

Lesson Seven

Review from Previous Lesson: We saw how specialized the Bible is, in performing the function of linking the seen to the unseen through its differentiated language. We also saw that the Bible is one of a class of types of revelation – all of which are not information and should not be viewed as such.

The Problem: Most Christians are not able to give a definition of the word, “faith.” They know that it is necessary but since it is not measurable, many of them can only describe it as a set of doctrines that need to be defended, or as a vague feeling of hopefulness. One reason for this is that the word faith itself has been co-opted by the secular world for its use to describe an optimistic outlook or confidence in a person or cause. In general, it is not seen as a link connecting the unseen to the seen world, yet the Bible portrays it as such.

Why the problem persists in churches: We have become accustomed to speaking about faith as a kind of commodity: we speak of sharing our faith, or of defending the faith. However, we’re not as comfortable in thinking of it as something that links us to the unseen.

Underlying Assumptions As Expressed in Everyday Language

1. I have faith in a lot of things and a lot of people.
2. We’ve been taught that we must defend the faith and I always thought that meant holding on to the doctrines and practices of my church.
3. I am uncomfortable with talking about the importance of faith because so many people say that “faith only” is necessary for salvation.
4. Doesn’t faith just mean that you believe the Bible is from God?
5. When bad things happen to me, I feel like I am losing my faith.

Background Reading Before Teaching This Lesson

We will be asking students to visualize the way that faith is triadic – it links the part of reality you can’t see to the side you can see. Be prepared to explain how both the actions of the Holy Spirit and revelation are triadic as well; in that they are elements that link two other things together.

Also, read carefully Hebrews chapter 11 at least three times before class begins and make notes for yourself on the way that faith functioned as an index between the seen and the unseen. How did it enable people to live triumphantly when all the information around them would have indicated there was no reason for hope?

The Lesson

- 1) The Bible continually emphasizes faith, but unfortunately the very word is one which has been largely robbed of its representational power by misuse and neglect. Biblical faith is far from mere hopefulness, because it rests firmly on its

- foundation of revelation of the will and mind of God. Paul put it flatly: "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). It is identified in the book of Hebrews as the very mechanism by which we are able to conduct our lives: "the just shall live by faith" (10:38); and we know that without it, it is impossible to please God (11:6).
- 2) Like the Holy Spirit and revelation, faith is a means of linking the unseen realm of God to our material existence. Hebrews 11 speaks of its solidity: it is the substance of things hoped for, and evidence of things not seen (v. 1). All of the rest of the 11th chapter shows how people from Abel forward used faith to link their lives to the unseen realities. This chapter of Scripture begins, in fact, with an amazing statement about faith linking our minds to understand ("by faith we understand") how the representations of God became fact through creation ("things which are seen were not made of things which are visible"—verse 3): a perfect example of representations preceding and forming facts on the visible side).
 - 3) The rest of Hebrews 11 shows examples of real people who used the active indexing action of faith to link themselves to the unseen realm. All used information that was supplied to them by the noncommutative action of God through revelation. They were able to re-represent their circumstances in light of a superior view of reality—one that took into account not just their troubles but the superintending and conquering power of their God. Some were able to even re-represent iconic (sensory) events like torture in the light of "a better resurrection" (v. 35).
 - 4) This was far more than wishful thinking or hopefulness! This was being linked to God in such a way that they could do anything He asked them to. This is true faith—and all such faith has the power to move mountains, change circumstances, overcome any obstacle.
 - 5) That is why the witness of their triumphant lives can surround us and allow us to be able to follow the example of perfect faith, perfect linking to God: Jesus. In Hebrews 12 we see how we can truly run the race set before us if we imitate the faith of these great ones and their Savior.
 - 6) It is evident that the progression through these stacked indices demonstrates an increasing amount of human involvement and will. The Holy Spirit acted always in supervision of human beings; but the linking process begins to include mankind in the process of revelation; and upon arrival at the concept of the process and substance of faith, man is included intimately. Progressively speaking, one cannot "help" the Holy Spirit; (human involvement is only that of recipient); but in faith all of humanity can actually participate. Believers commanded to build ourselves up in faith (Jude 20) and to strengthen ourselves as David did in the Lord our God (1 Sam 30:6).
 - 7) No one can impress God with works (unless it is the same "work" of Jesus, to believe on the One who sent Him: John 6:29). The Bible tells us that Jesus was only impressed by one thing: the exercise of faith. He only "marveled" at faith (Luke 7:9) and at the lack of it (Mark 6:5-6—a situation that actually caused Him to be unable to do miracles in the midst of such).
 - 8) At this point one might conclude that although faith is essential, it must be accompanied by works as James suggested in 2:17. It is not enough to link oneself

by faith to the unseen world; that faith will naturally manifest itself in the production of symbols or actions in one's life that show that faith, as we will see in next week's study.

Questions for Discussion with Class

- 1) What aspects of faith does Hebrews 11:1 emphasize?
- 2) In looking over Hebrews 11:2-40, point out examples of how faith acted as an index in the lives of some of those individuals listed there.
- 3) Why must authentic faith be based on the underlying "layers" of revelation and the Holy Spirit? Can you give any examples from other world religions, where "faith" is not based on those two underlying layers?
- 4) In your own words, explain this statement: "It is evident that the progression through these stacked indices demonstrates an increasing amount of human involvement and will." Give examples.
- 5) How does the way that Jesus viewed faith ((Luke 7:9, Mark 6:5-6) relate to Hebrews 11:6?
- 6) Hebrews 11:6 speaks of the way that God rewards those who come to Him. From your own journey of growing in faith, how do you react to learning that the original Greek of this verse says, "God *becomes* a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him"?
- 7) Using what you have learned about faith, work as a class to create a definition of the word that is in keeping with what you have learned from the Bible about it.

Yeah, but...

What about our active role in building upon the indices God provided? What is my role?
Next week – even more solid Biblical information about how we can link the great power of the unseen God to our very real circumstances.