



Faith Matters

The evidence of things not seen

Herb Paynter

Living faith produces results while passive faith produces only wishes.

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Introduction

Ask any Christian if they believe that God is totally sovereign (that He and He alone determines what will and won't happen anywhere in the universe) and they will confidently respond "yes!"

Ask the same believer if he really believes in the power of prayer (that man can effectively appeal to God for His supernatural intervention in the affairs of man) and they will emphatically say "yes!"

Now ask him if his personal faith (his ultimate confidence that God will bring about a desired condition as a result of prayer) really changes anything and he will without hesitation state "yes!"

You don't have to be a Bible scholar to realize that these three issues do not comfortably dovetail. They seem to conflict in some fundamental way. Like the tongue-twisting argument: "can God create a rock so big that He cannot lift it?" these issues retain a similar degree of "spiritual tension." How can God be immutable (restricted by His own holiness to the inability to change) and still be willing to supernaturally alter the natural order of events in response to the simple prayer of faith from one of His children?

The Bible says that God never changes, but it also says that believers can ask anything of God in faith, and that He will answer that prayer. Is there really a conflict here, or is our God bigger than we can understand?

Faith in the Face of Distress

Psalm 34:2-18

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD;

let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

David says in this Psalm that we are to glorify the Lord at all times. How can we glorify God when we are in the midst of incredible personal peril? How can we praise Him with our lips when our life is in total turmoil? David claims that his soul, the very core of his being and the seat of his emotions, boasts in the Lord. Even more, David says we should let those who are also in great peril hear us glorifying of the Lord so we can all praise the Lord together.

Isn't this a bit like thanking a close friend for abandoning us at a very crucial time? If God is really in charge of every being on earth, doesn't He know every hair on our heads? If He loves us, how can He stand idly by while we are in such turmoil?

Do we just not get it? Is there more to this God/man relationship that we don't know about? Apparently so. James gives us additional insight into David's strange and seemingly illogical exclamation.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

As a believer, God is working on the inside to change us; He is persistently going about the process of changing us from the inside out. Many times this alteration and reshaping are painful both to experience in ourselves and to watch in others. But why is He changing us? Doesn't He "love us just the way we are?"

The answer is yes. Certainly He loves us regardless of what we are or how unlovely we are. Then why does He not simply love us and give us a care-free life?

The truth is that God loves us enough to conform us into the very image of His Son. It's not because God doesn't love us that we go through tests and trials, God loves us enough to re-mold us into an everlasting companion.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

In this life you find exactly what you are looking for. If you look for thrills you'll usually find them. Those looking for misery always manage to find it, and those seeking the Lord only find Him IF they seek Him with all their heart. God doesn't want to be your co-pilot! He wants to be the focal point of your life.

Notice that when David sought God, God answered him. If you haven't heard God lately, perhaps you are not seeking Him with all your heart. If there are other alternatives that could meet your need; if God is "plan B," or even "plan C," don't expect to hear much from Him. For those whose entire existence is dependent on God alone, those to whom God is not only "plan A," He is plan *only*. These people get answers from God because they are totally dependent on Him. There is never a "plan B" with these folks. God has all of their heart. He is their only Deliverer.

Notice what God did when David called on Him. God didn't deliver him *from* the situation -- He removed David

from the *fear* of the situation. It's a control thing; and God wants all of it.

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

You can tell those who rely totally on the Lord; they absolutely radiate. They glow. The presence of the Lord in their lives is more evident than any trouble or circumstance they are in. To know the Lord is to be so dependent on Him that physical circumstances don't shape your attitude. Those who know the Lord with that kind of intimacy can turn their face toward Him and honestly say, "Lord, *we* have a problem, but I know that you always have, and you always will take care of me." Could you use some perfect peace this week? Where's your mind? Are you focussing on the circumstances or are you focusing on the God of all circumstances?

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear hath torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

If you want to live without fear, you must first learn to fear God. You will either fear your circumstances or you will fear God. Fearing God is not being afraid of God; quite the opposite... it is revering Him to such a degree that you are overwhelmed by His presence. Do you want to feel secure?