

### What is Faith? Hebrews 11 v1-3

In the Old Testament the word 'faith' doesn't really exist, Habakkuk 2 :4 is the nearest we have. The word 'faithful' is used more frequently. However, the concept is clearly there e.g. Abraham in Genesis 15 :6

In the New Testament, both faith and belief are generally translations of the Greek word *Pistis*. People who live by faith as followers of Jesus Christ are called "believers" Acts 5:14. In the N.T. the main way word 'faith' used is by trust or reliance. It is more than just intellectual belief In Gk, it has a sense of confidence in a person & their testimony based on knowledge of them. 2 Cor 4 :13-14

Why Did God, want faith, as key to our salvation? Maybe, because it involves nothing of us, apart from our focusing on Him.

In popular understanding, faith is something done in ignorance or belief without evidence, however true faith is based on true information about Christ. Romans 1 :20, 10 :17

In fact more we know about God, the easier it is to trust him.

Faith is rational (Romans 1 :20) but it requires a step beyond.

John 20 :29 Our faith starts with God Ephesians 2 :8

A gift given 2 Peter 1:1, Acts 3 :16



## Questions

How would you define 'faith'?

### Saving Faith

The whole topic of salvation (How someone becomes a Christian) is called Soteriology and involves a negative and a positive. Negative, repentance Acts 3 :19, and the positive, faith. There are over 100 verses that make faith alone the basis of our salvation, Acts 20 :21. The faith element leads to 'Justification by faith' John 3 :16, Romans 3 :22-26, 5 :1, Ephesians 2 :8. A prayer of repentance and faith is helpful to people, but saying words alone does not save, it is a genuine response of the heart that counts. Proverbs 3 :5-6, Justification does not just involve our sins being forgiven, it also means we take on the righteousness of Christ in God's eyes. Romans 4 ;5, Titus 3 :5

### Applied Faith

'Faith that...' which is based upon truth. John 8 :32

'Faith in...' which is based in a person.

Is it the size of our faith that matters, or who we put our faith in? Luke 17 :6

### Faith and Works

The issue arises because of two errors; a) Easy Believeism (Say words of a prayer, and you're in, live how you want) b) Works is part of what justifies us. Since the days of the early church there have been those who have taught that faith has to be supplemented by works. The Early Judaisers, tried to get Gentile believers to obey Jewish law in addition to faith. Galatians 2 :16, Romans 3 :28, Works do not save us, however they are the evidence that faith has taken root. Matthew 3 :8, Titus 1:16, James 2 :14-26 Religion teaches Works leads to Salvation. (Earned) The Christian teaches Salvation leads to Works (Grace)

**Blind Faith?** Are we called to have blind faith? Faith is made up of content and conviction.

Content is what we believe. You have to believe in something. Conviction is your personal trust and commitment to the content. But, It isn't just wishful thinking but based on evidence.

**Evidence for our faith** 1. Logic, e.g. nothing cannot produce something. Truth exists

2. Archaeology, e.g. evidence for over 50 Old Testament characters have been found.

3. Influence The influence of Christians in our World for good e.g. hospitals, education etc

4. Changed lives, millions have had their lives changed for the better after knowing Christ.

No-one can prove to a non believer that our faith is true, but even sitting on a chair needs faith.



## Historic view of Faith

**Pre-reformation** Early Christians accepted that faith was the foundation of being a Christian, Augustine taught faith as an intellectual thing but should lead to self surrender, love, and good works in general. Thomas Aquinas "Faith causes the intellect to give its assent to things that are not seen." There was a general view that you belonged to 'the faith' meaning the Church, with less emphasis on a persons own individual faith.

**Reformation** There was renewed emphasis on faith needing to not just to be part of our thinking but also our wills, to trust. Before the Reformation, people were told they needed to have faith along with certain works. John Calvin described faith as 'revealed to our minds, and sealed in our hearts'. The Reformers stressed that faith alone (sola fide) was the key to opening up the work of Christ on the cross to ourselves, however even our own faith isn't our own work, it is a gift of God.



John Calvin

**20th/21st Century thinking** Remember the three main strands of those that call themselves Christian?  
*Evangelical* (Bible based), *Liberal*, *Liturgical* (e.g. RC).

In *Liberal* circles, personal faith is not a major issue, as there is no Hell. Right actions are far more important than right belief.

In *Liturgical* (Roman Catholic) circles, justification comes at baptism, when in later life they sin, they need to take the sacraments.

Among *Evangelicals* there is clear teaching on the need to have faith and repentance.

However there is a discussion, does regeneration come before faith Ephesians 2 :1 & 5, or faith before regeneration 1 John 5:1 ? How can a 'dead person' believe? Or, does faith have to come first? (Reformed v Arminian debate)



**The 'Word Faith' Movement** There are many high profile Christian speakers in this, such as; Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen They teach that we can have health and wealth by speaking out words of faith (Name it, claim it!) They look at scriptures such as Isaiah 53:5, the however context is spiritual disease. Matthew 16:19 However Romans 9:15-16 Prosperity teachers use often talk about planting 'Seed' Mark 4:8. Kenneth Copeland - "Faith is a force" False - Faith is trust in God, not a 'force' to be used. Some say we can speak things into existence like God. Creflo Dollar claims Christians are 'little gods'. Genesis 3 :5 One of many criticisms of the movement is that it is 'Me' centred, my wants, my needs, rather than Christ centred. Instead of focusing on Christ, it can elevate humans to the level of Christ.

## Questions

What problems could a false understanding of faith bring?

**Faith and doubt** Christians are called 'Believers', however the amount we believe does vary!

Many at times struggle with their faith e.g. The father Jesus met Mark 9 :23+ Faith comes by hearing Romans 10 :17 So listening to Gods faithfulness in the past & promises for the future can help us work through times of doubt.

We should remember that it is okay to ask questions, God gave us minds to think and work things out.

Matthew 11 :4-5 Remember, faith doesn't have to be an emotional response, it can be an act of will.

**Living by Faith on a day to day basis.** We are called on to live by faith not sight 2 Corinthians 5 :7

How can we do this?

1. Keep our focus on God, include in our day, reading, listening, watching things that help us do that.  
Proverbs 3 :5-6, Hebrews 12 :
2. Don't focus on 'earthly things' Matthew 6 :19-20, 33, 2 Corinthians 4 :18, Colossians 3 :2  
Assess our 'wants' list, to see if we can justify or it is just a whim!
3. Focus on the end game Revelation 22 :12 Parable of 10 Virgins - be ready
  4. Think of God in the everyday things of life 1 Corinthians 10 :31
  5. Focus on what we can do for others Ephesians 4 :28, Hebrews 13 :16
  6. Obey his commands John 14 :15
7. Get encouragement from other Christians Hebrews 10 :25
8. Be thankful 1 Thessalonians 5 :18
9. Assess our attitude, how vain and self obsessed are we? Philippians 2 :3
10. Give God what is his! 1 Peter 5 :7



"Faith is taking God Seriously"

## Questions

Any Comments?

Next time - Arguments against Christianity