



Will He Find Faith?

Part 3: God's Plan to Transmit Faith

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"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Isaiah 1:18 ESV

The more I consider this question, the more I see the relevance and indeed, the danger, of there being so little faith found on Messiah's return! We know He always preserves a remnant, but we do not know how small or large it might be.

Last month's portion addressed the definition of faith and confirmed that it was never intended to be a blind faith, but an informed one. That would involve examining the facts to see what is right. Logical thought progression and reasoning is not the "norm" anymore in some younger generations. Rhetorical language which appeals to emotions, even though the "lens of oppression" is more well received today. Barna called this a Mosaic generation some time ago...as in small pieces of different colors or textures put together to create an effect, but not in any special order. Essentially, a collection of bits and pieces of ideas about God and how to walk gathered from random sources is as much of a base as far too many people have for what they call faith. It is difficult to reason with people who do not follow a standard progression of ruling out or ruling in points of understanding as they go.

This is another part of the challenge that those who haven't yet come to faith, and those who try to teach, must overcome.

Then, we come to consider how GOD had determined that faith was to arise within people. That whole time period before faith comes used to be considered primarily, or even ONLY, in childhood. Even twenty years ago, I was hearing that most people come to faith as children and are unlikely to come as adults. In recent years, I think we are seeing more situations in which our God may intervene where we as human beings haven't been good teachers, or where people have grown up in a culture that does not

honor Him. I keep hearing anecdotal reports of all the Muslims coming to faith through dreams of Messiah appearing to them. I don't think we can ever rule out His supernatural intervention!

In any case, as long as one chooses behaviors based only on some external motivation, faith has not yet come.

In 2013, I wrote about a perspective on faith development that was becoming popular: Spiritual Formation. It is set in opposition to Discipleship. Very briefly it sets up a model in which the older form of Discipleship is said to teach faith only by giving a list of dos and don'ts to accomplish, while the newer form, Spiritual Formation, is about teaching others to BE more merciful people. This appears to be a false dichotomy to me when I see aspects of both as being a necessary part of the process, and even that dos and don'ts lists are appropriate for those for whom faith has not yet become personal.

As I see it, He has a two-part plan:

- 1) Children born into family/community of those who have faith in God, and who provide good role models, and strong guidelines to protect child until they come to faith themselves.
- 2) Personal process of coming to the end of self, realizing a need for strength beyond personal resources.

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:22-26

Here we come to a concept that may be hard for some to see. Have you ever looked at a situation, considering one set of circumstances, only later to find that it wasn't about that at all, but something entirely different? Our pre-suppositions color what we see. This is the case for examining this aspect of faith.

Although due to the sin nature, I am quite sure it hasn't always developed exactly as Yah intends, I still see the value of a family/community that is walking out their faith to the best of their understanding as the best "petri dish" for faith formation. Walking after Him means examining His Word/instructions and then living out their instructions to please God...supporting Him and His ways, which we confirmed is faith. It means caring for and protecting the children who do not yet understand. (Unfortunately today, this kind of loving protection has been recast as restrictive and abusive. Granted, it may not be handled appropriately in some sad dangerous circumstances but that, too, is due to sin...not to a flaw in God's intentions.)

The Word for God's teachings on righteousness is Torah, that literally means to "hit the mark" as in archery. His teachings on how-to walk-in righteousness are said to be lovely, perfect, sweeter than

honey...many of these descriptions will be found in Psalm 119. Conversely, the word translated as sin, literally means "to miss the mark." So, the Galatians reference above speaks of being "kept under the law--until faith comes." Western ears hear "the law" as a punishment rather than as the righteousness of God and His directions to His children. So being kept really has to do with being kept in a safer environment, by people who DO already have faith and know the difference between right and wrong as found in the Law.... which refers to parents and the community. It does NOT refer to any kind of punishment or imprisonment. It parallels the first century practice of wealthy parents who hired a pedagogue to escort their children from home to their teachers. This pedagogue ensured their safety when they were not yet living out of their own internal belief. The intention being to bring one's faith to fruition when God/Messiah is acknowledged. Once that faith becomes personal and internalized one no longer needs an overseer to see to your safe passage through life. One is now in direct relationship with Messiah through the Spirit and is taught in that position...in faith. We ARE freed from the condemnation of sin once coming into personal faith, but we are not free from walking after Him in His ways. He is our "new master" not the flesh or sinful nature which was our old master. These are the only two choices...we are always under a master of some kind.

The second aspect is really closely bound up with the first. At some point, during the training up period, a child needs to realize human limitations and acknowledge that our personal resources will never be enough to meet all of our needs in this life. The sooner this happens, the less likely there will be huge shipwrecks of life. Thus, beginning to look to God, humbly acknowledging our need is a hallmark of new faith. I think it is this second aspect that is perhaps more prominent in our day. We see and hear far more of ungodly things being unleashed on our children than we hear of the Godly protection and appropriate sheltering until they have come to faith.

There is a generational aspect to this as well. When one generation has not done well transmitting the personal faith to the next, but rather has just communicated all the "dos and don'ts" in a more legalistic manner, that next generation may still perform the outward signs of faith without the heart understanding. They may do so out of loving respect of their elders but really have no idea what it was all about. The following generation then, will see only the outward signs of faith, with none of the heart, and will often conclude that this is invalid, bogus, objectionable....and cast off what they perceive as restrictive unnecessary bondage of rules. This is the situation that I believe the Spiritual Formation people are identifying. I believe it is NOT because the process of discipleship lacks power, but because it was not adequately practiced.

It is in this context then, that they must STILL one day face their own inadequacy to deal with all of life's challenges...but they are now doing it without that protective layer of childhood days around them. The stories of how far people fall into moral depravity and unspeakable behaviors when they are lost are heartbreaking. Thankfully, we do still have a faithful God Who will still reach out to such people in their darkest hour and use that pain to bring them to Himself.

When we see friends and family struggling through these things in the absence of protective training, our hearts go out to them and we often find ourselves praying "protection" around such people. While I am sure our God understands our heart for them, it is also true that sometimes the very things we are asking Him to protect them from are the things that they NEED in order to pierce the depths of their souls to know their need....and to eventually find faith.

How exactly does the Word define community or assemblies? How do we know which ones are teaching faith appropriately and which ones are not? How is it that I can include God the Father and God the Son, Yeshua/Jesus in this same picture? What about those cries of “Word alone!” or “Faith alone!?” How do they fit in the concepts of finding faith? And finally, how is it that we believe that the kind of faith that will endure all that must come on the earth must be grounded in the Whole Word of God? These will be addressed in the next portion. In the meantime, may our Abba continue His plan to find all of His lost sheep as soon as possible!