

Sermons

What is Faith?

🕒 January 3, 2010

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Intro: Luke 17:5-6 – *5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

I am excited about our anticipated study topic for 2010. Our focus this coming year is what God is looking for from me more than anything else. It is faith. It is also what God alone provides for us. Not in a mysterious or miraculous manner. But *faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God* (**Rom. 10:17**) Therefore to study about faith, and investigate what the Bible teaches about it, is the pathway to increasing our faith. That is what excites me. I want to increase my faith, and I hope you do as well.

Our text provides an abundant resource for a study of faith. I hope you will take the time to read Hebrews 11 several times over the course of the year. Take a look at the outline of our study that has been provided. Much of our study will be looking back to the events and characters of the O.T. But our look back will be for the purpose of a personal evaluation and application. We want to increase our faith because ***"the just shall live by faith"***

I. What is Faith? It seems logical to begin by defining faith. The basic NT words for faith are the noun *pistos* and the verb *pisteuo*. According to Vine's ***pistos*** means, "*firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing*". He goes on to say that it is used to denote: a. trust; b. trustworthiness, c. what is believed, the contents of belief; d. assurance, a ground for belief; e. a pledge of fidelity. When used to represent a condition for salvation, have two main connotations, each of which is a necessary aspect of the total concept of saving faith.

A. The first aspect of faith might be called ***assent or belief***. *It is an act of the mind, a judgment of the intellect that a particular idea or statement is true.*

1. Accepting a statement by faith does not mean I accept it blindly. It is not all that is left when there is no rational evidence as viewed in the following assertions: "Faith takes over where reason leaves off." "Faith is an illogical belief in the improbable." One must make a "leap of faith" or have "blind faith." My faith is based upon both the sufficiency of the evidence and my confidence in the trustworthiness of the witness (God Himself). Jesus said in **John 10:37-38**: *If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.*

2. We may ***know*** something by experience (see it) and therefore it is not accepted by faith. But technically speaking, the ideas that we accept by faith (assent) are those that enter our consciousness via the testimony of other people. It is a frequent element of everyday life, from newspapers to casual conversation ("How was your day?" "It was fine.")

3. Saving faith involves this assent or acceptance of what God has revealed in the testimony of the apostles and

prophets who bear witness in the Bible. "*Faith is the evidence of things not seen*" (**Heb. 11:1**) We believe the testimony is true even in the absence of firsthand experience.

4. In biblical terminology the assent aspect of faith is represented by the phrase "**believe that**" (*pisteuo hoti*), i.e., believing with the mind *that* statements and claims are true.

- **Hebrews 11:6** – 6 ...for he who comes to God must **believe that** He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
- **John 8:24** – 24 *Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not **believe that** I am He, you will die in your sins.*"
- **John 14:10-11** – Jesus exhorts Philip to **believe that** he is in the Father, and the Father is in him.
- John wrote his Gospel so that we may **believe that** Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31) Faith included the acceptance of certain facts substantiated through testimony given in scripture – "hearing the word of God" (Rom. 10:17)

5. Since faith includes the element of assent or belief in God's testimony, the N.T. also uses the same word, (*faith, pistos*) to refer to the body of doctrine that is to be accepted as true. So there is "**one faith**" (**Eph. 4:4**) one can be "obedient to **the faith**" (**Acts 6:7**), be "sound in **the faith**" (**Titus 1:13**), "*contend earnestly for **the faith***" (**Jude 3**), have "*unity of **the faith***" (**Eph 4:13**), and go "*astray from **the faith***" (**1 Tim 6:21**).

B. The second aspect of saving faith is usually called **trust**. Whereas assent is a judgment of the mind regarding the truth of a statement, trust is a decision of the will to act upon the truth that is accepted as true.

1. This element of faith is a personal surrender to the implications and consequences of the truth. It is described

accurately as trusting (or believing) IN a person . If I ask you if you have faith in your doctor, what does that mean? I am asking more than if you believe he exists. I am asking if you trust him with your health, or even your life.

2. Saving faith includes such trust. Jack Cottrell says the faith that is a condition of salvation involves "*specifically, a decision of the will to surrender everything about ourselves—our time, our possessions, our abilities, our life itself, and our eternal destiny—into the hands of Jesus Christ. Trust is the decision to rest our hope of eternal life upon the saving power of Christ's cross and resurrection.*

a. Paul said, "*I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day*" (**2 Tim 1:12**).

3. This aspect of faith is represented by the biblical phrase of believing "**in**" (eis) or believing "**on**" (epi) the person and work of Jesus Christ himself.

- "*Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*" (**John 3:16**). "
- "*Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 10:43).

"*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (**Acts 16:31**).

- "*believe in Him for eternal life*" (**1 Tim 1:16**).

4. **Assent alone** does not meet the condition of faith for salvation. Even demons believe that the God of the Bible is the true God (**James 2:19**). Saving faith cannot be defined as simply agreeing on what God has said. It must also include the willingness to trust in Him and surrender my will to His will. Thus faith without the obedience is dead (useless) in itself.

a. Faith and obedience are so intertwined that the writer of Hebrews was even willing to imply that unbelief was the same as disobedience. **Hebrews 3:18-19** – *18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.* The faith that saves is a faith that obeys.

II. Why is faith a condition for salvation? (It is not the only condition of salvation – repentance, confession and baptism are also conditions. But in a consideration of what faith is, this question is pertinent.) Let me affirm that given the nature of salvation and our understanding of what faith is, it is a necessary condition.

A. **The source of our salvation is not our work or activity, but a work that has been done by someone else—Jesus.** In order to be saved we must accept and rely upon what has been done for us. This act of relying on Jesus and his work is the very essence of faith.

B. **Salvation comes to us not through God's law but through his promises** (**Romans 4:13-21** – *13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, 15 because the law brings about wrath...) **Galatians 3:18;21-22; 26-29** – *18 For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise... 21 For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe... 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one**

in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

1. God offers salvation through his **promise**; the only way to respond to a promise is by believing it and trusting in it (and the one who gave it).

2. Salvation is by **grace** and faith is the natural and proper response to grace. *"For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace" (Romans 4:16).*

3. But the power of salvation is not in my faith itself. It is rather in the object of my faith – Jesus Christ. It is all Him.

- **Ephesians 2:8** – *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God – The gift here is not my faith, but my salvation. The faith is my response to grace offered.*
- **Paul wrote in Romans 5:1-2** – *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
- Later he noted the point of their faith in which they received the grace:
 - **Rom 6:3-4** – *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Have you expressed your faith in obedience to command to be baptized into Christ?*
 - **Mark 16:16** *16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

2010 theme

faith

Hebrews 11

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