



How Faith Grows (2 Peter 1:2-4)

'Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' (2 Peter 1:3-4)

A. Receiving God's Promises

God's plan from the very beginning was to *bring many sons to glory through Christ's suffering on the cross* (Heb 2:10). What is God's glory? It is none other than His nature (Ex 33:18; 34:6-7).

1. God's divine power has provided for us everything we need for this life and godliness to live a full fruitful life and a holy life in the sight of God in the midst of darkness.
2. This is what salvation is. It was the act of God's glory and virtue (goodness) calling us to Himself.
3. We receive God's total provision to live this life of holiness and power through what Peter calls 'the exceedingly great and precious promises,' which is the word of God.
4. The ultimate goal of all God's promises to us is so that we become 'partakers of God's divine nature' – i.e., becoming like Christ in every way. How? By escaping the corruption in the world through lust.

B. Warning Against Unbelief

What is the link between God's *exceedingly great and precious promises* and our lives, so that we can become partakers (Gk. 'koinonos') of all of God's provision and His divine nature?

1. The link is FAITH. *'For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.'* (Heb 4:2) This refers to the Israelites who escaped Egypt but failed to receive God's promises. When we hear the word of God it must be mixed with faith in our heart to produce the intended results.
2. We must take heed to God's warning against unbelief (Heb 3:7-11 c.f. Ps. 95). Unbelief is a very dangerous thing. It is sin. God calls it an evil heart of unbelief (3:12). Unbelieving heart provokes God to anger (3:10). It causes our hearts to depart from God (3:10). God calls this unbelieving heart the single greatest cause for Israel's failure to enter into His rest (3:19).
3. The writer of Hebrews warns us - Israel's tragic history exactly applies to the believers today (3:12-15). *'Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'* (3:15) This is why we must encourage one another daily to obey the voice of God promptly, and steadfastly hold on to our confidence in God and His word as at the beginning until the end (3:13-14).

C. Heart and Mouth Connection

Our faith is sealed by the confession of our mouth.

1. Confession ('homologia') means to speak something out confidently, boldly, and publicly. C.f. *'For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.'* (Heb 3:14) It means to say the same thing as God's word says. We make the words of our mouth agree with the word of God, and we bring our words in line with God's word.
2. This is how we experience salvation and our relationship with God begins. *'But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'* (Rom 10:8-10)

Paul asks in effect, *'How do we get saved? Do not make it impossible. Like going high up to heaven or down low to the abyss by striving. God has made it accessible for absolutely everyone. How? It is our word of faith in our heart and mouth – just a few inches.'* Paul connects mouth and heart three times - mouth

and heart twice, heart and mouth once. It means what you believe in your heart is made clear by speaking it with your mouth, and what you speak with your mouth makes concrete what you believe in your heart. How did you learn the multiplication table? By head or by mouth? 'To learn by heart' in Hebrew is to 'learn by mouth.'

Then what is it that you believe for your salvation? *That Jesus Christ died for our sins and that God has raised Him from the dead according to the Scriptures.* Paul says you believe with your heart unto righteousness, and confess with your mouth unto salvation. Your confession by your mouth enforces what you believe in your heart. It works both ways.

3. Salvation is an all-inclusive word, embodying all the benefits of the cross of Jesus Christ – spiritual, material, temporal, eternal. How do we enter into all the benefits of the cross? Whatever the area of salvation we need (forgiveness of our sins, healing of our body, provision we need to do the will of God) we confess with our mouth what God says in His word. Not because we feel like it, but because what God says is true.

'And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.' (2 Cor 9:8) 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.' (2 Cor 8:9)

D. Life of Obedience

Faith grows when we act according to the confession of our faith. When we confess our faith in the word of God, then it must be followed by the appropriate action that is in line with our confession. Our life must agree with our confession. This is the life of obedience to God's word (James 2:18-24, 26).

1. Having right theology without the acts of faith is dead faith. *'For as the body without the spirit is dead, faith without works is dead also.'* (James 2:26) Even demons have the right theology about God, but at the thought of God they shudder, but do not worship Him. Why? They do not obey God. Faith without the act of faith, i.e., obedience, is dead. It is nothing more than deception (James 2:18-20).
2. *'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness,'* (James 2:23, c.f. Gen 15:6). Abraham's faith in God led him to obey God's voice. Step by step God led Abraham to the promised land till he received Isaac - the promised son in the end. Abraham's faith did not stand still, but he grew till he could by faith place his son on the altar, believing God would raise him from the dead and fulfil His promise. Faith is not static but dynamic. Abraham's faith ultimately brought him to total surrender and obedience to God. Abraham's faith put him in the right relationship with God. Abraham's faith matured and was perfected till he was called 'the friend of God' (James 2:20-24; 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8). True faith is dynamic. It doesn't stand still. It is always expressed in obedience.
3. Is your faith a living faith, a growing faith? Or has it stopped growing at some point because you have decided to draw back because you got hurt, or you became afraid?

'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith. But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (destruction), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.' (Heb 10:37-39)

This Scripture was given to me (Paul Kim) in a dream many years ago when I was struggling to step out by faith to serve God. Let us bring to remembrance God's precious promises to us in the past. Let us also remember our promises to God that we would be faithful to Him. Let's remember God's Rhema word given to us (2 Pet 1:3-4), prophecies spoken over us (1 Tim 4:14), our personal prayers and confession of love we've made to God, our diaries, etc.

In the Bible, faith means both 'faith' and 'faithfulness'. Our faith in God's faithfulness to His word must grow. Our faithfulness to God must also grow, i.e., we become more dependable and loyal to Him. Faith is both the gift of God's grace and the spiritual fruit we need to cultivate (Gal 5:22).

4. Has your faith been put through severe testing? God promises all true faith that is precious in His sight will be tested and purified by fire. (1 Pet 1:5-7, c.f. James 1:2-4, Is 48:10) Is your faith growing today?