

HEBREWS 34
(Hebrews 11:1, 2)

DEFINING GODLY FAITH
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INTRODUCTION

We have come to the chapter in the Bible which is known as the faith chapter. And we are going to see that the great and notable saints of the past all lived by faith. They did not achieved greatness so much because of their great and noble works. But they were nominated to the hall of fame because of faith.

Now I want you to scan down with me through this chapter and see those who are in God's "faith hall of fame." And notice that sometimes they did great works, sometimes they did very modest works and sometimes they did almost nothing at all – but they are in the hall of fame because of faith.

In verse 4, Abel merely offered a sacrifice, and because he did it by faith, he is in the hall of fame.

In verse 5, God translated Enoch to heaven before death, and Enoch gets in because of faith.

In verse 7, Noah did quite a construction project when he built the ark, but he goes in because of faith.

In verses 8 - 10, Abraham left his native country and lived the life of a nomad, living in tents. But he gets in by faith.

In verse 11, Sara's great work was that she had a son in her old age, but she goes into the hall of fame because of faith.

In verses 20 – 22, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are in on the basis of their faith.

In verse 23 - 29 Moses performed some great and historic deeds for Israel, but he goes in because of faith.

In verse 31, Rahab the harlot goes into the hall of fame because of faith.

And then in verses 32, 33 Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthae and David and Samuel and the prophets all go into the hall of fame because what they did, they did by faith.

And each of us in this sanctuary this morning can achieve similar greatness in the kingdom of God. And we can do it by believing Him. This is what God requires of us. He requires that we believe Him. He requires that we cast our confidence in Him.

Now the book of Hebrews is written specifically to address certain Jews who have attached themselves to the church. They have attached themselves to Christ. They have left Judaism for a while and they have tried out this new way of Christ. And some of these Jews have already turned away from the church and gone back to the synagogue. They have stopped believing the testimony of God that Jesus is the way of salvation. And others are on the brink of turning back.

And the writer of Hebrews warns them that they better hold on to their faith and never let it go.

Now, Hebrews makes it clear that believing God is the great and ultimate distinctive of true Christianity. True Christianity is not distinguished by rituals and ceremonies. True Christianity is not primarily distinguished by outward works. True Christianity is not distinguished by having some intellectual interest in Christ. True Christianity is not that you have attached yourself to the church. It is not that you have engaged in good deeds or long prayers or self-sacrifice. Perhaps these Hebrews had done all of that. The one, ultimate distinctive of a Christian is that he believes God.

Faith is the ultimate inward reality that distinguishes a Christian from all others. Anyone can come to church. Anyone can recite a prayer. Anyone can give money. Anyone can do things. But only the regenerate can believe unto salvation.

Faith is the great distinctive that separates God's people from everyone else. Look in Hebrews 10:38.

The just shall live by faith. (v.38)

Now who is it that shall live by faith. It says, "The just shall live by faith." And if the just are distinguished in that they live by faith, then by contrast we understand that the unjust do not live by faith. The unjust live by sight and by self-reliance but the just live by faith. Faith is what separates the saved from the lost. Those who are saved have faith. Those who are lost do not have faith.

Now faith is the crucial principle found throughout the Scriptures. And it is the crucial principle found in this great book of Hebrews. Look in chapter 10:

Verse 22: Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience . . .

Verse 23: Let us hold fast the profession of our hope without wavering.

(Now that word hope is translated faith in some translations because hope is nothing more than faith in something that has a future fulfillment.)

Verse 35: Cast not away therefore your confidence . . .

Verse 38: Now the just shall live by faith.

This principle of faith separates Christianity from all other dead religions. Virtually every other religion is by works. Those religions are outward and cold and rote and ritualistic. But we begin to see the great truth that Christianity is not some dead, outward religion. It cannot be satisfied by mere rituals and deeds. There must be a change of heart characterized by utter faith and reliance on God.

Now if faith is so crucially important in Christianity, and if it truly distinguishes the saved from the unsaved, then we must ask the question, "What is faith? If it is the crucial and distinguishing feature of true religion in Christ, then what is it?"

Now the first verse of our text for this morning is a verse that many are familiar with. Many of you could no doubt quote it by memory. And it says,

Now faith is the substance of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen. (11:1)

Now we should understand first that this is not a comprehensive definition of faith. This is more in terms of a general principle or a characteristic of faith. It gives us an idea of how faith works as a principle.

And furthermore, this verse is not speaking specifically of saving faith as opposed to other kinds of faith. It is speaking of faith in general. It is describing the essence of faith whether we are talking about faith in the weather report, faith in the stock market or faith in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.

What the writer is doing in verse one is establishing a general characteristic of all faith. That is, he is describing faith in the generic sense.

Example: You may have faith that the sun is going to come up in the morning. Now that is not in any way saving faith, but it is faith. And you believe it with such strong conviction, that it is a virtual reality to you. When you go to bed in the evening, you have planned your next day because you have faith that the sun will come up and it will be light. And it is such a reality to you that you believe it with all your heart and you order your life by it. You are so confident that the sun will come up in the morning that it is reality to you before it happens.

And that is the great characteristic of faith. It is the substance of things hoped for. Now when you go to bed at night, the rising of the sun the next morning is still future. It may or may not happen. But by experience, you have observed it happening every day of your life. And so, you have faith that it will come up tomorrow morning.

Sometimes things that are unseen or things in the future are so uncertain that we can hardly count on them coming to pass.

Example: If we knew that the stock market would go up by a thousand points in the next week, why, we would invest all we had. But in reality there is very little certainty that the stock market will go up, because there are too many variables. We just don't know. We hope it will go up, but we don't put all of our money in because there is very little certainty.

But here is the principle of faith that is stated in verse one. If you really have faith, then you put your money in. In terms of spiritual things, if you really have faith, then you order your life by it.

When it says that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," it means that in your life there is a present reality of something that you cannot presently see." That is the general principle of faith.

But in the religious arena, in the spiritual arena, there is a great deal of confusion these days about what faith is. And like almost all other bible doctrine, it can be twisted and distorted by men.

I want to take a few moments and talk about what godly faith is not and then we will talk about what it is.

What Godly Faith Is Not

- I. Godly faith is not a way of bringing something to pass by visualization.

Example: Some golfers say that it helps if you visualize your shot before you hit it. In other words, you picture in your mind what you want the ball to do. You see it leaving the ground at a certain trajectory. You see it curving in a certain direction. You see it going exactly the right distance, you see it landing on the green and taking one hop forward and then catching and holding the green with backspin. Now what I have found is that I can visualize that all day long, but that doesn't mean that it will actually happen.

And certainly, godly faith is not a matter of conjuring something up in your mind and visualizing it and then expecting it to come to pass. Faith is not a mechanism by which you can simply bring something into existence. If that were the case, then we essentially would have a little genie inside of

us. Anytime we had any desire, we would simply conjure up an image of what we want and there it would be.

Now this kind of faith is big in the self-help arena. Motivational speakers will tell you that to sell more products, you need to visualize those sales and then believe it and it will come to pass. And preachers have many times adopted such an approach and they preach that you can have anything your heart desires simply by visualizing it and believing it. You have heard the old saying, "Just name it and claim it." They preach that with God, the world and all its riches is at your fingertips. Good health, worldly riches, comfort and ease and virtually anything else that you desire is available by naming and claiming. All you have to do is have faith and it is yours.

But, first of all you should know that the gospel doesn't make such promises for this life. It doesn't promise riches or good health or even comfort and ease. Many of the great saints of the Bible lived in great poverty and discomfort for the sake of the gospel.

And secondly God is not at our beck and call like a genie in a bottle. He is not moved by us visualizing and believing that we shall have all the things we want. This kind of perception about faith is actually an attempt to make us god and to make God our puppet. We think that we are god and we can dictate to him what we shall have in life. But it is God who dictates the affairs of our lives. We don't move him, he moves us.

So, godly faith is not merely visualizing something and believing it will come to pass. And secondly,

II. Godly faith is not a power or a force that causes something to happen.

I would guess that this is one of the most common thoughts about faith. And it is preached in the churches that the reason you don't have something is that your faith is not strong enough. And so, what you need to do, if you want something, is to believe something with more intensity. If your faith were only stronger, you could have anything you want.

Now this is a very popular concept among those who want things. If you want something, then all you have to do is increase your faith and

eventually you will have it. And this is a very popular message among preachers because it is an exciting message. Do you want more money? Then ask and believe. Do you want that disease to go away? Then believe.

But do you see how this pictures faith as being some force that actually causes something to happen. But faith is not some causal force. Rather, faith is a receiving instrument.

Many people have the idea that we can dictate to God by means of faith. If I want God to do something, I just believe it and God will do it. So, if I want a big house or a new car or more income I must believe it in order to get it.

This concept gives to faith more credit than it deserves. You see faith is merely a receptacle for God's truth and God's promises. God says it and we believe it. That is true faith. But if we turn that around to say, "We believe it and therefore God is obligated to do it," we have made our faith a god. Our desires are dictating to God. In essence, we are god, and he is our puppet.

Now you know that faith does not operate like that. Faith is not a causing force at all. Only God and his will and is a causing force. We are absolutely dependent on God for all things.

Now let me refer you to the example of Abraham. Abraham is known as the father of faith. It is his great example of faith that is our model.

Example: Abraham was not standing around one day saying, "You know, I think I would like to leave this country that I live in. I'm tired of my father and my mother and my brothers and sisters. I would really like to go live in the land of Canaan. And I would really like to be the father of many nations. And I would like to have a son in my old age by a wife who is barren. And I would like for the Savior of the world to come through me."

Now Abraham didn't visualize all of that so as to bring it to pass. Abraham didn't conjure up some intense, passionate belief that all of that would come to pass. You see, Abraham had no clue of any such thing. But God came to Abraham and promised all of this to Abraham. And Abraham simply received the promise by believing God.

You cannot command God to act by the force of your faith. Your faith is not a force. God is a force. Your faith is merely the receiving instrument of what God has promised.

Example: Take the example of Noah. Noah wasn't sitting around in his back yard one day dreaming of owning a boat. And Noah didn't visualize a boat the size of a football field. But God came to Noah and said, "I want you to build a boat because I am going to bring a great flood." And look in Hebrews 11:7. Noah was moved with fear. That is, he believed what God told him. He believed that a fearful flood was coming. And he built a boat.

So you should clearly see that true faith is not conjuring some vision of what you want, neither is faith some mechanism by which you move God to action. And thirdly, let me say that,

III. Godly faith is not a meritorious thing.

Let's consider Romans 4:4, 5 where this great principle of faith is discussed.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Now let me show you two things about the nature of works and the nature of faith. And, note that works and faith are opposites. Now, here is the first characteristic of works.

A. Works put God in debt.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

There you have a great works principle. When you work for something, then you put someone in debt. If I mow your lawn then you owe me \$50.00 dollars. If I am a doctor and I put you in a little room for a hour and then come in and listen to your heart and take your blood pressure, then you owe me \$500.00 dollars. You get the picture? If you do work for

someone, then you put them in debt. That is why it says,

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

And this is the way most people in the world view salvation. They intuitively know that they are not pleasing to God. And they think that they can work for God and somehow put him in debt such that he will be obligated to pass by their sins and take them into heaven. This is a works mentality. And it is a very dangerous mentality because there are no works that you can do that can atone for your own sins. Your works cannot undo what is already done. Adam sinned 6000 years ago and you are guilty in Adam. (Romans 5) And you have continued in that same pattern of sin. And your works are hopelessly insufficient to buy out from under God's wrath.

So you see that works is a fruitless effort to put God in debt to you. Works is your feeble effort to put God in debt to you. It is a way for you to be god over God. It is a way for you to manipulate Him. And it is an impossible proposition.

But notice in Romans 4 that faith is the opposite of works.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Do you see how faith is contrasted with works? Works puts God in debt. But, faith does not put God in debt. Now the reason that faith does not put God in debt is that faith is not meritorious at all. Faith does nothing. It is not a causing force at all. Faith is merely a mechanism to receive what God has promised.

Look what it says.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace . . .

If you have worked for it, then your reward is not a gracious reward. You are merely being paid for your work. And this is how people would like to get to heaven. We would like to get there on our own merit. We prefer not to admit that we are utterly without recommendation. We prefer not to

admit that we are vile sinners. We prefer not to admit that we are helpless. And the world marches to hell to the drumbeat of dead works.

Ah, but when it is by faith, it is by grace. And that is because there is no merit in faith.

We err when we begin to think of faith as some meritorious work that compels God to act on our behalf. Faith is not a force that moves God. Faith is not a work that buys anything from God. Faith is merely a receiving instrument whereby the sinner receives whatever it is that God has promised.

Example: When a baby is born it is virtually incapable of doing anything for himself. He is incapable of producing his own food. He is incapable of feeding himself. But he has one humble instinct. He knows how to suck. And I liken godly faith to the babe's instinct to suck. The sucking instinct in a baby is the mechanism of receiving milk. The mother produces the milk, the mother provides the milk. The baby merely receives the milk.

Never think of faith as anything but the most humble instinct of the regenerate soul. It is the instinct of the newborn creature to believe God. And when God speaks, the people of God simply suck in the truth by faith. What is foolishness to the world is the wisdom of God to us. Whereas others die for the lack of a spiritual sucking instinct, we live because God has made us alive with faith.

So, we see that works puts God in debt. But, faith is no work at all and faith does not put God in debt.

But there is another principle from Romans 4 that I would like you to see:

B. Works is something you can boast about.

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. (v.2)

Now here the idea is that works is a glory to the worker. And, it gives the worker bragging rights. The worker says, "Look how wonderful my

works are.”

But, faith is not something you can brag about. Faith simply says, “I have done nothing, but God has done something for me.”

This is the very same idea found in Ephesians 2:8, 9 with respect to salvation.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

The natural end of works is that man has something to boast about. But faith leaves man nothing to boast about but God.

So, we have tried to explain what faith is not.

It is not self-visualization.

It is not a power or a force that causes something to happen.

It is not a meritorious thing at all that puts God in debt to act on our behalf.

What Godly Faith Is

- I. Definition of faith in general: Faith is simply putting your confidence in the testimony of another.

Example: Several years ago my wife and I decided we wanted to go to Cancun Mexico for vacation. Neither one of us had ever been there. But we looked it up on the map and we googled it to get more information. And then we bought tickets and got on an airplane. Now that was an utter act of faith because we had no way of knowing that Cancun even existed except that we trusted what someone else said. We trusted whoever it was that made that map. We trusted the articles that we read about Cancun.

And that is a good illustration of faith in general. When you can't see it for yourself and you put your trust in the testimony of someone else so that you are willing to confidently act as though it is true, that is faith.

When you go to a financial analyst and you ask him where to invest your money and he tells you to invest in Company A, B and C, if you have faith in him, you take your money and invest in Company A, B and C. You put your confidence in the testimony of another.

Now that is an example of faith in general. But what is faith in God? Faith in God is putting your confidence in the testimony of God.

Now if we establish that faith is putting your confidence in what God has said, then we can easily see that apart from what God has said there can be no godly faith.

Now you can believe anything. You can believe that there is no God. You can believe that the universe evolved into existence. You can believe that there is no such thing as sin. You can believe that everyone is going to heaven. You can believe that God wants you to be rich. There are thousands of things that people can believe. But godly faith is a confidence in what God has said.

Now here is what men typically put their confidence in:

- **Themselves.** This kind of person thinks he is so smart that he only believes what he personally observes or what he personally can prove or what sounds reasonable to him. And since he wasn't around to observe God making the universe, he denies that God created all things. This person thinks that he is the ultimate determiner of truth. All truth runs through his own consciousness and is verified by his own understanding. How utterly arrogant and foolish is such a man.
- **The Revelation of Man.** Others admit their own lack of knowledge and understanding and they are quite willing to read books on history and the sciences and they will put their faith in what other men have said. Since Einstein was quite brilliant, then this man will study Einstein and this man will put his confidence in the testimony of Einstein. This man will say, "I never studied science, but I am quite willing to accept what the scientist tells me."
- **The Revelation of God.** But then there is another kind of testimony that most men will never trust. This is the testimony of God himself. Now I can confidently tell you that the testimony of God is a

thousand times more reliable than the most careful testimony of men. The testimony of men must be checked and double checked in order to weed out the inevitable error and to verify the truth in the matter. But God's testimony is true without the slightest equivocation.

Let God be true, but every man a liar. (Romans 3:4)

I hope you know that you can pick up your Bible and you have absolute truth in your hands. Now if there was such a thing in any other discipline, it would be the most prized book in the field. What if there was a book of mathematics that was a book of absolute mathematical truth? Every mathematician would memorize that book from cover to cover and he would accept its precepts with absolute confidence. He could have absolute faith in the contents of that book.

The Bible is a book of absolute truth in the discipline of religion and redemption and righteous living. The Scriptures are the very testimony of God himself. And those who have a godly faith put their whole confidence in the testimony of God.

Faith doesn't cause something to happen. Faith merely receives what God has promised.

Here is our duty. It is to believe the testimony of God. Faith is not some empty wish. Faith is not some unreasonable expectation to win the lottery. Faith attaches to something very certain and that is the promise of God. If God has promised, then we have full assurance. And let me say in closing that God has promised salvation in Jesus Christ. It is more certain than the sun rising in the morning. And you can breathe in that salvation this morning by faith.