

The Christian Life

Faith

Lesson #2 for April 11, 2009

Scriptures: Acts 16:31; Romans 10:17; 14:23; Ephesians 6:10-11; Hebrews 11; James 2:18,19; 1 Peter 1:3-8.

1. The main purpose of this lesson is to discover, if possible, the essence of faith and what we can do to make our faith “grow.”
2. Faith is not to be confused with rational conviction. Faith in the biblical sense is not based primarily on our reason (even though it is not unreasonable or irrational!); nor is it based on our emotions (though emotions do play a role). Faith is a **deep-rooted assurance** that affects the entire person. Faith is a **principle** that governs the life. Faith is **the means** by which we reach out and grab hold of the promises of a God we can't see yet we know is there. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, April 4, 2009.
3. Could you define “faith” in your own words? Many turn to Hebrews 11:1 for a definition of faith, but that verse really tells us what faith does and not what faith is! Here is the definition that I like:

Faith is just a word we use [the Greek word is *pistis*] to describe a relationship with God as with a person well-known. The better He is known, the better this relationship may be. [It is a pity that we cannot say, “will be.” But consider the case of Lucifer/Satan who knew God very well.] This relationship implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God—based upon the more than adequate evidence revealed—to be willing to believe what God says as soon as we are sure that He has said it [Matthew 24; 1 John 4; Revelation 13], to accept what God offers as soon as we are sure that He is the One offering it, and to do what God wishes as soon as we are sure that He is the One wishing it—without reservation—for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith in God would be perfectly safe to save, and this is why faith is the only requirement for salvation because nothing more complete could be asked of a person. Adapted from A. Graham Maxwell.

4. If faith is, indeed, all about trusting God, then we need to know what kind of God we are talking about! What kind of God is it that we are trying to get to know?

God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. [Ellen White gave an enormous list of accusations that Satan has made against God!] God is just as loving and trustworthy as his Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious

Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of his intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. [John 15:15] This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God’s loyal children throughout the universe.

Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as his trusted friends—God’s friends today want to speak well and truly of our heavenly Father. They covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: “He has said of me what is right.” A. Graham Maxwell, *Servants or Friends*, pp. 186-187.

It is interesting to note that “the 144,000” as described in *Great Controversy* pp. 648,649 are much like Job and Moses.

5. If God is truly like that, would you find Him trustworthy? What would a God like that require of people so that they can be saved? Paul seemed to suggest that all that is required for salvation is faith! (Acts 16:31—you remember the story of Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi) Is that really enough? And what did Paul think was included in “faith”? Remember that there is only one word in Greek for “faith,” “belief,” “confidence,” and “trust”! Is faith alone enough? Think of all that things that you have heard about from the pulpit that are supposed to be required for salvation. What does faith do for/to us? It must make some kind of difference in us if it is going to be the determining factor in our salvation!
6. Read Ephesians 2:8. Is faith, indeed, a gift of God? What would that imply? Why doesn’t God just give it to everybody? Or is faith the “gift” of grace? Is salvation the “gift”? Does it come to us only by God’s grace when we have “faith”? Do grace and faith just sit on a shelf somewhere until we “take them down” and “out of the box” and use them? But you cannot have “trust/faith” in a vacuum. You must have “trust/faith” in a person. We need to get to know God better. How many people in our world really know anything about God. How many people in our world today really have access to the Bible like we do? Isn’t God’s grace/salvation available even to those who do not have access to the Bible? How do you understand Romans 1:20 and *DA* 638?
7. Read Acts 16:29-31. Had the jailer received a gift from God? Why do some people have faith and others do not? Does God give faith to some? And does He not give it to others?
8. Remember that in order to talk intelligently to each other, we must agree on our definition of “faith.” We have had several quite different definitions implied by different statements that have been made. Let us review our definition of “faith.” **Christian theologians have often described faith as a “leap in the dark.”** What does that imply? Is leaping in the dark ever a safe practice? Does one really need to get to know God, read the Bible, etc. to make a “leap in the dark”? Unfortunately, leaping in the dark has led to the profusion of modern “churches” in our day. People have come to feel that they are free to choose what they want

to believe and reject the rest! Is that ever a safe course? People are jumping in every direction in our day. Many are even choosing to believe that God does not even exist! Dr. **Sean Pitman recently gave a lecture on the campus of La Sierra University concerning the issues involved in creation vs. science. He showed that the “science” of evolution has many problems! Creation is actually a more rational “science.” One thing that we most never allow our evolutionist friends to do is to suggest that they have “science” and we have “religion” or “faith.” All of us have the same “data” available to us. We can discuss the issues involved in that science and talk about creation science vs. evolutionary science. We can bring much evidence to bear on that subject. But we must also recognize that they have constructed a new paradigm of beliefs based on their interpretation of the “science.” That paradigm of beliefs is their “religion.” So, if they want to discuss “religion,” we can do that too, but in that arena, we will win every time! What do they have to look forward to after this life?**

9. If Jesus said He was the Light of the world, (John 1:4-9; John 8:12) are we to infer that this light was not very good? Are we still leaping in the dark?
10. Read Hebrews 11:6. Why would it be impossible to please God without faith? Is that an arbitrary requirement on the part of God? Is faith an essential quality that is found in some people and not in others? We believe that He exists, and as Christians, we believe that He wants the very best for us, even in this life. God says that what He wants for us is better for us than what we want for ourselves. That is incredibly difficult for selfish human beings to believe. Every time we commit a sin, we are in essence saying to God, “I think I know better than You do what is good for me to do right now”! What would our lives be like if we really believed that and acted accordingly?
11. If faith is the result of a growing relationship with God, how are the Scriptures involved? Is there a difference between believing in God and having faith in Him? Romans 10:17 assures us that faith comes from hearing and hearing comes from the Word of God or the preaching about Christ. In Paul’s day very few people could read and very few had access to the very expensive copies of biblical documents that were available. They had to go to church and listen while someone read it to the entire congregation. (Revelation 1:3) Do we have adequate evidence for believing in God and Christ and understanding, as far as is humanly possible, something about Their character and government? Can we have an adequate faith based on that evidence? Many of us have had the privilege of going through the Bible book-by-book with Dr. Graham Maxwell and some of us have also had the privilege of taking other groups through the Bible that way. To get an idea of how you might conduct such a group, look at the suggested Study Guides and Teacher’s Guides found on our website: www.theox.org
12. So what is the basis for our faith?

Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves....

There are today thousands of professors of religion [i.e. those who profess to be religious] who can give no other reason for points of faith which they hold than that they were so instructed by their religious leaders. They pass by the Saviour's teachings almost unnoticed, and place implicit confidence in the words of the ministers. But are ministers infallible? How can we trust our souls to their guidance unless we know from God's word that they are light bearers?" *Great Controversy* 595-597 (1888)

Is it safe to trust what you learn in Sabbath School class? What basis for faith did Enoch, Job, and Abraham have? They apparently had a direct connection of some kind with God. Would God be willing to offer such a direct "revelation" to those in our world who do not have access to the Bible as we do? Many of the great "pillars" of faith in the Old Testament lived before there was any Bible available! How often did those men and women have "access" to God? How did Abraham know the voice of God so well that he knew for sure that God was talking to him when He told him to go and sacrifice his son. God takes it upon Himself to reveal what He knows each person needs to get to know God.

13. The Greek word *pistis*, often translated "faith," can also be translated "belief," "confidence," or "trust." What is the essential core meaning of these four words?
14. James says the devils also have faith! (James 2:18,19) Will that faith save them? Why? Or, why not? Is it possible to have a "faith" that is not a "saving faith"? If so, how would you describe a faith that is not a saving faith?
15. Read John 5:39; Luke 24:44; and 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. While it is clear that much of the New Testament speaks about Jesus Christ and His earthly ministry and subsequent work in heaven, what can we say about the Old Testament? Jesus Himself repeatedly said that the Old Testament is all about Him because He was the God of the Old Testament. (1 Corinthians 10:4) Can we put together a clear and consistent picture of God and of Jesus—from what we read in the Old Testament as well as the New—the God: 1) Who drowned all but eight in the flood (Genesis 6-8); 2) Who killed so many firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:29-36); 3) Who opened the earth and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16:1-40); 4) Who ordered the children of Israel to stone Achan (Joshua 7); and yet, 5) Who in the times of the New Testament said to so many, "Go and sin no more"! (John 8:1-11) Could the God who thundered on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20) be the same One who sat quietly and gave the Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew 5-7) Why did He do all those things? Is there any evidence that all those who perished in the flood or in the death of the firstborn will be lost? Not at all! And do you find such a God trustworthy? Many Christians do not know how to put all of this together. And what do we do with the incredible evidence for an orderly universe? Did it get that way just by accident? Or, could we have faith in a "false god" or a wrong "picture of god"?
16. Read Romans 11:20 and Hebrews 3:19. What is implied by the statement that the children of Israel did not enter the land of Canaan as they should have because they did not believe or have faith? What is the relationship between faith and feeling?
17. Much has been said and much has been preached about the relationship between faith and works. The Bible clearly teaches that faith is essential for salvation. What about "works"? And

what is included in works/actions? Read James 2:14-26. Can we truly have faith without works? Are works important for our salvation? Do works increase our faith? Does faith always lead to works?

18. Read Hebrews 11. Does Hebrews 11:1 suggest that if we “believe” something hard enough, that will make it true? Think of all the contradictory things that people believe in! Roman Catholics believe that Mary is in heaven “pleading” their cases. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Mary is in the grave. They cannot both be right. In this chapter we see a gallery of “heroes of faith.” What do we learn from their experiences? Notice that Paul and James both mentioned Abraham as a great example of faith. But, they both also mentioned Rahab! Why do you think that is?
19. Is faith a case of believing something for which we have only limited evidence—or even no evidence at all? If we had clear evidence for God and His character, could we say that we now “know” God, and we no longer need to have “faith” in Him?
20. Is faith a way of knowing anything? Is that what is suggested by Hebrews 11:1? Can you think of anything in which you have “faith” but about which you have no evidence at all?
21. If believing something makes it so—as many seem to believe—think of all the things that people believe that are contradictory! Could they all be true?
22. **Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction, [Hebrews 11:1!] by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which, through the grace of Christ, the soul becomes a conquering power. *Ministry of Healing* 62 (1905)**
23. God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony [or evidence] that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth, will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. *Steps to Christ* 105 (1892)
24. There are many who fail to distinguish between the rashness of presumption and the intelligent confidence of faith. *Review and Herald* April 1, 1875; 1RH 161:2:5 [Does this sound like “leaping in the dark”?]
25. Some people believe very strongly that their “faith” is based on their personal experience with God apart from any “evidence.” But Ellen White wrote:

Even the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart must be measured by the Scriptures. *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, April 13, 1891; 1SM 43.

Experience is said to be the best teacher. Genuine experience is indeed superior to mere theoretical knowledge, but many have an erroneous idea as to what constitutes experience. Real experience is gained by a variety of careful experiments, made with the mind free from prejudice, uncontrolled by previously

established opinions and habits.

The results are marked with careful solicitude. That which many term experience is not experience at all....There has not been a fair trial by actual experiment and thorough investigation, with a knowledge of the principles involved in the action.

Here is where we have met the greatest difficulty *in religious matters*. The plainest facts may be presented, the clearest truths sustained by the word of God may be brought before the mind; but the ear and the heart are closed, and the all-convincing argument is, "my experience"....Many examples might be given to show how people have been deceived by relying upon what they supposed to be their experience. *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* 109,110 (1890 - Originally written in 1865 in a series "How to Live")

26. Our only safety is in getting to know God personally—not just through the pastor; not through some feeling or "personal experience" although those may be important at times, but rather—through a careful and thorough investigation of the truth as presented in Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit, the One who gave us the Scripture. In association with others, we need to investigate and be humbly willing to listen (the biblical definition of "obedience") until we know that we know the truth. Faith is the only requirement for salvation because as we draw closer to Christ to get to know Him better, we shall become more and more like Him. (Compare Romans 14:23)

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Last modified: March 14, 2009

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