

WHAT IS FAITH?

INTRODUCTION

A. Two thousand years ago the angel Gabriel said to Mary:

‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.’ Luke 1:30-31.

1. Mary could not figure out how this could happen. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” Luke 1:34.
2. But not to worry. ‘The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”’ Luke 1:35.
3. All this is because ‘Nothing is impossible with God.’ Luke 1:37.
 - a. The question is: did Mary believe this?
 - b. Yes. “I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.’ Luke 1:38.

(1) In a word: Mary believed God.

(2) She believed the angel which meant that she believed God.

B. The Millennium Faith: believing God.

1. Nothing has changed; faith then and now is summed up in two words: believing God.
 - a. This is not only believing *in* God, and there is nothing wrong with that! The Apostle Paul could say, ‘I have faith in God.’ Acts 27:25. This is the same as believing God. Cf. Acts 27:25 (AV).
 - b. But ‘believing God’ puts it more strongly.
 - (1) It is one thing to say you believe *in* a person.
 - (2) But when you say you believe that person – whatever he or she says – it shows an even higher level of trust in their *word*; you believe them!
 - c. This is how faith was sometimes described:
 - (1) ‘Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.’ Genesis 15:6.

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(3) Faith, to be pure faith, is not seeing but still believing.

(4) In a word: it is believing God.

c. Faith is based upon God's integrity.

(1) The Bible is God's integrity put on the line.

(2) If you believe that the Bible is God's word, believing it is to believe him.

(a) 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.' 2 Tim. 3:16.

(b) 'For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.' 2 Peter 1:21.

D. I believe this is needed more than anything as we enter this new Millennium.

1. The church needs to recover its faith in the Bible.

2. The church needs to believe that God got personally involved when he gave us the Bible – it is he speaking to us.

3. The Holy Spirit who wrote the Bible is equally present today.

a. He speaks in two ways:

(1) Indirectly, that is, through the Bible.

(2) Directly, that is, as if apart from the Bible but never contradicting or adding to the Bible.

(3) 'The Bible was not given to replace direct revelation; it was given to correct abuses.' D Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

b. The degree to which we are on good terms with the Holy Spirit will be the degree to which we believe God and demonstrate the kind of faith needed in these times.

E. Why else is this study important?

1. Faith is a vast subject and one all of us should explore and try to understand.

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2. Faith is the only way to please God. 'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.' Hebrews 11:6. We therefore should seek to know how to please God.
3. There is more than one kind of faith – not only saving faith but 'achieving' faith; to grasp this is to be able better to handle the word of truth. 2 Tim. 2:15.
4. This will help us better to understand the Gospel and how faith must be exercised after we are saved.
5. This study is aimed to help us to increase our faith, to have more faith.

I Saving faith: believing God with regard to our salvation

- A. This is to believe the Gospel, that is, believing what God has said about his Son coming into the world, and knowing we are saved.
 1. John 3:16 is what Martin Luther called 'the Bible in a nutshell'. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'
 2. Keep Hebrews 11:1 in mind: 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'
 - a. It is being sure without the evidence, that is, empirical (scientific or visible) evidence.
 - b. We have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes. 'And, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for.' 1 Peter 2:8.
 3. The Gospel is presented as righteousness from God that is revealed from 'faith to faith'. 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith.' Romans 1:17 (AV).
 - a. Sadly, for some strange inexplicable reason the NIV chose to paraphrase (or give some scholar's odd interpretation) rather than translate. Fortunately it gives a marginal note that puts it right: 'from faith to faith'.
 - b. Paul's words 'faith to faith' are crucial to an understanding of Romans generally and justifying (saving) faith particularly.
 - (1) Note: justifying faith and saving faith may be used interchangeably in this lesson.

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- (2) To justify means to be made righteous.
- c. 'Faith to faith' means (1) the faith of Jesus, and (2) our faith.
- (1) The phrase 'righteousness of God' (Rom. 1:17) appears again in Rom. 3:22: 'Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.' Romans 3:22 (AV).
- (2) Sadly the NIV chose to translate 'faith of Jesus' as 'faith in Jesus'; but the AV got it right.
- (3) Only those who believe have the benefit of what Christ did for us.
- (4) Had Paul said: the righteousness of God which is by 'faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all' – and stopped there – it would imply that all would be saved.
- (5) But Paul didn't stop there; he went on to say 'upon all them that believe.'
- (6) Why? If you don't believe you won't be saved, even though Jesus believed perfectly for you on your behalf.
- d. What Paul means by 'faith to faith' is stated in Galatians 2:16: 'Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.' Galatians 2:16 (AV). Follow this carefully:
- (1) 'We have believed *in* Jesus Christ' – why?
- (2) 'That we might be justified by the faith *of* Jesus Christ' – why?
- (3) Because the faith *of* Jesus Christ is the meaning of the 'first faith' of 'from faith to faith'; the 'second faith' of that phrase is our faith.
- (4) I promise you! Read Galatians 2:16 over and over again in the Authorised Version; compare it with Romans 3:22 and Romans 1:17 and this will become clear.
- (5) All the above is based upon a literal translation of the Greek.

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- B.** The faith of Jesus.
- 1.** This means just that – Jesus' own personal faith.
 - a.** He was a believer. 'I will put my trust in him.' Heb. 2:13.
 - b.** He was a perfect believer because he was given the Holy Spirit without any limit. John 3:34.
 - (1)** You and I are given a 'measure of faith'. Rom. 12:3.
 - (2)** But not Jesus. 'For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.' John 3:34.
 - 2.** Jesus' faith was a substitutionary or vicarious faith.
 - a.** This means he took our place.
 - b.** Everything he did was for us.
 - c.** He did for us what we could not do for ourselves; this includes:
 - (1)** Believing perfectly.
 - (2)** Fulfilling the Law by obeying perfectly.
 - (3)** Satisfying God's justice.
 - 3.** When Paul said that the righteousness of God is revealed from 'faith to faith' he meant therefore:
 - a.** The faith of Jesus – his believing perfectly on our behalf.
 - b.** Our faith – trusting what Jesus did for us.
- C.** The object of our faith is God.
- 1.** We believe God – what he has told us in his word.
 - 2.** He tells us to put our faith in his Son.
 - a.** When we do that the righteousness of Jesus is put to our credit. 'What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Romans 4:3.
 - b.** This comes from transferring our trust in ourselves to what Jesus has done for us.

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'I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died
And that he died for me.'

D. Our faith: being sure.

1. It is when we are convinced that Jesus' life and death are what save us.
2. When we are 'sure' of *that*, we put our trust in the Gospel.
 - a. Faith therefore assures.
 - b. It is not a perfect faith but faith none the less in a perfect and great Saviour!
 - c. This is why we are sure we will go to Heaven.
 - (1) Not because of works. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.' Ephes. 2:8-9.
 - (2) It is faith alone in Christ alone.
 - d. Note: when it comes time to die, this is the only comfort that is possible.

'Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies.'
Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

'Be near me when I'm dying;
O show Thy cross to me.'
Paul Gerhardt (1607-76)

Achieving Faith: believing God with regard to his will

- A. If believing God is the best way to die it is also the best way to live.
 1. Saving faith secures a home in Heaven.
 2. Achieving faith enables us to accomplish things on the way to Heaven.
 - a. It is described throughout Hebrews 11.
 - b. The faith of Hebrews 11 is not referring to how we are saved, with the possible exception of Hebrews 11:4: 'By faith Abel offered God a

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better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.'

- (1) It is what 'the ancients were commended for'. Heb. 11:2.

(2) It enabled them to do things in this life.
- c. God wants us to have both kinds of faith:

 - (1) Saving faith: assurance we will go to Heaven.

(2) Achieving faith: accomplishing something here below.
- 3. What if your own name were added to the list; what do you suppose might be said about you? 'By faith Mary Jones. . .'

 - a. I believe we are all called to follow in the footsteps of those stalwarts in Hebrews 11.
 - b. They were ordinary people; God made them unusual by what they did by faith.
- 4. What is good enough to die by, then, is good enough to live by.

 - a. This is partly what Paul meant: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Galatians 2:20 (AV).

 - (1) Greek literally means: I live by faith, namely that of the Son of God.

(2) Paul continues to refer to Jesus' own faith and says he *lives* by that!

(3) It is not only what saves but the way we should continue to live.
 - b. Living by the faith of Christ achieves things; what God has in mind for each of us.

 - (1) He has a will for each of us – just as he had a will for Abraham, Moses and Samuel.

(2) The degree to which we live by the faith of Christ will be the degree to which we accomplish what God had in mind for us.

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- c.** Note: Christ is now at the right hand of God interceding for us. What level of faith do you suppose Jesus exercises there?
 - (1)** 'Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.' Romans 8:34.
 - (2)** 'He always lives to intercede for' us. Heb. 7:25.
 - (3)** He intercedes with a perfect faith! No wonder, then, that Paul says, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God'!

- B.** Habakkuk's vision: 'the righteous will live by his faith'. Hab. 2:4. Cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38.
 - 1.** The Hebrew is best translated 'faithfulness' in Habakkuk 2:4, which is why the NIV says so in the footnote.
 - 2.** The greater issue however: what does 'his' mean; who is the 'his'?
 - a.** If 'his' means the person's own faithfulness, this could lead to trusting one's own ability to endure.
 - b.** But if 'his' means God's faithfulness it means you are trusting God and not yourself to be faithful.
 - c.** Answer: it means God's faithfulness.
 - 3.** Context of Habakkuk's word that the just would live by God's faithfulness:
 - a.** God told Habakkuk to write down the revelation he had been given. Hab. 2:2.
 - b.** This revelation however awaited an appointed time. Hab. 2:3.
 - (1)** It refers to the end; not Habakkuk's day.
 - (2)** It won't be coming in a day or two. 'Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.' Hab. 2:3.
 - c.** What then is a person to do? Answer: live by the faithfulness of God who promised all this.
 - (1)** Do not trust yourself or your own faithfulness.
 - (2)** Live by his faithfulness, 'for he who promised is faithful.' Heb. 10:23.

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- d.** This is precisely how Hebrews 10:35-39 (which introduces the achieving faith of Hebrews 11) is to be understood:

‘For in just a very little while,
"He who is coming will come and will not delay.
But my righteous one will live by faith.
And if he shrinks back,
I will not be pleased with him."
Hebrews 10:37-38.

- (1)** Those discouraged Hebrew Christians were exhorted to trust God’s faithfulness to show up!
- (2)** This is why the writer refers to Habakkuk! They were to wait. How long? ‘In just a little while.’

- C.** It is at this point that the writer brings in the ‘faith chapter’ of the Bible.

- 1.** Hebrews 11 is in a sense a long parenthesis (brackets).
- 2.** You could go from Hebrews 10:39, ‘But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved,’ to Hebrews 12:1b, ‘Let us throw off everything that hinders. . .’ and not lose the writer’s meaning.
- 3.** Hebrews 11 is given to encourage us.
 - a.** We learn what they did by believing God.
 - b.** What they did we can do, that is, achieve in our day the purpose for which God made us as they achieved God’s purposes for them in their day.
- 4.** One important observation: no person mentioned got to repeat what was done before.
 - a.** Each faith was an ‘original’ faith; there were no imitations; each had to achieve on their own what God led them to do.
 - b.** Noah was not allowed to do what Enoch did; Abraham wasn’t allowed to build an ark!
 - c.** So with you and me; we cannot look over our shoulders and do what others have done; we fix our eyes on Christ. ‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.’ Hebrews 12:2.

CONCLUSION

- A.** Saving faith is believing God; achieving faith is believing God.
- B.** We must experience both; and if we do we can turn the world upside down for God in this new and exciting day!