

Back to Basics: Believing With a Faith That Saves

My subject in our ongoing study of back to basics is faith. So it seems that we should determine the following: What is faith? Why is faith necessary? How can I obtain this faith? And finally, do I have a faith that saves?

Faith and belief are commonly interchangeable terms. In the Bible, the words mean not just an acknowledgement but rather confidence, trust, and obedience. In fact, many modern translations use the words interchangeably, as in John 3:36:

“He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

The word translated “obeys not” in this passage comes from the Greek word ***apeitheo***, which is many times translated “believes not” or “disbelieves”, such as in Acts 14:1:

“But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” They were unbelieving by their rejection of Jesus Christ, and disobedient to the word of God that had declared Him to be their promised Messiah.

Even God Himself substituted the word obey with believe in Numbers 20:12 when He said,

“Because you believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6), yet faith only will not save, either, as can be seen in Numbers 20:7-12. Moses obviously had faith in God, but he was disobedient when it came to him not speaking to the rock as God had commanded, and he struck it instead. His disobedience cost him from entering into the Promised Land.

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying . . . Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; . . . Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. . . . Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe [obey] Me . . . you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

The writer of the Book of Hebrews has told us that “ . . . ***the just shall live by faith . . .*** ” (Hebrews 10:38), and that those who have faith “ . . . ***believe to the saving of the soul*** ” (10:39). The substance, the ground, the foundation of our confident hope of eternal salvation is our faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith understands what the most learned scientist cannot fathom. Faith understands that ". . . **the worlds were framed by the word of God,**" for faith simply believes God. The word of God shows us that Abel understood that the only way a guilty man could approach God is by blood atonement. His brother, Cain, did not understand this. Cain thought that a man could please God and win his favor by his own works, and so his offering was rejected. Abel believed God. Cain did not. Enoch understood that the only way a man could please God and be accepted of him is by obedient faith. So Enoch walked with God by faith. And when he left this world, he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

The Hebrews writer is telling us that the only way to be saved, the only way to be accepted of God, the only way to walk with God, the only way to please God is by having faith, obedient, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Hebrews writer states in Hebrews 11:6,

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

What is faith? A simple biblical definition is given to us in Hebrews 11:1:

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

There are many forms of false faith by which the souls of men are deluded. Judas, Demas, and Deotriphes all had faith, but a reading of the Scriptures shows that theirs was a false faith. Many people have a denominational faith. I do not say that their faith is without sincerity, devotion, and zeal, but unless they have that faith which is described in the word of God, their faith is damning to their souls. As we saw last week, even the devils have faith, and tremble. But what is that true, saving faith, by which a man pleases God? That is the question I want to answer.

There is but one true faith. And you and I must examine ourselves and prove ourselves on this point, whether we be in **"the faith"** as Paul refers to it in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and Jude does in Jude 1:3.

True, saving faith, consists of four things: Knowledge, assent, trust and obedience. If we would be pleasing to God, if we would come to Him and be saved by Him on His terms, not ours, then we must know the revelation of God that is found in the Gospel plan of salvation. We must give assent that God's revelation is truth, and we must trust Him Whom God reveals: Jesus Christ.

The first aspect of faith is knowledge. As we have noted earlier, the Hebrews writer declares that, ***"He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that***

He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. The text clearly shows the necessity of knowledge. Faith in Christ is a work that comes from the heart, but it is not a blind leap in the dark. It is based upon knowledge. In order for us to trust, there must be someone, or something, known for us in which to trust. This is what we are told in Isaiah 53:11:

“He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by the knowledge of Himself shall My Righteous Servant justify many; and He shall bear their iniquities.”

This is why Jesus said in John 17:3, ***“And this is life eternal, that they should know You the only true God, and Him Whom You sent, even Jesus Christ.”***

Two things, according to Hebrews 11:6, must be known:

In order for anyone to have faith, he must know the Lord God, as He is revealed in the Person and work of Christ (John 1:18; 14:6-9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

You must know that God is.

You must know that God is Who He says He is.

You must know that God is what He says He is. He is sovereign and good (Exodus 33:18-19). He is just and gracious (Isaiah 45:20-22). He is holy and merciful (Isaiah 6:3, 7).

The only way man can know God today is by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the God-man, as the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6:

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness, Who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’”

We can also see from Hebrews 11:6 that you must know that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Isaiah 55:3, 6-7 says,

“Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Seek Jehovah while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

The Lord can be found if we seek Him, as Jeremiah 29:13 says, ***“And you shall seek Me, and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart.”***

Paul understood this, too as he said in Athens in Acts 17:27, “. . . **they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us:**”

All who seek the Lord, all who come to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be rewarded with eternal life and everlasting salvation. This, too, must be known. But how can we know that God will reward every believer with eternal salvation? We know this by hearing and believing the Gospel! Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 3:24-26,

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in His blood, to show His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of His righteousness at this present season: that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.”

It is the Lord Jesus Who earned righteousness for His people (Romans 5:19). The Son of God purchased salvation for His elect (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:12). God has promised that salvation is the reward to all who trust in His Son (John 3:14-16, 36; Romans 10:9-13).

The point I am making is that it is essential to having saving faith that one must have Gospel knowledge. And the matter of paramount importance in the knowledge of the Gospel is the redemptive work that was accomplished by Christ. He is an able Redeemer, for He truly is the Man Who was Immanuel, **“God With Us.”**

Our Lord is also a willing Redeemer as it is declared in Isaiah 50:5-7 in a prophecy of the agony faced by Jesus:

“The Lord Jehovah has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord Jehovah will help Me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”

Our Lord is also an effectual Redeemer: **“Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand.”** (Isaiah 53:10)

Unless a person knows these things, he cannot have faith, he cannot please

God, he cannot be saved. Still, merely knowing these things is not saving faith. Knowledge is necessary, but knowledge alone is not saving faith, for along with that knowledge, our hearts must give assent that these things are true.

Many people know the truth. They may have heard it for years. They may have been trained in Gospel truth from their infancy. But saving faith involves a willing, voluntary, deliberate, and considered assent and response to the truth of God. Faith simply embraces the Revelation of God as the Revelation of God.

Today, you are being confronted with the truth of God. The truth is staring you in the face. God is speaking directly to your heart. Now you will make a decision. You will either embrace the testimony of God as the Truth, or you will reject it and declare that God is a liar! This is what the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 5:10:

“He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in him: he that believes not God has made Him a liar; because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.”

Have you now embraced this Gospel of God’s free grace as the truth? If you have, you are not far from the kingdom of God. But still, there is something else necessary.

Faith knows the Gospel and gives assent to the Gospel of the truth. But there is more, for saving faith trusts the Lord Jesus Christ.

A man acts upon what he believes. And the act of faith is trusting Christ. We see this in many cases of individuals in the Gospels, such as the woman with an issue of blood, the Publican praying in the Temple, the Leper, Zacchaeus, and the lame man lowered through the roof of the house by his friends.

Why is faith in Christ necessary? Why is it necessary for sinners to trust the Lord Jesus Christ alone in order to be saved? It is necessary because no one has ever pleased God and been accepted of Him except those who have obedient, saving faith in the Lord.

Hebrews 11 records the names of 17 men and women, whose histories are well known, who pleased God. How did they do it? They all did it by demonstrating their obedient faith in God!

Many others, also mentioned in the Bible, have perished under the wrath and curse of God, though they did some good, commendable things.

Obedient faith pleases God, because only obedient faith gives all praise, honor, and glory to the Son of God.

Obedient faith is absolutely necessary because without faith there is no vital union with Christ. It is only when we act upon our faith that we put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Obedient faith is absolutely necessary because God plainly declares that works do not earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). James then shows that our faith is demonstrated by our works when he writes in James 2:17-18,

“Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. Yes, a man will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works: show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.’”

How can one obtain this faith? It does not come from heredity, and neither does it come from education. Faith is not something we will achieve through human reasoning or inculcated to us through pomp and ceremony. We obtain faith by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), and as we discussed this morning hearing encompasses heeding, which means we act upon what we hear, just as did the eunuch in Acts 8 after hearing the Gospel message delivered to him when Philip had preached Jesus to him in the desert. One must willingly surrender one’s life to rule of Jesus Christ as one’s Lord on His terms. And the way we see this act of obedient faith in the Book of Acts is that all accounts of conversion ended in baptism, immersion, for the removal of sins. That is how one demonstrates true, obedient saving faith in the Lord.