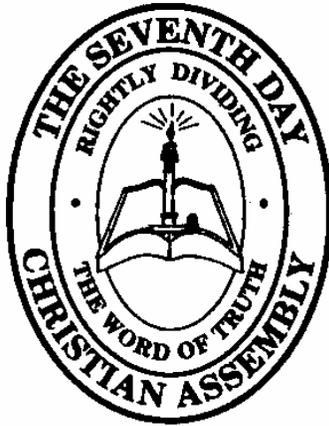


*Rightly Dividing*

THE  
WORD OF TRUTH

*Bible Study Course*

Lesson Seven:  
Faith toward God



*Without faith it is impossible to please God because he that comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6; author's paraphrase of the Kings James Version)*

*Faith means that we are certain of the things we hope for, convinced of the things we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1; William Barclay translation; The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Hebrews; St. Andrews Press, 1964; p. 144)*

*For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13; King James Version)*

an open letter from

## The Pastor

In many respects, the *faith* spoken of in the Bible is misunderstood. I know – that’s a bold statement that brinks on the edge of absurdity, but give me a few minutes of your time to explain the basis for my conclusion. In order to do so, we have to understand some of the misconceptions about the scriptural context of *faith* – you know, what *God* expresses as *His* expectations of the structure and content of faith, as well as the things that *people* use as the structure and contents of their faiths. This will, perhaps, broaden your view and understanding in a way that will help you to assess your own idea about faith – and change whatever needs to be changed.

Suffice it to say, *faith toward God* involves, first of all, more than simply believing that He exists. There are the various *thoughts and ways* of God that we must consider – as well as the great gap that exists between His thoughts and ways and ours (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Second, we must carefully consider this statement by James, the brother of Jesus Christ: “What does it profit a man if he claims to have faith, yet does not have *the works that faith demands*? Can that faith save him? ...Faith, *if it is not expressed in the deeds of faith*, is dead because it produces no fruit....You believe that there is one God – and that is well and good – but the devils also believe that...and tremble. But know this, you empty, useless person, faith *without the works that it demands* is dead” (author’s paraphrase of James 2:14-20; *KJV*; emphasis added). The devils believe in God’s existence, but they are destined for destruction because their belief does not change their character one bit. Finally, in the same argument, it would do you no good if you spent your life and its resources pursuing *the wrong God!* It is imperative that your faith is expressed toward the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the gods of the pagans or the gods made in the image of man.

Before we get into the study, let’s take an in-depth look at the meaning of Hebrews 11:1. As defined in this passage, *faith* is not an unfulfilled desire or a futile longing for something. The word Paul uses for *faith* is the Greek term *pistis*. This is the word that is overwhelmingly used throughout the New Testament. In one (1) case (Hebrews 10:23), the term *elpis* is used. Even then, you can see that it

must be derived from *pistis*. In five (5) other cases (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; and Luke 12:28), the term is *oligopistes* – “lacking faith; of little faith.” There again, you can see that *pistis* is the root from which it is derived. All other references to faith use the term *pistis*.

This term *pistis* implies a couple of things. First, it is an *absolute conviction* that God can and will do the things He has promised to do. Look at Romans 4:20, 21 and understand faith as expressed by Abraham: “He [Abraham] did not *doubt* or *waver* at the promise of God by not believing Him, but was *strong in faith*, giving glory to God; and being *fully persuaded* that God was able to perform all the things that He had promised” (author’s paraphrase of the *KJV*; *emphasis added*). Second, it is an *unwavering reliance* upon Jesus Christ for the salvation that is promised for faith in Him and His sacrifice for sins (see John 3:16-18 and Acts 4:10-12). It would follow, then, that the *faith* expressed by those named in Hebrews 11 involves both of these aspects. Yes, even before He came to be sacrificed, these faithful had *unwavering faith* in the promise of God (Genesis 3:15) – and that His Christ would come for the purpose of saving mankind out of sin. They were, in effect, *Christians*. So, faith is to be expressed toward *this* God and *this* Christ – no other.

In the “politically correct,” multi-cultural world, you will hear scorn being heaped upon those who believe that their religious faith is the only true faith. Yet, how could we admit that the religions of the world are *all* *true* and *right* – *all* merely different paths to the *same* goal? The same thing is true of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations who teach *different* things that *compete* with each other and *contradict* one another. How can that be if God expects us to be “...*One* body, and *one* Spirit, even as you are called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6; emphases added)? Explain that to yourself.

So, *pistis* not only involves this *active belief*, it also involves *unwavering fidelity* to it. This is expressed by the U.S. Marine motto: *Semper Fidelis* – “Always Faithful.” In other words, God *always* needs to be able to trust you as much as you *always* need to be able to trust Him. It is a two-way street. James expresses it very well by saying: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

(Continued on p. 16)

# Faith toward God

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Some believe that *faith* consists merely of a belief in the existence of God. Some extend that same idea to belief in Jesus as the Christ. This is generally born out of the tendency many have of using one scripture, or a small group of scriptures, as the basis for their *faith* paradigm. For example, in Acts 16:30, 31 the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” Their reply was short and sweet: “Believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your entire household.” Too many people believe that is all you have to do. Is it? Well, not being good Bible students, they leave off the next verse: “**And they** [Paul and Silas] *spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*” It appears that Paul and Silas gave them *a body of doctrine about God’s truth* on which to base their *faith* paradigm. After sufficient instruction had taken place, the jailer and his household were *baptized*. It was not enough to simply believe in the existence of God and Jesus Christ.

When the crowd that was gathered to celebrate Pentecost asked Peter what they should do about his sermon (Acts 2:14-36), his reply was different from Paul’s: “...**Repent** and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (vv. 37, 38). Repentance, baptism, receipt of the Holy Spirit. But...was that all? No, check the context. Verse 40 says: “...**With many other words did he testify and exhort**, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this stubborn and willful generation.’” Peter’s exhortation evidently contained *a body of doctrine about God’s truth* on which to base their decision about repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. From that exhortation, they made up their minds about whether or not what Peter said was worthy of their wholehearted faith.

Both of these examples fly in the face of the radio and television preachers who exhort people to simply believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. *Faith toward God* involves more than mere belief. Let’s investigate this thoroughly for better understanding of *God’s* requirements for *true faith*.

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## Lesson Seven

### Proving the Existence of God

In Hebrews 11:6, Paul says that the person who wants to come to God must *believe* that He exists. This word is from the Greek term *pisteuo* (“to put one’s trust in” – pronounced *pist-yoo-o*) – a derivative from *pistis*. And...it would be reasonable that one would believe that God exists if he wants to put his trust in Him! Why put your trust in something that does not exist? The problem that you face is in *proving* to yourself that He does, in fact, exist. There are numerous sources that say that He does not exist, and others that say that He does not exist in the way the Bible says He does. There are many who say that He exists as the Bible says He does, but then they misinterpret what the Bible actually reveals about Him. We took up that discussion in Lesson Two (“Explaining the God of the Bible”).

What can you do to settle this problem in your mind and heart? What source of information can you look at in order to come to a trustworthy, definitive answer regarding God’s existence? This will be an in-depth survey of what the Bible puts forth as its *proof*. Learn this well.

1. Hebrews 6:1 – Is *faith toward God* one of the basic doctrines of Jesus Christ?

**Comment:** The Greek term translated *toward* in the *KJV* is *epi*. This word means more than just “in the direction of something.” This usage in Hebrews 6:1 is an accusative case usage – specifically, a preposition that implies *motion* in one form or another. In this case, it has to do with feelings *and* actions directed toward God that express belief, hope, trust – the *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek/English Lexicon* follows with the term *pisteuein*. It is apparent, then, that those who come to God must do so with *feelings* and *actions* that express belief, hope, and trust in His existence. This definition also implies that such a

person will do so with the willingness to allow God to have control over his/her life. How can you do that if you do not believe that God exists?

2. John 3:8 – Are your five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) capable of detecting *spirit*? Or, does *spirit* have to be *revealed* to us?

**Comment:** Even the detection of the *sound* of spirit would be a revelation. You would not detect it if it did not choose to make the sound. Read Acts 2:1-4 to see an example of this. Both the sound of the wind and the tongues of fire were *revelations* of the presence of the Spirit of God.

3. Psalm 14:1 – What kind of person denies the existence of God? What does *fool* mean in this statement? Look up the definition.

4. Romans 1:18-23 – What prevents people from receiving the true revelation of God’s existence? Has God given *proof* of His existence? In what ways? Are the unrighteous and fools without excuse? Why /why not?

5. Genesis 1:1 – Who created the universe? Does v. 26 reveal that there is more than one God involved in this creation?

**Comment:** As we have already studied, the Hebrew term translated *God* is *Elohim*. All of Genesis 1 uses *Elohim* in the places you read *God*. The “-im” ending shows the noun is plural. The singular form is *El* or *Eloah* – which means “the Mighty One.” The plural form, then, would mean “the Mighty Ones” – more than one mighty being.

6. John 1:1-3 – Who was in the beginning with God? Was the Word also *God*? How much of the work of creation did the Word do? Is there anything in existence that the Word did not create? (Also read Ephesians 3:9 and Colossians 1:1-20 to get a better idea about the way *Elohim* has worked together in creation.)

7. Verse 14 – Did this Word become a flesh-and-blood human being and dwell among us? With what does John compare the Word’s glory? Who did this Word become in the flesh?

8. Matthew 1:21-23; Isaiah 7:14 – What was to be the name of the child born to the virgin? What does that name mean? So, does this mean that Jesus

Christ is the One known as “the Word” and “God with us”? (O.T. = *Lord God – Yahweh*)

9. John 1:14; 21:24, 25; Acts 1:1-3 – Were there *witnesses* to His existence and the things He said and did – many of which are recorded in the New Testament? Did John say that there were things He did that were not even written down? Would you agree, then, that Jesus of Nazareth was a real, historical person?

**Comment:** *If* Jesus was a real, historical character, and *if* He was, in fact, “*God with us*,” then we have *proof* that one member of *Elohim* actually exists. How do we *prove* that He was, in fact, “God with us”? We have already used two key elements in the process: (a) *historical witnesses* and (b) *prophecy*. John 3:2 shows a historical record that there were numerous Jews who believed that Jesus was sent from God *because of the miraculous works He performed*.

We know that it is possible for people, under the influence of demonic spirits, to perform miraculous works. Exodus 7, 8 shows Moses in competition with Pharaoh’s magicians – but...there came a point at which the magicians could not perform (Exodus 8:18,19). Revelation 13:11-15 shows that the False Prophet will have similar powers and will use them to *deceive* people into worshiping a false god: the Beast.

The way John writes his account in John 3:2 is interesting: “...No man can do *these* miracles that you do unless *God* is with him” (emphasis added). There appears to have been a specific type of miracles Jesus performed that no human could perform *without God’s help*. Humans can do certain things that *appear* to be miraculous, but only God can do the truly miraculous.

So, we can add another *proof* of God’s existence: *true miracles incapable of human duplication*. The Bible, which Paul says was inspired by God Himself (see 2 Timothy 3:16), gives historical records of prophecy and miracles that have occurred from the very beginning of human civilization. *Faith* demands that you believe that they are *true* and they are *revelations of God’s relationship with mankind*. Can you do that without reservation? Many claim to be people of *faith*, yet they kiss off many scriptural accounts as mere myth, Zionist zeal, or the superstitions of primitive people.

Don’t forget that we have also seen in Romans 1:18-23 that *creation itself* is a *proof* of the existence

of God. At this point, we have four proofs of God's existence at our disposal: creation, eyewitness historical accounts, prophecy, and miracles. We will look at examples of each one of them so you can get an idea how important each one is to the overall proof of God's existence. This is important information for your *faith*.

10. Do you realize, at this point, that your *faith* is to be expressed toward *Elohim* – because *both* the Father and the Son exist as separate Beings? Both of them had parts to play in the creation? And salvation?

**Comment:** Many assume that faith is only expressed toward Jesus Christ as Savior. That's not exactly true. As strange as it might otherwise seem, there is a "package" of things in which we must have faith. You cannot have faith in *Jesus Christ*, attach to it all manner of ungodly life-styles, and claim that you are "righteous" and worthy of salvation. You cannot claim faith in *God* and attach to it all manner of doctrines that fly in the face of His revelation of "truth." The offer of salvation only through Jesus Christ is certainly an important part of God's revelation of truth, but it is not the *only* matter of truth revealed by *Elohim* that is necessary for *true faith*.

This is very plainly evident in Jesus' statement in Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent and believe the gospel*" (emphasis added). **Which gospel?** Verse 14 says that Jesus was "...preaching *the gospel of the kingdom of God*." That gospel has a very specific doctrinal content revealed in scripture. What if someone comes preaching *another gospel* or *another Jesus* or *another spirit*? Yet, that is done in far too many cases – without people being overly critical of the contradictions. Matthew 7:21-23 also shows that simply preaching, healing, casting out demons, and doing good works in the name of Jesus Christ is not enough if it *contradicts the will of God the Father*. Understand this very deeply: having faith in Jesus Christ is only part of *your journey into salvation and God's kingdom!* There are many other things to which you must pay attention – things which cannot be summarily dismissed as being unimportant. Pay attention to how this will unfold in scripture.

### **Proof #1: Creation Demands a Creator**

We have already seen in Lesson 3 how evolutionary science is divorced from the idea that there is

a God who was involved in the creation of all that exists. In their concept, all that exists is the product of blind, unplanned chance. It all came into existence on its own – without the aid of any kind of divine cause or power. Let's go back to Psalm 14:1 and discuss the meaning of the term *fool*. (Psalms 14 and 53 are the same psalm – with minor variations.) Our objective is to determine if a creation can exist without a creator.

1. Verse 1 – List three ways the *fool* is described in this psalm.

**Comment:** The Hebrew term translated as *fool* is *nabal*. It describes a person who is lacking in value, force, sense, or purpose. The *fool* is a *contemptible, deliberate scoundrel and/or criminal*. While the term includes the *atheist* (*a* = no; *theist* = God), *fool* by no means is only the *atheist*. There are three types of people which would fit the term *fool*: (1) those who deny the existence of God; (2) those who do not deny His existence, but who deny that He guides and cares for the creation; and (3) those who admit that God exists and guides and cares for creation, but who *live* as though there is no God to either reward or punish humans for their thoughts and ways – that is, their belief does not affect the way they live. They also do not bother themselves with *why humans exist*.

2. Verse 2 – When God seriously ponders mankind (steadfastly fixes His gaze upon them), what two things is He looking for?

**Comment:** *Understand*, in this instance, has to do with rightly understanding God's thoughts and ways. It is possible for a person to have great understanding of the things of the world, yet not understand even the minutest thing about God's thoughts and ways. It is possible for us to understand everything from atoms to how stars are formed and still not understand *God*. *Seek God* means that our understanding (wisdom) leads us to conduct the affairs of our lives on the basis that God exists and has an intimate role to play in the unfolding purpose of the creation as it relates to the existence of human beings. We can learn that by *listening* and by *searching*. The *fool* will not bother to do either.

3. Verse 3 – What conclusion does God draw from His observance of the *typical human being*? Read also Paul's conclusion in Romans 3:9-18, in which he quotes this verse in connection with others from

the Old Testament. Who is included in God's judgment?

4. Verse 5 – In what kind of generation does God find those who understand and seek Him?

5. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 – Which two types of wisdom does Paul put into contrast in these verses? In which type of wisdom does God want our faith to stand?

6. Verse 6 – What is the ultimate end of the wisdom of this world?

7. Verse 8 – Do the rulers and wise men of the world possess God's *revealed wisdom*?

8. Verses 9-13 – How do people of *true faith* receive their knowledge and understanding of God's thoughts and ways? Is this understanding a product of the *world's* wisdom/knowledge? How does the Holy Spirit teach us the things of God?

9. Verse 14 – Can the natural man receive this *revelation* of God's truth? List two reasons given in this verse.

10. Isaiah 44:6-20 – Would you agree, then, that a person can believe that *God* created all that is and still not understand the importance of the idea that *creation demands a creator*? Would you agree that they, in fact, could give credit to the *wrong God*?

11. Isaiah 45:5-19 – Which God claims to be the Creator God (remember John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17)? Has God spoken in *secret* (remember Romans 1:19, 20)?

12. Jeremiah 32:17 – Is there anything too difficult for God to do? What is God's *great power*?

**Comment:** God originally created – and later re-fashioned our earth (Genesis 1:1-3) – by His great power *the Holy Spirit*. This spirit expresses *the unified creative will of Elohim* – the God Family that we learned about in Lesson 2.

This Spirit is like a tool, but, unlike man-made tools, it never runs down or wears out. It is so pervasive that it literally fills the vast universe (see Psalm 139:7-12 and Jeremiah 23:24). It is this same Spirit that must be allowed entrance into your mind in order to transform it from a mind that merely understands the physical, material universe to one that

also understands spiritual matters (refer back to 1 Corinthians 2:9-14). God does not trespass your personal choice, so He will not allow that Spirit power to influence your thinking unless you *choose to surrender* to its influence. The typical person does not understand this nor actually do this – especially those guided only by the spirit/wisdom of this world system.

13. Hebrews 11:3 – Out of what did God create the matter that forms the worlds?

14. Psalm 148:1-6 – In what way did God utilize His spirit of power to create all that is? Read Genesis 1 and compare it to this scripture. Also read Psalm 33:6-11. How did He create? What does it mean when it is said that "...it stood fast"? Is that *miraculous*?

**Comment:** Recall that John 1:1-3 says that the Word was the agent by which all things were created. The term translated *Word* is from the Greek term *logos*. So, this *Word* is the one who became flesh – the personage in *Elohim* who became Jesus Christ. Think about this very carefully: *This means that Jesus Christ is the Creator God – the one in Genesis 1 who said "Let there be..." and it came into existence!* We can conclude, then, that Jesus Christ is the *Spokesman of Elohim*. In most cases, when you see the term LORD or LORD GOD in the Old Testament, it is referring to the one who became Jesus Christ.

The expression *stand fast* means that it is "firmly fixed or bound; adhered firmly; unchangeable." In other words, in and of itself it is fixed into a condition that will remain intact forever unless some kind of power is exerted upon it that disrupts that fixed condition.

15. Psalm 89:28-37 – To which heavenly bodies does God's covenant with David refer? How long will David's throne endure when compared to those heavenly bodies? Does this help you to understand the expression *stand fast*?

16. Jeremiah 33:15-26; 2 Samuel 7:12-19 – By which covenant did the Lord God swear His faithfulness to David? How *awesome* to you is this oath—you know, to *guarantee forever* that David's throne would exist? Does that suggest that our sun and moon are not *temporary fixtures* in space?

17. Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:2, 3; Psalm 66:7 – Does it make sense that God would have to have the power to keep all things operating *precisely* throughout the ages so that they would not fall apart? Is that *miraculous*?

**Comment:** Evolutionary scientists know very well the interdependence of various factors that keep things operating in our universe – *yet, they attribute their existence to chaotic, blind, unplanned chance.* Their *worldly wisdom* says that it is foolish for anyone to believe that a *God* wills, speaks that will, and causes His Spirit to act on any and all things thus spoken. It is true that God does not reveal the exact mechanism by which He does that, but He has revealed enough of the general process to give us historical and scientific proof that all nature is obedient to Him. He uses His great spirit of power to sustain and rule His vast creation. This brings us to our second proof of God’s existence.

## **Proof #2: Law Demands a Lawgiver**

1. Jeremiah 33:20, 25 – What, exactly, are the “covenant with day and night” and the “ordinances of heaven and earth”?

**Comment:** These expressions are roughly equivalent to the concept of “natural laws” by which day and night are regulated, as well as other natural laws that keep planets and moons in their orbits and the stellar system in its positions. It speaks of the *vast stability* of the creation because of the *laws* that govern it.

2. Psalm 104 – Make a list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God. Seriously contemplate the claims of this Psalm and be as complete as you can be. Remember: this is not a race; the objective is to learn.

**Comment:** Here is an example of what I want you to do: v. 2 – *light* operates by specific, definite laws. However, scientists do not really know how to explain it other than by making note of its properties, like color, types (examples = X-rays, gamma rays, infrared, etc.), speed, et cetera. It travels in straight lines at 186,000 miles per second. God knows *exactly* how He made light; man has only a vague idea, in spite of the many things we know he has discovered about it. Man really is not properly equipped to understand it fully. Read an article about light in an encyclopedia and see what has been

discovered about it – as well as the limitations of man to fully understand it.

3. Job 38 – Again, make a list of things that operate according to *laws* established by God.

4. Job 26:7, 13 – Upon what does the earth appear to be suspended? What keeps it in its place?

**Comment:** The term *sustain* means “to hold suspended, to support, to keep alive, to keep from ruin.” God’s creation would literally “fly apart” if He had not anticipated the laws by which to hold it together – to *sustain* it. So, not only is He the Creator of all that is, He is also the Creator of the *laws* by which it all operates and stays together. Since they are *natural laws*, then it is possible for man to trespass against them and *sin* in the process. That *sin* will have natural consequences. A lung-breathing creature cannot enter a liquid environment and “breathe” that liquid. If he does, he will drown and die! Neither can a human jump from a height that would cause greater pressure upon his skeleton than it can withstand. If he does, he will be terribly broken and, possibly, die! Those consequences are determined by *laws* that God established to control His creation. Do not jump off such a height, change your mind half-way down, and cry out to God to save you (see Matthew 4:5-7).

5. 1 Corinthians 14:33 – What does Paul mean by saying that “God is not the author of *confusion*”?

**Comment:** In this context, Paul is referring to how the Spirit of God should work among His Church in the expression of the various gifts it brings to God’s people. However, we should be able to generalize this example to the totality of God’s character. ***God does not operate as a God of tumult and disorder – that is, there is no instability in anything that God does.*** Why? Because He holds everything together with appropriate laws. In order to do that, it would stand to reason that *Elohim* would have laid out a *plan* before They began the actual process of creating. I have often pointed to Ephesians 1 as an example of such a planning session (read it). The term *predestined* suggests that there was an *idea* and a *plan* before there was a *creation*.

God’s assignment of His Spirit in attaining His plan and purpose suggests that He is intent on finishing what He started. Maintaining the physical universe through specific laws suggests a long-term

plan. *True miracles* suggest extraordinary events that testify to the existence of God.

The existence of natural laws proves the *kind begets kind* concept of creation we discussed in Lesson 3. Man can tinker with the laws and cause various things to operate against nature. By doing so, man causes *confusion* and *chaos* and *tumult*. For example, Leviticus 18:22, 23 says that *homosexuality* is an *abomination* (that is, *detestable* – the same term is used to describe someone who *curses* while calling on a *deity* as a witness – which is a type of spiritual *chaos*), and *bestiality* is *confusion* (that is, a mental or spiritual *disorder* and *turmoil*). Both break the laws of sexual conduct that God established by creating humans as male and female who would engage in sexual intercourse for both pleasure and the procreation of their kind. *Homosexual* intercourse does not obey God's will – even though same-sex couples express toward one another love and devotion and fervently desire to spend their lives together in that relationship (see Matthew 7:21). It might *seem* to be so good and so right because there is a form of love and devotion involved, but it has never been God's design or desire for such relationships to exist – no more than it having been His design and desire for married man and woman to divorce (see Matthew 19:3-8). Ways that *seem* right are not always, in fact, right (see Proverbs 14:12).

Read Romans 1:18-32 again to see the *natural* cause-effect progression of law-breaking and the sexual and social degeneration of the mind and actions of man. The *wisdom of this world* thinks that it is all well and good for things to be this way because we are *endowed* with these *rights* by our Creator (see 1 Corinthians 1:19-31). However, we should know that *God's* desire for our life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness is bound up as much in the *natural laws* He created to govern such things as it is in the commandments He gave that govern our behaviors.

Evolutionary science teaches that the vast universe came into existence by a random explosion of some hydrogen gas. This explosion, they proclaim, both eventually created the sun, stars, moons, and planets and set them in their places and courses. All that has appeared since then is ultimately a product of this random explosion – even the various life forms that have come into existence. ***But...from where did all of the laws and materials come? By which laws did the hydrogen explode? Which laws put the earth into an exact orbit around the sun to provide just the right conditions for the emergence***

***of life and the maintenance of its existence? It was not an accident; it is the product of a Creator who set everything in its place according to specific laws. The existence of laws demands the existence of a lawgiver. Laws are miracles from God.***

### **Proof #3: Design Demands a Designer**

1. Psalm 139:14-16 – Does David attribute his existence to God's *design*? Look up the meaning of the term. Note some of the more salient points made in the definition: (a) "to sketch out a pattern for development"; (b) "to devise for a specific function or end"; (c) "to conceive and draw the plans for". How does David describe how his own body was made?

**Comment:** The term *fearfully* in this case means "causing reverent awe and great awareness." Not only should it inspire your reverence of this holy God, it should bring to you an awareness of some great *purpose* He has in mind for humans and the creation around them. The term *wonderfully* means "causing astonishment." So, David appears to be greatly astonished and awe-struck at the design and purpose of the human body. He shows his understanding of that *design* when he remarks that God saw his *substance* and had his members *written in a book* and *fashioned* before they even came into existence.

This is not a case that supports some claims that God knew from the beginning who is going to be born, when, how they will look, and what plan He has for their lives. Such a concept would have God planning adulteries, rapes, and fornications by which children are born. Such a concept is a gross misunderstanding of God as a *designer*. It also grossly misunderstands David's comments.

2. Genesis 1:14 – For what purpose were the "lights in the firmament of the heaven" designed?

3. Leviticus 23 – Do you find a relationship between these holy days and the *seasons* (v. 4)?

4. Psalm 8 – How does David extol God for His great *design* of the universe and earth's life forms?

5. Hebrews 11:10 – Read the translation in *The Jerusalem Bible*: "...he looked forward to a city *founded, designed and built* by God." What does this tell you about God as a *designer*? (Read Revelation 21 to find out about that city.)

6. Ephesians 1:4-14 – Go back to Lesson 3, pp. 18, 19 and re-read the discussions. *When* did God decide all of the things about which Paul writes here? Do you get the idea that He just made it up as He went along in time? Or, is there some great *purpose* for which God created all that exists? Did He even plan a span of time during which His plans would be accomplished (v. 10)? Is it apparent to you yet the God is a *designer* who not only sets out a *pattern*, but also a *purpose* and a *schedule for its accomplishment*?

7. Genesis 1:3-25 – Using your dictionary definition of the term *design*, write out an explanation of the *design* of the created things described in these verses. Here's an example: v. 14 – we have seen that these lights were put there for *telling time* in various ways: day, night, month, year, season (*The Jerusalem Bible* says "...let them indicate *festivals* [remember Leviticus 23], *days, and years*" – emphasis added). That's a *design*.

8. Genesis 1:26-28 – In what way did God create man? After which *kind*? Were they of one gender or two? Why? Does sexual activity between members of the *same gender* (homosexuals) fulfill God's *design* and *purpose* for creating *males* and *females*? Depend on all that you have learned thus far to help in answering these questions.

9. Does it appear to you yet that God is a great *designer* with a great *plan* and *purpose* for humanity and the creation around them?

10. Read Job 38-42 and note the ways God reprimands Job for his lack of understanding about God's *design* and *purpose* for all things (if you can, read this from a modern translation). Also, note Job's confession in ch. 42:1-5 and how God dealt with him for that confession (vv. 6-16).

#### **Proof #4: Prophecy Proves God's Existence**

God's *plan* and *design* are already written in the Bible. If Jesus Christ is Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8) – that is, the Beginning and the End – then He is well aware of where that plan will take us. I know that we will ultimately *win*, but...let me give

you a better example of how we can understand God's plan through prophecy.

On Friday, June 15, 2007, I placed a three-column, eight inch long ad in *The Moultrie Observer* which asked the question "Will Jesus Return in 2007?" I was doing a radio program at the time and was about to begin a series of studies on the *Rapture* concept. The *Left Behind* books had sold in the millions and had spawned a series of movies – all of this based on the concept that Jesus Christ is going to *secretly* return, seven full years *before* His "second" coming, in order to rescue Christians out of the terrible prophesied *Tribulation Period*. I have a serious problem with the *Rapture* concept because it misinterprets prophecy. One way in which it does that is by fostering the idea that Jesus could return *at any moment*. Many "Christian" ministers warn you to make your profession of faith right away because Jesus could come *tonight*. Well, *that is not true*.

Since 1994, I have regularly updated this cautionary message: *Jesus will not come tonight, nor will He return by \_\_\_\_*. My statement in that June 15, 2007 ad was simple and to the point: "Will Christ return *tonight*? No. Will He return in 2007? No. Will He return anytime – by *secret rapture* or *Second Coming* – between now and June 2010? No. How can we *know* this to be true?" At that point, I deferred to my radio program and the series I was going to present over the next several weeks. But... the question remains: ***How can we know this to be true?***

Based on what God reveals in *prophecy*, I can tell you with the utmost certainty and confidence that Jesus Christ will not return anytime between now (February 5, 2009) and February 2012. You might die and be confronted by Him in your next waking moment, but His Second Coming most definitely will not occur within the next three years. Each year that certain events do not take place, the return of Christ moves up at least three more years from that time. ***I know this because God has revealed what to look for! That revelation proves God's existence!*** [\*\*\*To update that message on this date (October 29, 2011), I can say with great confidence that Jesus Christ will not return between now and October 29, 2015 – and probably not before October 29, 2017.\*\*\*] Now, let's understand how that works.

1. Look up the term *prophecy* in your dictionary. Do not settle for the one that says "a divine utter-

ance by a prophet.” That’s vague and incomplete. Write down the definitions that say something like “apocalyptic revelation” or “foretelling” and “prediction.” Write down as complete a definition as you can. It’s important to understand what *prophecy* means so you can understand why it is a *proof* of God’s existence.

2. 2 Chronicles 9:29 – Are Ahijah’s writings referred to as *prophecy*? By definition, would you assume that Ahijah was *inspired by God* to write down those prophecies?

**Comment:** At this point, we do not know if *God* inspired them. The reason is simple: we know that there is such a thing as *false prophets*. We can look at 1 Kings 11:26-40 and find Ahijah bringing to Jeroboam a prophecy from God that was later fulfilled just as God had revealed it (read chapter 12). We could conclude from that incident that Ahijah was a true prophet of God.

3. 2 Chronicles 15 – What did Azariah, son of Oded, prophesy to King Asa? Did that prophecy come true? Was Azariah a prophet of the True God?

**Comment:** The expression “the prophecy of Oded the prophet” should be understood to be the prophecy given by *Azariah*, the son of Oded. In this case, the term *prophecy* means “a specific and genuine prophecy.” We can conclude that Azariah was a true prophet of God.

4. Nehemiah 6:1-14 – What problem did Nehemiah have with Shemaiah? Did Shemaiah bring to Nehemiah a *prophecy*? What was it? Why did Nehemiah refuse to meet with him?

**Comment:** In this case, the term *prophecy* means “*false prophecy*.” Shemaiah was foretelling something that was not of God. It was a false report about a so-called coming event.

5. Proverbs 30-31 – Do these two chapters appear to be foretelling future events? Do they *warn* against certain actions, thoughts, and/or beliefs? Look up the term *oracle* and determine how that definition might apply. Were these *prophecies* divinely inspired?

**Comment:** The term *prophecy* as used here means “a burden (a message of doom); an utterance or oracle.” Note how these two men warn against certain thoughts, actions, and beliefs. It should be evident that they know by inspiration that certain

things will result in certain consequences – consequences that can be avoided if one uses this advice wisely. Such understanding points to the wisdom of following God’s thoughts and ways. This, too, is a type of prophecy that *proves* God’s existence.

6. Luke 1:5-25 – What did Gabriel tell Zacharias was going to happen to him and his wife? By what sign would Zacharias know that what Gabriel told him was true?

7. Verses 57-80 – Did Gabriel’s prophecy come true? What happened to Zacharias when it was fulfilled?

8. Verse 70 – How long has God had prophets in the world to foretell future events?

9. 2 Peter 1:19-20 – How do *God’s* prophecies compare to any others? What warning does Peter propose to people about heeding God’s prophecies? Are prophecies subject to whatever meanings different people want to give them – or, does it appear that prophecies are *objective* and *fixed* in meaning that *God* attaches to them? By what means are the prophets able to foretell future events?

10. Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Peter 2:1-3 – In the face of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, how seriously should you consider these warnings? How much would knowledge of God’s *truth* benefit you in these situations? Would God have prepared people for dealing with the *false* prophets if they had listened to God’s *true* prophets from the beginning of the world?

**Comment:** You have to understand the ability of Satan to deceive people in a religious setting. Notice Matthew 7:21-23. In whose name do these people operate? Jesus Christ’s. How easy is it for you to speak against people who come in the name of Jesus Christ? My guess is that you find it very difficult to do so because you do not trust your knowledge of God’s truth as opposed to what others teach. The result is simple: you adopt a “live-and-let-live” approach to *your* Christianity. You might not realize that Jesus Christ and His apostles took *God’s* argument against the pretenders. All of the writers of the New Testament, which is as prophetic as the Old Testament, engaged in arguments against *false Christianity*. We should have no problem doing the same *if* we know and understand *God’s truth*. God’s

prophets told us ahead of time that we would face this dilemma! God's prophecy is timelessly authoritative simply because those who wrote and spoke it were *God's spokesmen moved by His Spirit*.

11. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 – What does God warn us about in these verses? Do those described in these verses use *foretelling* to deceive people?

12. Verse 15-22 – Whose words will the *true* prophet speak? Not his own words? Does God commit Himself to fulfill whatever He puts into the mouth of His true prophets?

13. Amos 3:7 – Does God act without making known what He is up to? By whom does He send the messages?

14. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – Who inspired the writing of the scriptures? For what purposes?

**Comment:** Paul had only the Old Testament, so we have to understand his position about the value that all of those writings have for leading us to salvation through Jesus Christ. If we are not careful, we denigrate God's word by denying its divine inspiration – saying that it is the product of *man*, not God. Satan would lead us to believe that there is nothing special about God's holy word because it calls *him* out as a liar, murderer, and deceiver. *And he is desperate to keep you from believing that!*

15. Ephesians 4:11-16 – Has God provided His True Church with *prophets* within the types of religious leaders He sends to educate His people? List three prominent reasons for doing so. Is *protection from deceivers* one of those reasons?

16. Isaiah 44:6-8 – Who is speaking in this situation? Does He claim to be *God*? Is there any other *God* than Him? Does He claim that other “Gods” do not have the power to prophesy in the manner He does?

**Comment:** Some use these verses to try to prove that there is only one God. But...you have to look carefully at what is said. Notice v. 6: “Thus says the Lord the King of Israel, and His Redeemer the Lord of hosts...” This is speaking of two separate Gods. We know this by His comment at the end of the verse: “...Besides me there is no *God*.” The word translated as *God* is *elohiym* – a plural noun; a collective noun. *Elohim* has the power to foretell and

make it come to pass. In v. 8, *God* is used twice. The first reference is *elowahh* – the singular form of deity. He explains His uniqueness by the second reference translated *God*. What does this mean? The second reference is *tsur* – “the mighty God, the rock.” This is a reference to Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4 provides us this information: “[Israel] drank of that spiritual *Rock* that followed them: and that *Rock* was Christ.” Acts 4:10-12 tells us two things: Jesus Christ is the *stone*, as well as the *only name* under heaven whereby men must be saved – that is, the *rock* and the *Redeemer*. Outside the *Elohim family*, there exist no other gods. Within the *Elohim family*, there is no other *Rock* or *Savior* than *Yahweh Elohim*. He is *unique*. That is how God's word explains itself without men imposing their meaning upon it.

17. 1 Kings 13:1-10 – What was the content of this prophet's message? Did Jeroboam agree with the prophecy? How did God protect the prophet and the message from God? What special instructions did God give this prophet about leaving Jeroboam? Did he obey?

**Comment:** Although there are numerous examples I could draw from, I will use this one example to show how prophecy proves the existence of God. This prophet came as God's messenger against Jeroboam's imposition of an idolatrous system of worship over the House of Israel over whom God had made Jeroboam king. This is probably one of the most remarkable and most specific prophecies of the Old Testament.

As a sign to Jeroboam, God foretold the coming of a man named *Josiah* who would destroy Jeroboam's idolatry. Jeroboam would not live to see its fulfillment because *Josiah* did not come for **340 years**. Because of the lapse of time, Israel and Judah believed it to be a *false* prophecy and sank deeper and deeper into the idolatry God despised. But, they underestimated both the knowledge and power of God. They even forgot the two *miracles* by which God sought to validate this prophecy: (a) He protected the prophet by drying up Jeroboam's arm, and (b) He tore up the altar Jeroboam was protecting. Although Jeroboam offered the prophet a bribe so he could compromise his prophecy, the prophet feared God more than he feared Jeroboam.

18. 2 Kings 22-23 – During a remodeling project, what did Hilkiah the high priest find? What did he

do with this book? How did it affect King Josiah? What fear did he express? To whom did they go to get understanding of the book? So, God has no problem using *women* as prophetesses? What did the prophetess's answer inspire Josiah to do? Whom did Josiah get rid of (ch. 23:24)? How *exact* was God's prophecy **340 years** after it was spoken?

**Comment:** The book Hilkiah found was the book of *Deuteronomy*. Read it sometime to see what affected Josiah so profoundly.

19. Isaiah 46:9-11 – Is God *bragging* too much about His ability? Or, is He merely stating *fact* to which we should pay attention?

**Comment:** Wherever the Bible reveals God's prophecies, we would do well to pay attention to them. However...we must take two precautionary measures: (a) we must understand that they are *inspired by God* – not the private utterances of men to serve their own agendas, and (2) we must not be thrown off-guard because of the time that has passed between the giving of the prophecy and its fulfillment. The coming of the Kingdom of God is a case in point. Almost 6,000 years have passed since God revealed His plan to Adam, and many have come to not believe it or to change the teaching about God's original plan. Be careful! There are many pretenders out there. We are charged with the responsibility to put ourselves into a relationship with God so that He can reveal to us His truth (see John 14:15-18, 26 and 16:13). The fulfillment of prophecy is *proof of the existence of God Almighty*. It is *proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible*. It is *proof* that the Bible contains *revelations from God Almighty that we could not have otherwise known or discovered in advance!*

### **Proof #5: Answered Prayer Proves God's Existence**

Jesus' disciples experienced the power of His conversations with God the Father. They witnessed how He and John the Baptist approached the Father, what requests they made, and how those requests were treated. It was no surprise, then, that they wanted to be able to approach the Father in the same way. So, in Luke 11:1 we find them asking Jesus to teach them how to pray. The result of that request is what has come to be known as *the Lord's Prayer*.

It is actually a *model* upon which prayers should be based – an outline of one's approach to the Father

and the things that should be included in one's prayers: (a) recognition of God's holiness and your *willing submission* to Him; (b) a desire for His Kingdom to be established *on the earth* and for His will to be the governing factor among its inhabitants; (c) requests for *our* daily needs – not just selfish requests for *personal* needs; (d) admission of *our* sins and petition for forgiveness in relationship to *our* willingness to forgive those who have sinned against *us*; (e) request for deliverance from any and all sources of temptation and evil. The rest is found in Matthew 6:13: (f) recognizing God as the great *eternal and glorious* power that reigns over such a kingdom; and (g) ending with *Amen* – an expression that means "Let it be done as it has been spoken."

The disciples realized that Jesus was not just throwing words into the air and hoping that somehow what He spoke would come true. The fact that Jesus prayed to a "Father in heaven" is one more proof that there exists more than one God-being; otherwise, Jesus looks like an *idiot* praying to *Himself!* To the point: what does *answered prayer* teach us about the existence of God?

1. Would you set forth such an exercise toward a *non-existent* Being? Would you expect that what you asked of God would be given – in other words, would you expect an *answer*? What would be your reaction if your prayer was answered?

2. Matthew 6:5 – What lesson about prayer is given here? Is your prayer to be for the entertainment of an audience? Would you conclude that there is a right and wrong way to pray? Should the wrong way expect an answer from God?

3. Verse 6 – Is prayer mostly a matter between you and God? How does God reward your private prayer?

4. Verse 7 – What does Jesus mean by the expression *vain repetitions*?

**Comment:** This has to do with repeating the same phrase over and over – the kind of thing people do when they chant incantations: a formula of words chanted or recited as part of a *ritual of magic*. It is also descriptive of prayer in which someone might use the same phrase over and over (examples = "God and Father" and "O Lord."). And...they go on and on and on and on doing so.

5. Verse 8; Philippians 4:19 – Does God already know what you need? If that is so, why would He expect you to tell Him? By whom will He supply our needs? Shouldn't He just go ahead and give it to you without you having to ask (think of all the elements Jesus told us to include in our prayers before you answer the question).

6. Now, read Matthew 5-7 to understand the context in which Jesus gave these instructions about prayer. Are you expected to be *obedient* to these instructions? If you are not, should you expect the Father to answer your prayers? Would you agree that your prayers will be answered in proportion to your *obedience*? Pay special attention to chapter 7:7-12. Are there *conditions* for receiving things from God?

**Comment:** This is very important to understand because people pray, get no discernable answer, and conclude one of two things: (a) there might be a God, but He doesn't answer prayers, or (b) no answer to prayers proves that God does not exist. How do we solve this problem?

7. Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24-26 – Is *faith* a requirement for answered prayer? What else?

8. John 14:13, 14 – Read the context in which Jesus makes this statement. What must be your *faith condition* in order for prayer requests to be answered by God the Father and Jesus Christ? Does this mean that you can ask God to help you win the lottery and expect that He will do it every time you ask?

9. Psalm 66:18, 19; Isaiah 59:1, 2; James 1:5-8 – What kinds of things cause God to not answer prayers?

10. James 4:1-3 – What further answer does James give to the above question? What does he mean by the expressions *ask amiss* and *consume it upon your lusts*?

11. Ephesians 3:20 – Is there any limit to God's ability to help us?

12. Romans 8:26 – Do we always know what to pray for?

13. 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9 – Do we always get what we ask for – even if it is not asked amiss to con-

sume it upon our lusts? Would you expect "No" to be an *answer* to your prayer at times?

14. 1 John 5:14, 15 – What prayers may we confidently expect God to answer?

15. John 11:41, 42 – Has the Father always answered Jesus' prayers? Would you expect, therefore, that Jesus has always met all of God's requirements of *obedience*?

**Comment:** Let's be sure of one thing here: *you* and *I* are not going to be *perfect* like Jesus Christ was as a human. Because of that, should we expect that God would *never* hear and answer our prayers? **NO!** But...we must come in *faith* and have a willing heart to repent of our sins and be as obedient as we possibly can be. We must also come *boldly* before God's throne – not like a *whipped puppy* (Hebrews 4:16)! Obedience to God helps us to be bold in our approach to God. God understands what He is dealing with in the human being (read Psalm 103 to understand this comment), and an obedient faith posture is very important to Him. Half-hearted, insincere effort is not good enough. As He reveals to us things that we need to change, we must immediately be willing to change them.

There are seven conditions to be met if you want your prayers answered. I will not discuss them in detail, but I will give the conditions and some scriptural references for them. Study this thoroughly so you can increase your understanding of this matter and improve your prayer life.

1. Know God's Will: James 4:1-3; John 5:30; Ephesians 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 5:14, 15.

2. Believe God: Romans 4:20, 21; Galatians 5:22; James 1:5-7; 2:20.

3. Obey God: Romans 6:16; 1 John 2:4; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1, 2; John 9:31; Daniel 10:12; Romans 11:7, 8; 1 John 3:22.

4. Have Proper Fear and Humility: Psalm 111:10; James 4:14; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 5:7; 1 Peter 5:5, 6; Luke 18:10-14.

5. Be Fervent: Hosea 7:13, 14; Luke 22:44; Psalm 4:1; Psalm 6:2; Joel 2:12, 13; James 5:16.

6. Be Persistent: Luke 18:1; James 1:3, 4.

7. Use Christ's Name: John 16:23, 24; Acts 5:32; Hebrews 4:14-16

Suffice it to say that one cannot be obedient to this instruction without faith in God's existence. When we immerse ourselves into this kind of faith posture, God *reveals* His fatherliness to us by providing our needs in the same way any loving, caring father would do – even more because God knows exactly what we need and in what proportions. And you should be open to the possibility that He knows that you need something other than what you ask for (read Matthew 26:36-46). God must be allowed to do *His will* in our lives over whatever time span He thinks best so that we can be thoroughly converted to worship Him in *spirit* and *truth* (John 4:23, 24). I say that because your prayer might not get answered for *several years*, and you should not get a sour attitude when the answer does not come according to *your* schedule. In this way, answered prayer is *proof* to the truly converted that God exists. Others will not understand that or really believe it (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Those five proofs should suffice in dealing with your belief that God exists. They should also demonstrate how He rewards those who *diligently seek* Him.

## Two Kinds of Faith

We have seen that true faith is embodied in the existence of the true God and the body of revealed truth He has given us. We have already seen four essential elements of faith: belief, confidence, trust, and the evidence provided by God. But, there is more we should know about faith toward God.

1. James 2:14-26 – Are your *works* a test of how true your faith is? What does James call the faith that lacks the *works of faith*? Will claiming to have faith and not acting upon that faith favorably recommend you to God? Explain your answer. Does James call this a *dead faith*? Write down some examples of *dead faith*.

2. Galatians 5:6 – What does Paul mean by the expression *faith which works by love*? Does this kind of faith move one to act upon God's revealed truth?

3. Acts 2:37, 38 – Did the people act upon Peter's instructions? What did Peter expect them to do?

4. Acts 8:37, 38 – Did the eunuch see the necessity of *doing something* as a sign of his faith? What?

5. Acts 9:1-22 – Did Jesus reveal to Paul that he had to do something for God? Did Ananias also have something to do? Did he really want to do it? Why? Did both men ultimately do what was expected of them?

6. Acts 10 – Was Peter's vision about *animals* or *men*? Read the account carefully before answering. What did God expect Peter to do? Did he do it?

7. Acts 16:30-34 – Did Paul require the jailer and his family to do something? What? Did they do it?

8. Are all of these situations examples of *living faith*? What does that expression mean? Would you conclude, then, that *living faith* is the only avenue to God's saving grace – that it is *essential* to salvation?

## How Do We Obtain Faith?

1. Romans 10:14-17 – What two things do these verses tell us about obtaining faith? Does they tell us that God's *revealed truth* must exist and there must be preachers sent by God to correctly teach it? So, we can conclude that faith comes by *hearing* and *preaching*?

2. Luke 17:5; Mark 9:14-24 – What do the disciples ask for? Why were they unable to cast out the demon? What did the father of the boy ask Jesus to help him with? Would an increase in faith be one of the things that we should ask God for? Why?

3. Acts 10:30, 31 – What was the result of Cornelius's prayer of faith? What else was he doing in addition to praying?

4. Daniel 9:1-23 – Read carefully Daniel's prayer and notice the things he was doing in relationship to it. Notice the respect and reverence that he expressed toward God. Was his prayer answered?

5. Daniel 10:12 – What two things did the angel credit Daniel with? So, would prayer indicate that we should set our hearts and minds to understand God’s will and to discipline ourselves to come into God’s presence to request it? Would that help us to come *boldly* before God?

6. James 5:16b-18 – What kind of prayer avails much? What does James mean by the expression *effectual fervent prayer*? Does the expression of a *righteous man* suggest that such a prayer comes from a person of *deep, abiding faith*? Can one achieve that level of faith without proper discipline and desire?

7. John 16:13 – What leads you to *know* all of God’s truth? Should you ask God for more of it?

8. John 14:26 – How will God enable you to *remember* the truths you should know?

9. John 15:26, 27 – Will this Spirit of Truth help to increase your faith to the point that you can explain God’s truth to others?

10. Is the objective of the injection of this Spirit of Truth to *lead* you to faith and, once there, to *increase* your faith in God and His plan?

11. 1 Timothy 4:12 – As your faith grows stronger, what should happen? How valuable is your *faith* to others? List some ways in which it is valuable.

You should be able to see from the above discussion five ways by which we can obtain faith. They are: (a) by listening to God’s true ministers – because they know God’s truth; (b) by studying God’s word (see John 17:17 and 2 Timothy 2:15); (c) by asking God, through prayer, to increase your faith; (d) by God’s gift of His holy spirit of truth (re-read 1 Corinthians 2:5-16); and (e) by the example of those who are faithful.

## What Faith Does For You

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German minister martyred by the Hitler regime during World War II, made some comments about faith that are worthy of our attention. He said that responding to the call of Jesus Christ is an act of *obedience...the necessary first step toward faith*: “Faith is only real where there

is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience....In exactly the same way in which obedience is called the *consequence* of faith, it must also be called the *presupposition* of faith”) *The Cost of Discipleship*, Simon & Schuster: New York; 1995; p. 64; emphasis added). So, faith requires ahead of time that you will be obedient to God’s revealed truth. Your actual obedience is the *proof* of your faith. What does that mean to you?

1. John 3:16-20 – Does your faith in Jesus Christ *assure* you of salvation? So, you can have faith in the idea that God sacrificed His only begotten Son for your personal benefit?

2. Acts 16:31 – Do you already understand that this verse is not all that is involved in securing your salvation? List some other things that also must accompany faith in Jesus Christ.

3. John 1:12; Galatians 3:26 – What *benefit* do we realize from our faith? What do you understand John and Paul to mean by the expressions *sons of God* and *children of God*? Do you understand them to mean that your faith *assures* you of a place in *the family of God*?

4. Acts 13:39; Romans 3:28-31 – Look up the definition of the terms *justify* and *justification*. Pay attention to the definition that says one is “regarded as being free from guilt or blame.” Knowing that you are a sinner and worthy of eternal death (Romans 3:23; 6:23), what does this mean to you? Can obedience of the law *without* faith in Christ *justify* you? Does faith *establish* (make valid) the law? Does *justification* allow us to continue to willfully sin (see Romans 6:1-2 and Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27)?

**Comment:** Faith in God’s revealed truth and His Christ makes it possible for God to *treat* us as though we have never, ever sinned – even though we and God know that we have. It is our *repentance* – the attitude we take to *willingly surrender* our lives to God through Jesus Christ and to be led out of sin – that causes God to take this attitude. Mere obedience to God’s law is not enough.

The law merely defines for us what God considers to be sin (Romans 3:20). Understanding what sin is and the penalty one incurs for sinning should lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:17-25). Once we understand what sin is and accept Christ as our sacri-

face, the spirit of God begins to put God's law into our hearts, and we begin to be obedient to it *in spirit* – that is, we no longer need to be tutored by an *external* force – it is *established* in our hearts and minds. Think about this carefully: Do you need a teacher to continue to teach you the rules of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division? Why? When you understand the answer to that question, then you will understand why God's law has not been done away with and how it continues to serve us after faith has come (see Matthew 5:17-19 and Hebrews 10:11-31)!

5. 1 Peter 1:8; Romans 5:1 – What two things are brought by our justification by faith? How important are *joy* and *peace* to your life?

6. James 5:13-15 – Does this scripture imply that your faith makes a difference in your *health*? Does it help you to understand why Jesus Christ is called our *Great Physician* – our *Healing God*?

7. Ephesians 6:16 – How important to you is God's protection against the forces of evil? Why do you think Paul refers to it as a *shield of faith*?

8. Matthew 17:20; Mark 9:23; 1 John 5:4 – What kind of faith makes possible so many things for the person of true faith? What does John mean by the expression *overcomes the world*? Now for the really important question: How *realistic* would it be for a true Christian who is 4' 3" tall and weighs 103 pounds to *believe she* could become a starting quarterback on a contending American professional football team?

**Comment:** Many become frustrated by unrealistic expectations of faith. Did Christ open the possibility for people to cause huge disturbances in our landscape by simply saying to a mountain, in true faith, "Rip yourself up and be deposited in the ocean"? If you take those words literally, then begin to have unrealistic expectations of your faith, you set yourself up for great disappointment and frustration. Here's how you understand Jesus' comments about *power* and *possibilities*.

The comment about removing mountains is Jesus' use of a literary device called *hyperbole* – the use of extravagant exaggeration to make a point. Barclay, in his *Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, says this: "When Jesus spoke about *removing mountains* He was using a phrase which the

Jews knew well. A great teacher, who could really expound and interpret scripture, and who could explain and resolve difficulties, was regularly known as an *uprooter* or, even a *pulverizer*, of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, and to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for removing difficulties. Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally" (vol. 2; St. Andrews Press: Edinburgh; 1963; p. 184).

So, although Jesus used this well-known device to make His point about the *power* and *possibilities* of faith, He by no means intended to teach us to be *unrealistic* in our expectations. Remember: If God can say "No" to your prayers, He can also refuse to use His power to help you achieve something that is totally unrealistic. Jesus meant to teach us that enough of the *proper faith* can enable us to solve our greatest of difficulties and accomplish the hardest of tasks. Barclay concludes: "Faith in God is the instrument which enables men to remove the hills [mountains] of difficulty which block their path" (p. 185). *God does not do magic tricks, so do not expect that of Him!*

9. Romans 8:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 5:7 – Are *faith* and *hope* the same thing? Re-read Hebrews 11:1 before answering that question. What should be our attitude as we wait for our hopes to be realized?

10. James 1:2, 3 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 – Is it possible for your faith to be put to the test? List some ways by which this might be done.

11. Jude 3; Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:13 – What kind of duty do we have as people of true faith? Does this imply that our unwavering faith should also be a growing, expanding faith?

This has been a good overview of *faith toward God*. Do you now understand that *faith* is not only belief in the existence of God, but also in his Christ and the body of *true doctrines* They have revealed to us? If so, you are making great progress.

Let me give you some final thoughts about this subject. In order for our faith to grow, it must be constantly *exercised*. The faith that you express by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is not the end of God's expectations of you. Sadly, though, some people think that is all there is to the salvation process: a one-time expression of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is *a way of life* – an everyday, simple, child-

like trust in God...and an unwavering obedience to His revealed truth. This child-like trust and unwavering obedience make it possible for us to overcome difficulties under the most trying circumstances – even when we might otherwise have no good reason to have hope.

In Romans 4:18-22, Paul describes the faith of our Father of Faith, Abraham, by pointing to several salient points: (a) he hoped when there was no reason to hope; (b) he was not weak in faith; (c) his strong faith helped him to overcome unbelief and not stagger at God's promises; and (d) he was fully persuaded that God could and would do what He promised. The fact that God waited 25 years before He gave Abraham and Sarah the son He promised shows that Abraham was patient and allowed God to work out things according to His will, not Abraham's. Oh, they tried a couple of times to do it their way, but they were corrected by God and set on the right path (see Genesis 15:1-4 and 17:18-21).

Finally, intelligent faith will understand that God will answer our faith according to His will. We cannot set our hopes on things that God never promised. We must understand what God's word says about the things our faith expects of Him. To do otherwise is presumptuous. *Faith* rests on the certainty of the promises of God; *presumption* rests on personal feelings and personal desires – things that faith cannot rely on. Faith is a pure belief and a confident trust in the promises and will of God regardless of personal feelings. We should do our part to increase our faith, but we should also realize that God must also be allowed to do His part in making our faith perfect through Jesus Christ. With that, I hope you have learned much about faith toward God that will help you in the future.

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an open letter from (continued from p. 1)

## The Pastor

This two-way street demands *your fair share* in the effort to get you "saved." That is part of Paul's admonition in Philippians 2:12, 13: "...[You] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: *For it is God which works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure*" (emphases added). God provides His Spirit to give you the proper willingness and power to act – but *you* have to approach the rela-

tionship as though it were up to you (believe me, though, it is only *partially* up to you). So, *pistis* presupposes that you will *always* be *active*, rather than *passive*, in pursuing the things God expects of you.

Now, let's pick apart more of the meaning in this passage from Hebrews 11:1. Some believe that faith is ***not*** *the intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrine but faith in a person* (that is, Jesus Christ) – but...that assumes a conclusion not in evidence in scripture. That kind of idea comes as the result of the existence of so many different, conflicting doctrines held by so many different "Christian" denominations and the reluctance to say that some are biblically correct and some are not. It is largely considered "unChristian" and "politically incorrect" to make such judgments.

*Doctrine* presupposes that *acceptable beliefs* have been formulated and set forth for the consumption of a body of believers. One would assume that a thorough investigation of scripture would have taken place in order to establish any standards of faith expected for membership in that group and that the standards are in agreement with the scriptural record. The real problem comes when one group sets its doctrines against the doctrines of others. In that case, then, *faith in God's truth* demands that *false doctrine* is to be differentiated from *true doctrine*. The result will be an *intellectual* pursuit of the *truth*.

Think about this: Jude exhorts Christians to "earnestly contend for the *faith* which was once delivered unto the saints" (v. 3). Is he pressing only for a *faith in a person* – or, is there also a *body of doctrines* that *support* the demand for that particular faith in that particular manner? Here are two excellent examples. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:4, rebukes the Corinthians for entertaining *other gospels* that teach *another Jesus* and advocate *another Spirit*. He rebukes them for "...putting up with it." He calls those itinerant preachers "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" (v. 13). He calls them "masqueraders" and "pretenders." He also rebukes the Galatians for turning away from *the true gospel* to a *perverted gospel* (Galatians 1:6-9) – and pronounces a devastating curse upon those who purveyed such a false gospel. Were those false teachers merely teaching the *wrong person* – a false Christ? No! I suspect that they were also teaching a *body of false doctrines* as well. Read Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 as he argues against those who taught that there is no resurrection from the dead. *He is*

correcting the mistakes contained in a body of **false doctrine**.

This provokes an interesting question. How can you be *always loyal* and *always faithful* to God through Jesus Christ if you do not understand and accept the *truth* revealed in God's word? Jesus told Satan that we must live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus called God's word *truth* (the Old Testament scriptures He had available at that time) and asked God to set aside true Christians for holy usage *through that truth* – that is, through what is contained in His Old Testament scriptures (John 17:17). It is the various *interpretations* of those same scriptures that either adhere to *truth* or deviate from it. What happens if you believe *wrong doctrinal interpretations*? Do you get an “E” for “*effort*”? Or, does God hold you responsible for believing His *revealed truth* in its rightful context? Is it possible to line up scriptures showing that *pistis* is “faith in a person”? Yes – but to say that such a meaning is *all* that is involved is, in itself, a deviation from the scriptural revelation of God's truth. How can I “preach Christ” among you, yet teach *wrong doctrine* about that same Christ? I cannot do that and be faithful to God's *revealed truth*. And neither can anyone else.

So, these are some of the issues that prompt me to conclude that the faith spoken of in the Bible is generally misunderstood. *Pistis* implies that there is *one belief* expressed in two ways: (a) unwavering faith in the historical truths embodied in all of scripture and (b) unwavering faith in scripture's revelation of God's Christ as the means by which we are to be saved out of sin (see Isaiah 8:16, 20).

Hebrews 11:1 (KJV) says that *pistis* is “...the *substance* of things hoped for...” *Substance* is translated from the Greek term *hypostasis* – “that which becomes a foundation for another thing to stand on” (Adam Clarke). All of the things we come to believe about God, His promises, and His plan for the salvation of mankind use *faith* as the sure foundation. It is the *confident assurance* that all that God has revealed is just as good as done – regardless of the span of time between the promise and the fulfillment.

This verse also says that *pistis* is “...the *evidence* of things not seen...” *Evidence* is translated from the Greek term *elenchos*. Here is the strength of this *evidence*. A problem is clearly explained by reasoning and/or evidence. Once the evidence is

presented, a conviction arises in which there is *no remaining doubt* that a thing exists, that it cannot do anything except exist, and that it cannot be anything other than what it is and has been proved to be (author's paraphrase of Adam Clarke).

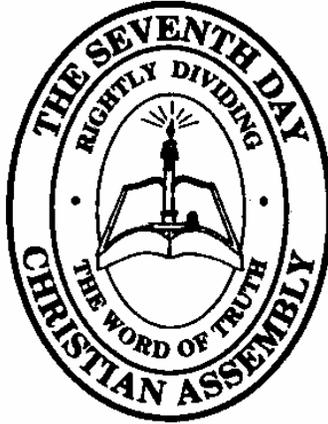
That is the nature of this Bible Study Course. I lay out to you the explanations, clarifications, and evidence from which I establish the *proof* of God's truth relative to the matter under discussion. I do this to remove any doubt and to establish *pistis* – *the foundation for all of your hopes and expectations in God and Christ that are grounded in God's truth*. It is with this in mind that Paul calls God's True Church “...the pillar and ground of the *truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15; emphasis added).

Now, let's get into the study and learn more about *faith toward God*. Remember to write down the scriptures and your answers, study, and pray for guidance. May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you study this most important subject.

In Christ's Service,

Larry E. Ford, Pastor

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## Straight Talk . . . Plain Truth

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