

FAITH IN FAITH?

Many years ago, a certain fisherman was caught in a sudden storm. As he desperately made toward shore, the sea grew rougher and wilder. Alas, before he could reach safety, a huge wave capsized his boat, plunging him into the roaring sea. He knew that without help, his life would soon be over.

From the shore, a strong, alert young man saw the distressing scene. He jumped into his own boat and launched out into the bucking waves, at extreme risk to his life. Finally nearing the drowning man, he threw him a lifeline and hauled him into the boat. Somehow, he managed to wrestle the boat safely back to shore.

As the fisherman and his rescuer climbed out of the boat, dripping and panting, they saw a small crowd had gathered. A local news reporter rushed up to interview the rescued man. "Tell me, how did you make it out of there alive?"

"It wasn't easy. I had to hang onto the lifeline with all my might. Were it not for my powerful grip, I wouldn't have made it."

"Good story! Thank you." The reporter left, and the crowd dispersed. Nobody thanked or even acknowledged the hero.

Of course, this is not a true story. People do not act like this. Or do they? You may have heard or read of individuals who weathered a severe hardship or a traumatic experience. When asked how they made it through, they replied, "It was my faith that carried me through."

Why don't they say, "It was my God who carried me through"? Is their faith in God? Or is their faith in faith?

A PREVALENT PROBLEM

It seems, at least in America, that it is fashionable to talk about faith, and even to praise people for their strong faith. It is not so fashionable to talk about the Object of faith, let alone praise Him. Popular thinking says that all roads lead to the same place. It doesn't matter so much what you believe in, as long as you believe in something. In fact, don't tell us too much about what you believe, because that is divisive. We just want to commend you as a person of faith. Thus "faith" is promoted for its own sake.

Closely related is the emphasis on positive thinking. Faith in faith is a religious form of positive thinking, which focuses on the power within our minds to make things happen. By contrast, faith in God focuses on His power.

By focusing on self instead of God, faith in faith robs God of the glory due Him. It also cuts one off from His power. For faith without an object is nothing. And it can quickly lead to faith in the wrong object, which is not saving faith. Faith in faith will finally fail.

SYMPTOMS

Are we in danger of putting our faith in our faith? What are the symptoms? A few questions can help reveal the true focus of our faith.

Do we brag about our faith? Where does the credit go when we recover from an illness, have a good year in business, overcome a bad habit, or hear someone praise our people or way of life? Is it our faith or our God?

When our prayers for a friend are answered, what drives us to say, “I was praying for you”? Are we trying to impress them with our faithfulness and the power of our prayers? Or with the faithfulness and power of our Father who answers prayer?

Are we aware how desperately we need Christ, that without Him we are nothing? Or have we become complacent and self-sufficient?

Is our Christian service motivated by wholehearted love for our Lord and for others? Or are we merely busying ourselves with religious activity while our fellowship with Him grows cold?

How do we feel about our religious heritage? Do we value it as a gift from God and humbly thank Him for it? Or do we take pride in it and trust in it for merit?

What is our main goal in passing on the faith to the coming generation? Is it only to teach them to do and say all the right things? Or is it to lead them to a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ?

Do we see faith as personal empowerment, a tool to get what we want in life? Or is it an exercise in surrendering our will to His, totally trusting that His way is always good?

GENUINE FAITH

The Bible heroes of faith did not boast of their faith. Rather, they boasted of their Lord. They simply lived their faith by trusting Him and obeying His Word.

Hebrews 11, while extolling the faith of the saints, keeps the focus of their faith very clear. Faith pleases God. It believes that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It acts on His warnings of things not seen as yet. It looks for a city whose builder and maker is God. It judges Him faithful Who has promised. It sees His promises afar off and embraces them. It seeks a heavenly country. It sees Him Who is invisible.

Right after the faith chapter, Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as “the author and finisher of our faith.” Without Him there would be no foundation for faith and no hope of it ever being completed.

None of this is to diminish the importance of faith. The Scriptures emphasize its importance. It is something we must earnestly contend for. And even though faith is not as important as its Object, faith needs emphasis because we are the ones who can fail—He cannot.

But as we seek to increase our faith, let us be sure we’re emphasizing the right faith. True faith is strengthened, not by focusing on itself, but by gazing on the face of its Author and Finisher.

Our faith grows as we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him, as we read His Word for a better view of Him and His will, as we seek His presence among His people in His house, as we ponder and praise His

glorious character, as we grasp His hand through every step of life in gladness and in tears, as we remember His faithfulness in the past, and as we commit to His plan for the future.

By all means, let us hold onto the lifeline as if our lives depend on it. But let us never take our eyes off the One on the other end of the line. And be sure to give Him all the credit.

-A. Clair Auker