

Lesson # 5 -- The Content of Faith

Introduction

- A. We have discussed in this series, among other topics, the basis as well as the object of faith. In this lesson we wish to build upon what we have learned and take an important step forward.
- B. We need to remind ourselves that faith is a characteristic -- a quality -- of our relationship with God. It is therefore a very personal and living facet of our spiritual life.
- C. The content of our faith is not the same as its basis (which is found in the Word of God.) What I mean by "content" is the union of the Scripture and our faith. When we as "believers" respond to God on the basis of His Word, there comes to pass a spiritual act whereby the promise and our faith are united and become one.

I. The Biblical Instruction

- A. Faith may be defined as the body of truth believed.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith. II Timothy 4:7.

Comment: The apostle Paul made this statement at what he knew to be the end of his life. His use of the word "faith" was a reference to what he believed the Bible taught. He is here declaring that he had been faithful to God.

- B. Faith may be defined as a response of submission, obedience, and trust.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. John 1:12

Comment: In this passage the emphasis is on what we do (by the grace of God) in salvation -- we believe. The elements of submission, obedience, and trust are all present in this type of response. Most of the references in the Bible to "faith" would be of this type.

- C. Faith may be defined as a description of a believer.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.
II Peter 1:1

Comment: The characteristic of every believer is the ability to exercise faith as well as the evidence of such an activity. We all believe the fundamentals of the Word and are committed to certain values and way of life.

D. Faith may be defined as a union of response and Word.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Hebrews 11:13

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them (those who died in the wilderness), but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Hebrews 4:1

Comment: These passages illustrate the union of faith plus promise or truth. Essentially the result is what the Bible designates by the use of some form of the word "believe." In this facet of faith we recognize the work of the Holy Spirit (which we will discuss in a following lesson) whereby He performs a spiritual act that makes our response of faith plus the Word of God to be united.

II. The Biblical Illustration (These are only samples)

A. We are to believe (accept) the gospel.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye, and believe the gospel. Mark 1:14,15

Comment: Every believer has obeyed this command of the Savior. By the grace of God we have repented and believed. The result is that the gospel and our faith have become essentially one. That we believe and what we believe cannot be separated.

B. We are to believe (obey) the commands.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. Matt. 22:37,38

Comment: When our faith unites with the commandments of the Bible the result is obedience. This is an indication of the spiritual nature of faith. The evidence is seen in our submission to God, as well as in our trust in God for the enablement to obey Him.

C. We are to believe (trust) the promises.

Let your conversation (daily life) be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Hebrews 13:5,6

Comment: The promise in these verses is one of the greatest in all the Bible. To know that the infinite God is always with us in all His love, truth, holiness, wisdom, and power will surely deliver us from any form of covetousness. The unusual facet of faith is again seen here in that the promise and our faith are not two items but one. They are united so as to be inseparable.

III. The Biblical Explanation

A. The explanatory theme.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16

Comment: Paul was not ashamed of the gospel (the truth of divine revelation) because it worked. When he preached the gospel and people believed -- they were born anew!

The apostle points out the four important truths that have to do with the message of this verse.

1. The Gospel (the message of redemption)
2. The necessity of faith - believing.
3. The inflow of the power of God
4. The resultant benefit of salvation (in all three tenses).

B. The explanatory illustrations.

1. The provision to live in freedom.

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8:32

Comment: The truth (Biblical principles) plus faith will result in freedom. This means when I have a specific problem in my life, I can claim a particular truth that relates to that issue, and through this union of truth mixed by faith receive divine cleansing and help to live in freedom. (Truth + faith = freedom)

2. The provision of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth John 16:13

Comment: The Blessed Holy Spirit has been given to every believer as a divine Helper. He has come to teach us the truth and to enable us to live in harmony with it. It is overwhelming to know that we are the temples of God -- but to realize that He dwells in us to guide, strengthen, and protect us in the daily activities of the Christian life -- is a truth that goes beyond our comprehension. (Truth + faith = enablement)

3. The provision for sanctification (daily success)

Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth. John 17:17

Comment: The word "sanctification" refers to the provision God has made for the transformation of the character and actions of the believer. The reference is to freedom from all that is not the will of God and the ability to do His will. One important facet of this truth is the message of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and another is that of our faith. (Truth + faith = holiness)

4. The provision for protection.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness And take the . . . sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Eph. 6:14,17

Comment: The only protection for the believer is to know and practice the truth. When we live according to error we are vulnerable to the world, the Devil, and the sinful patterns of our old nature (flesh). Every believer has experienced the weakness and defeat that has followed a neglect of the truth. (Truth + faith = protection)

5. The provision for cleansing.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth I Peter 1:22

Comment: In His infinite wisdom and power God has made a provision for the believer so he can grow in his Christian life. The secret is knowing the truth and putting it into practice by faith (obedience in trust). When we commit a sin it is also the way we are cleansed from the bondage and defilement that accompanies all sin. (Truth + faith = cleansing)

6. The provision for fellowship.

But if we walk in the light (truth), as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another . . .
I John 1:7

Comment: One important characteristic of the Christian life is that of fellowship with God and other believers. This verse points out the basis for that enjoyable way of living. Because God works in us as we seek and make the appropriate decisions of faith to practice truth -- the result is fellowship. We can only know communion with God as we live in harmony with His character -- He is Truth (John 14:6). (Truth + faith = fellowship)

7. The provision for love.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. I John 3:16-18

Comment: The Biblical principle of this lesson is clearly seen in these verses. Each of us must obey the commands to love our brethren. How this is done is by the practice of the truth in appropriate decisions and actions that grow out of faith. (Truth + faith = love)

IV. The Biblical Application

A. We must make sure we have the right daily priorities.

In the light of this lesson we cannot draw the conclusion that the benefits of faith are unimportant. There is probably nothing more valuable than knowing how to live by faith and to have the benefits that flow from spiritual freedom, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, protection, cleansing, fellowship, and love. We all agree to this -- but we must do more than give mental assent -- we must change our life if necessary.

B. We must make sure we make decisions of faith each day.

One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is not the Devil, immorality, blasphemy, or apostasy -- it is neglect. We often allow ourselves to be characterized by passivity or some form of spiritual laziness. Check yourself out! Are you aggressive about faith? Do you make decision each day to practice the truth in the attitude of trusting God? Let's work hard on this!

Conclusion: (You + truth + faith = success = the glory of God)