall be done unto you.” Abiding in Christ and having the word of God in our hearts replaces the selfish motives and fleshly lusts with God's will.

6. We are to ask according to His will.

Our conviction or reliance should be based upon God's revealed truth that is what He has promised. It involves conviction that influences our conduct or actions. It involves surrender on our part that is anchored upon God's character. Jesus and his disciples teach us to qualify our petitions with God's will. So in Matthew 6:10 Jesus prays, "Thy kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The Apostle John in the book of 1 John 5:14 says, "if we ask anything according to His will He hears us."

If you have embraced the teaching that God wants to make you rich, you may want to consider some of the above Scriptural principles. Having faith in God means you are relying upon His wisdom to guide you and His power to help you. Dependence in God is the place where Jesus commands His children to exercise their will. Yielded and forceful is not contradictory when we are in Christ. Dependent and decisive is not paradoxical.