

Faith – 1

The word “faith” is used 300 to 500 times in the Bible, depending on the translation you are using. I chose this topic for this podcast primarily because of Hebrews 11:6 which says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Impossible! So, the Bible has a lot to say about faith and counts it as absolutely necessary if you want to please God.

Question – So, what is faith? Does the Bible define faith?

- **Answer** – Yes! Just a few verses before Hebrews 11:6.
 - **Hebrews 11:1** “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
 - “Assurance” – HUPOSTASIS – substance; a support or something that stands under and supports something else; it may signify a title-deed as giving a guarantee or reality to something. So, in that case, it would be saying that faith is the title-deed of things that are hoped for or expected. It is the guarantee that it will come about. The word “assurance” has the idea that there is no maybe about it – it is reality even though it is not seen yet.

The next word to look at is “hoped”. “Faith is the guarantee of things hoped for”. It has a slightly different meaning in the Bible as compared to the way we use it:

- “Hoped” – ELPIZOMENON – means reality; confident expectation; happy anticipation of good; full realization of what is already possessed by the believer.

Now let’s look at “conviction” – faith is “the conviction of things not seen.”

- “Conviction” – ELENCHOS – means proof. It always implies the presentation of evidence in court, for example. After a careful consideration of the proof offered, the decision is made.

Let’s rewrite this verse, making the meaning a little clearer: “faith is the reality of what already belongs to the believer – it is the confident expectation and happy anticipation of good; and it is the proof that unseen things really exist”.

- So, a person with faith KNOWS that reality is more than what he can see. In fact, a person with faith doesn’t rely on what he can see at all because he knows that there is more. He knows that God defines what reality is. That is true reality. There is no place for doubt.

So, let’s look at the Hebrew and Greek words for “faith”.

- The Hebrew word in the Old Testament is EMUNAH – means belief in God; it means trust and reliance upon God. And because of that trust and reliance, our behavior will show faith. It is not just intellectual agreement with certain truths about God. For example, you might ask me if I have faith that this shaky-looking chair you have put in front of me will hold me up. And I say “yes”. Then you ask me to sit down on it. Now I have to behave like I trust that chair! I have to sit on that chair. My actions will tell you if I really have faith in that chair to hold me up.

Another example would be actively trusting in the goodness of the Lord and, because of this, being loyal to His will. In other words, if I believe that God is good, then I will also believe that He can be trusted to do good to me as I obey Him. My faith in His goodness is not just intellectual – it leads to behavior that illustrates that faith.

- The Greek word in the New Testament is PISTIS – a firm persuasion; a conviction based upon hearing; a firm conviction producing a full acknowledgment of God’s revelation or of God’s truth.

This is in contrast to a simple belief which consists of an opinion held in good faith without necessary reference to its proof – for example, I may believe that it is going to rain today because it is cloudy – I may have faith that it is going to rain today – but that opinion has nothing to do with actual proof that it is going to rain. Clouds don't necessarily mean it will rain.

Question – Can a person have faith without any changes in what they are doing? The information I've just presented has really dealt with this already, so...

- **Answer** – No. Let's put this another way. If I say that I have faith in God, will you be able to look at my life and the things that I do and see that faith? Will my life be different or will it stay the same? If I go up to someone on the street and ask them if they believe in God, if they have faith in God, most people will say yes. But what does that mean? Am I only asking them if they believe that there is a God? Or am I really asking them if knowing that God exists and who He is has changed their life so that they absolutely rely on Him for everything?
- **Acts 3:1-8** – Of all the Scriptures I could use to illustrate how faith changes what we do, this one seems like a good place to start. Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray. At the same time a lame man was being carried to the gate of the temple so that he could lay there and beg for money all day long. Since this man had been lame from birth, this was the only thing he could do to support himself. No doubt he was used to putting his hand out for alms and hoping people would notice him and put some money in his hand.
 - As I thought about this, I thought that most people would not even look him in the eye but would either keep walking or quickly give him something and quickly walk away. As the lame man saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked them for a gift.
 - These verses say that Peter then looked at him “intently” and said “look at us”. That tells me that the lame man was just going through his normal, daily request to everyone who entered the temple. Perhaps he was not even making eye contact with those people. But now...
 - The lame man immediately focused on Peter and John because, according to these verses, he expected to get something from them. Then Peter told him that they did not have any money.
 - Peter said, “I do not have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give to you; in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!” Then Peter reached out and grabbed the man and raised him up. At that point his feet and his ankles were strengthened and he leaped up.
 - As I look at these verses, one of the 1st things I noticed was that Peter had to have faith in order to do what he did. I asked myself if I would have grabbed the hand of the lame man and told him to get up and walk. Would I have done that? I think I would have been afraid to do that. And what if I didn't have enough faith for God to use me to help that lame man walk? How foolish would I look? What if it didn't “work”? So Peter had faith and took action and God healed that man. Peter had a choice to make – trust God and step out in faith and offer healing... Or not.
 - Now, before we go any further, I do believe that Peter and John were not just going around healing people that needed healing any more than Jesus did that. Somehow Peter knew that God was telling him to heal this lame man. And so he stepped out in faith and did so. Peter had no doubt that God's power would be there to heal that man.
 - And what about the lame man? Did he have to have faith? To stand up, he did. He could have refused to stand although these verses seem to indicate that Peter made him stand up. As I read these verses, I think faith was being shown by both Peter and the lame man, but it started with Peter.
- Some other very important verses about faith and action are found in the book of **James, chapter 2:14-26**. Let's read those verses:

¹⁴“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can ¹⁴that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, ¹⁶be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is ¹⁷dead, being by itself.

¹⁸But someone ¹⁸may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” ¹⁹You believe that ¹⁹God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²²You see that faith was working with his works, and ²²as a result of the works, faith was ²²perfected; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

- “Faith without works is dead” – what does this mean? The word “dead” is not the normal word we find in the New Testament for being dead. This Greek word for dead – ARGOS – means unproductive, useless, barren.
- This is a pretty strong statement linking faith with action. If you think you have faith but your life does not show any action or works that would normally result from that faith, your faith is dead. In other words, this is not the kind of faith that God requires of us. In fact, it is not godly faith at all. It is false advertising! True faith always results in action.

Well, that’s all we have time for today but we have a lot more ground to cover because faith is a very big topic. In the next podcast, we will take a look at **Hebrews 11:6**, a key verse dealing with the importance of faith.