

Lesson # 4 -- The Attribute of Faith

Introduction

- A. These ten lessons have as their theme one of the most important functions of the Biblical Christian -- faith.
- B. Every believer understands the necessity of living a life of faith and yet we readily confess that such a life is not easy.
- C. In this lesson I wish to present an aspect of faith which will enable us to get a new grasp on this subject. The attribute of faith is, I believe, a decision -- a choice -- a response by way of the will. If we can understand what this means, and begin to practice it, a good deal of illumination will come to us.

I. The Biblical Instruction

A. Faith is a decision.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice . . .  
By faith Enoch . . . pleased God . . . By faith Noah . . .  
prepared an ark . . . By faith Abraham . . . obeyed and went  
out . . . Heb. 11:4-8

Comment: These men who are held up as illustrations of faith all have a common characteristic -- they made a decision to obey God and trust Him in that obedience. This is what we must do when we know the will of God. Faith is taking God at His Word -- and putting it into practice -- with trust, through or by a decision.

B. Faith is a decision as a response to God.

By faith Abel offered unto God . . . Heb. 11:4

Comment: True faith is a very personal matter. It is a way two individuals relate to one another. Abel's act of worship was simply a sacrifice that God (as a Person) had asked Abel to do and to which Abel (as a person) responded by obedience.

C. Faith is a decision based on God's Word.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out . . . obeyed . . .  
Hebrews 11:8

Comment: Abraham, like every other true believer, did not have to guess regarding God's will. He simply obeyed what he was told to do. God created us so He could reveal Himself to us. He has done that through the Lord Jesus Christ -- as recorded in Scripture. It will simplify our life of faith a great deal, and give us much more confidence, when we understand and practice this truth.

D. Faith is a decision that issues in action.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out . . . obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. Hebrews 11:8

Comment: The decision to respond to God and His Word does not become true faith until it issues in some form of action. Abraham not only made an initial choice to obey God but did so every day in that he was simply told to go "West." When he arrived in Palestine the Lord spoke to him and indicated he had arrived. Faith, like love, cannot be separated from action.

II. The Biblical Illustration

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. Hebrews 11:24-29

Comment: In this exposition of Moses' response to God, the words that indicate his decisions stand out with clarity. It was not enough for him to know the will of God for his life -- he had to make the decisions necessary to obey God -- often with what seemed to be great personal risk. From the divine viewpoint, however, faith is never a risk. In fact it is the only way of living in complete security. This passage has been written into the Bible to instruct each of us and to illustrate how we must respond to God by faith.

III. The Biblical Explanation

A. Faith, as decision, opens the door to God's grace.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed (the response of faith) . . . For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Phil. 2:12,13

Comment: These verses remind us of the inseparable relationship between faith and grace. When we respond to God by faith we receive the wisdom and power of divine grace to carry out the will of God about which we have made the decision. This is one of the most helpful principles in all of the Bible

B. Faith, as decision, clarifies commitment.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. James 1:5-8

Comment: The summary of these verses would be: " Make up your mind what you need/want, ask in faith, and it will be yours. But don't expect an answer if you are double minded and therefore cannot ask in faith."

The truths in this passage regarding faith can be a great help to us. Genuine faith is not related to the indecision, vacillation, compromise, instability, weakness, and self-centeredness that characterizes a "Christian" who has not surrendered himself to God to do His will. When we have an area in our life where we have not "made up our mind" to do the will of God -- it is not only difficult to trust God there -- it is impossible. What terrible weakness we allow in our life by not fully choosing the will of God! What a serious sin it is to permit something or someone to rob us of the exercise of our faith! Our laziness, bitterness, grudges, envy, jealousy, lust, pride, self-righteousness, pretending, lack of love, worldliness, and justification of our sins produces more destruction and bondage than the selling of dope in our schools.

C. Faith, as decision, identifies God's will.

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Ephesians 6:5,6

And he that doubteth (about what is right to eat) is damned (under judgment) if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Romans 14:23

Comment: True faith, as we have seen, cannot be separated from knowledge. When a person is not sure about the will of God it is obvious that he cannot act by faith. When the believer knows what he is to do, makes up his mind he is going to obey -- then he can exercise faith. Too often our weakness, in this important area of trust, is due to an ignorance of God's will or an unwillingness to live the way we know we should. It may help us to ask the question: "Can I exercise faith regarding this area of my life?)

D. Faith, as decision, leads to the obedience of trust.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. . .  
But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?  
For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works  
is dead also. James 2:17,20,26

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? James 2:21,22

Comment: These passages remind us of the inseparable relationship between faith and works. Since faith is a decision -- a response to God concerning His will -- we readily understand that what the Bible calls "works" is simply the activity that grows out of faith. Abraham, for example, believed God for the birth of Isaac (Rom. 4:17-22), and when God asked him to sacrifice his son, he continued to believe God -- namely, that Isaac would be raised from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). The faith of Abraham was rooted in God's faithfulness, through the promise that the Messiah (Jesus Christ) would be born of the lineage of Isaac.

The pattern is the same in the life of every believer. Our obedience to God (doing His will) is the activity that grows out of faith. It is living or acting by faith. The above verses warn us that faith is not simply a mental exercise nor is it an emotion. Faith is a decision to do the will of God -- trusting Him for the wisdom and ability we may need.

IV. The Biblical Application

A. The Old Testament example.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 25:15

Comment: In this passage from the life of Joshua we are shown the necessity of "making up our mind" to do the will of God. Joshua was a strong leader and had brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan under divine direction. In his lifetime the people served God. He knew what would happen when he would die if they did not make a decision of faith regarding their future. He urged them to stop depending on him and choose to do the will of God. Their relationships with God was to be one of faith -- therefore they had to make a practical decision to obey God and live trusting Him. The history following this period of time indicates how poorly they did this.

B. The New Testament example

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot, I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of mouth. Revelation 3:14-16

Comment: It has often been pointed out that the titles the Lord Jesus gave Himself in the introduction of the message, is the key to understanding the weakness in the church. In this Laodicean Church the problem was lukewarmness. They had failed to understand and rightly respond to the Lord Jesus in the light of what it meant for Him to be the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and also the Beginning of the Creation of God.

Each of these titles indicate the greatness of the Savior and what He could have been in the Church. The basic issue has to do with our theme -- faith. They did not put their faith in Him, but in themselves, and their church. The Lord Jesus said to them,

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee . . . (Vs 17,18)

It is easy for us to test ourselves to see if we are also lukewarm. It has to do with our faith. Does the Savior and His Word mean something to us -- practically? Do we find our delight and satisfaction in Him and His will? Are we motivated by His promises? Do we have a sincere desire to obey Him that is immediately translated into action? Or are we like the Laodicean Church in that we are in the church -- but the truths about the Lord Jesus are hardly ever put into practice -- and we are content with our self-righteousness?

Conclusion

- A. How long has it been since you made a clear-cut decision to put the Word of God into practice?
- B. We may not allow ourselves to settle back into a complacent, self-satisfied way of living. The Lord Jesus Christ deserves our best. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." Hebrews 11:6