

Faith, Scripture & the Holy Spirit

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On the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of Samuel Rodriguez

Our *Bar Mitzvah* Samuel spoke eloquently about how faith impacts his life, and I have chosen to speak about faith as well.

Many of us have been taught that believing in God requires faith. I would like to challenge that view and suggest, instead, that having faith requires that we first believe in God. I want to repeat what I just said so that you may absorb it before I proceed. I am of the opinion that believing in God does not require faith, but that it is the other way around – having faith requires that we first believe in God.

If I am right about this, many of us are standing on very shaky ground in both our faith and our belief in God because we are basing our belief in God on what some call "blind faith" that, according to the Bible, does not exist. Let's think about this for a minute. Blind faith means believing in something without there being a rational reason for doing so. Here are some statements about "blind faith" that I found at the source of all reliable knowledge – the Internet:

"Blind faith" is faith based on no experience.

"Blind faith" is belief that lacks concrete evidence.

"Blind faith" is belief without true understanding, perception, or discrimination.

"Blind Faith" is an English blues rock band .." {:-)

Is blind faith what the Bible teaches? Let's see. The King James and New King James Versions translate Hebrews 11:1 this way:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The New American Standard translates it:

"Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

The Bible's definition of faith is at odds with their being such a thing as "blind" faith because the Bible's definition says that, for there to be "faith," there must be evidence and conviction; merely believing in a thing is not sufficient; there must be evidence and conviction. "Blind faith" is therefore a contradiction in terms because in "blind faith" there is no evidence. Also, conviction that is based on no evidence, i.e. on nothing except what we have been told to believe, leads to "weak" belief, which falls short of conviction, and therefore cannot be faith!

Pursuing this further, according to the Bible, the evidence (or the conviction) that is required to have faith, is of things that are "not seen." Perhaps that is where the notion of "blindness" comes from. But what kind of evidence is there that we cannot see but that leads us to an assurance of something? I know of nothing other than having an encounter with God (whom we cannot see) who tells us that something is true. Yeshua said to His disciple Thomas:

"Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed." (John 20:29 NKJ)

If we perceive God telling us something, that is enough to give us conviction!
Communication from God has to be the evidence.

Now, if that is so, we must come to believe in God before we can have faith.
Hebrews 11:6 in the New King James Version of the Bible says:

"But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
(NKJ)

The same verse, rendered in the Complete Jewish Bible, says:

"And without trusting, it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him must trust that he does exist and that he becomes a Rewarder to those who seek him out." (CJB)

So, once again, believing in God has to come before having faith, for as I have just read: "whoever approaches him must [already] trust that he does exist .." (I added the word "already.")

I hope I am making my point and that you understand why the point is important.
There are too many believers who say they have faith, but do not recall ever having

been spoken to by God. The result is that they are continually reassessing and straining to maintain their beliefs and are not on solid ground.

Believing in God with conviction can come about in two ways. The first is the way I have already mentioned, which is that God visits us personally and directly. But there is another way that is spoken of in Romans 1:18-20; in the New King James Version, we read:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse .."

This other way to come to believe in God, is to see God's attributes in his creation – a creation that is so profound as to make God's existence a certainty, and His non-existence unthinkable.

Once we are certain that God exists, we are open to having faith. But faith for what? According to Scripture, it is only for what God reveals to be His will. So, once again, we need to hear from God for that which we have faith, or else our belief in whatever it is we believe will not be faith; it will be presumption.

Returning to Hebrews 11:6:

"But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him* .."

Making a logical substitution of words we get:

"But without hearing from God, *it is* impossible to please *Him*.."

And also, Romans 10:17:

"So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

You see, being in communication with God – hearing His still small voice with which He most often speaks to us, is absolutely essential to both our believing in God's existence, and our having faith that, whatever His will is, will come to pass.

Now I want to change gears. You probably have noticed that I rely on Scripture quite a bit for what I believe and profess. That is because I believe that the Word of God is conveyed through the Scriptures. I have faith that the Bible was given to us and is inspired by God. I don't wave my Bible and say "This is the Word of God" because my Bible is but one translation among many, of ancient documents that have gone through scribal transmissions and canonizations that are enough to "cross a rabbi's eyes." So why do I believe that the Bible that has come down to me through the ages is reliable? Once again, it comes down to my having heard the voice of God. Those of you who have heard my testimony of how I became a believer know that God spoke to me and, in a moment, I went from being an atheist to believing that God was my heavenly father. But at that moment I did not know who Yeshua was, and God directed me – no, He compelled me – to search for the answer in the Holy Scriptures. I found the answer in the Scriptures, but it took a second visitation by God to show me that what I was reading was true. So, that is why I have faith for the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy.

But that was my encounter with God – not yours, or anyone else's, and I want to find ways to convince others that the Bible really is from God – others who might not have had the same experience as I have. Believing in the Bible's godly origin and inspiration is very important because it is the only source I know of that teaches us who God is, what God is like, how God created us, what He wants from us, and how He has related to man throughout the ages. The benefit of believing the Bible is immense because, when one believes it, one becomes a receiver of the knowledge and wisdom of the ages that enhances one's life beyond measure.

Having God-instilled faith is the best way to come to believe that the Bible is from God, but there are some arguments that can be made that are pretty convincing. One of them is the improbability that man alone could have created a compilation of 66 books, written over a span of thousands of years by men of diverse circumstances, in several languages that are in almost complete harmony with each other. Then there is the witness of the Bible's almost universal acknowledgement by humanity, albeit some positive and some negative. On the positive side, even peoples historically at odds with each another have adopted the same Bible as their guide for moral life. On negative side, in some quarters the Bible has been deemed of such a danger that some nations have actually banned its use and possession. In all, no other book in history has received such worldwide attention and circulation as has the Bible.

An argument for the Bible's divine inspiration that I find convincing, involves the number of predictive Messianic and other prophecies contained in the *Tanakh* that,

centuries later, were recorded as fulfilled in the *B'rit Chadash*. I am sure everyone here knows some of them – prophecies concerning the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34), Yeshua's birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1(2)), His entering Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), His crucifixion (Psalms 22:14(15)-18(19) and Zechariah 12:10), the timing of His death related to the Temple's destruction (Daniel 9:24-26), and His resurrection (Psalms 16:8-11). Peter saw this, and testified to it in his second epistle (2 Peter 1:16-21CJB), in which he said:

"For when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, we did not rely on cunningly contrived myths. On the contrary, we saw his majesty with our own eyes. For we were there when he received honor and glory from God the Father; and the voice came to him from the grandeur of the *Sh'khinah*, saying, "This is my son, whom I love; I am well pleased with him!" We heard this voice come out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Yes, we have the prophetic Word made very certain. You will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark, murky place, until the Day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts. First of all, understand this: no prophecy of Scripture is to be interpreted by an individual on his own; for never has a prophecy come as a result of human willing- on the contrary, people moved by the *Ruach HaKodesh* spoke a message from God."

Peter knew of the Bible's prophecy in Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 28:64 that Israel would be dispersed among the nations, but he did not live to see Israel's re-gathering that was predicted in Ezekiel 36:33-36 & 38:8, and especially in Jeremiah 16:14-15:

"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that it shall no more be said, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers."

Peter did not see it, but we (you and I) have seen it in the restoration of *Eretz Yisrael*.

I am also impressed at the New Testament's predictions of the end times that I see unfolding before my eyes. One regrettable prediction is found in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power."

Do you see it? I see it!

Now I realize that we cannot look to the Bible to prove itself, but I find it significant that the more recent books of the Bible authenticate the earlier books. For example, in 2Timothy 3:16-17, we read:

"All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

When Paul says "all Scripture," he means the *Tanakh*, which was the Bible used by him and his contemporaries.

To summarize, believing in God is not acquired through faith. We must believe in God in order to have faith and, despite the many impressive "proofs" of the Bible, it is mainly through faith, communicated to us through the Holy Spirit, that we believe that the Bible is the Word of God and the guide for our lives. I heard someone say it this way which I think is worth repeating:

"I know that the Bible is God's Word because the Holy Spirit within my body tells me so. It's not something I can describe. All I can say is that when I read the Word of God, it all makes perfect sense to me."

To the *Bar Mitzvah*

Samuel, today is the day of your *Bar Mitzvah*, when it is traditional that we say to you: "Today you are a man." It is the day of your passing from childhood when your parents were answerable for you, to today and all future days, when this congregation and Jewish communities worldwide will treat you as a responsible adult, and expect adult things from you. You were called to *Torah* for the first time today as a symbol of that, but responsibilities are much more than symbols. Today, both you and I spoke about faith, and it is faith, the Scriptures, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit that must guide your life.

Being a man is not a static condition; it is a maturing process. None of us have arrived at an apex of spiritual growth, so you should expect and look forward to your faith growing stronger with the years. But always remember that faith is not just believing something. It is conviction given to you by the Holy Spirit. When you pray, don't do a lot of talking and, instead, do a lot of listening. That still small voice (or sometimes that loud penetrating voice) of God's Spirit will speak to you and, when He does, say to Him "HERE I AM. USE ME."