

Faith

Are you living by faith? This is an important question, a question which is often not asked in our secular culture. What do we actually mean by this question? Sometimes faith can be taken to mean “blind trust”, simply believing something because that is expected behaviour within a certain group or society. Then faith has a negative connotation and it is something unintelligent people do. But this is not how the Bible explains faith.

In the letter to the Hebrews, faith is defined as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). Faith is being certain of what we cannot see with our eyes right now. Faith is believing something even though we ourselves, according to our limited capabilities, cannot see for sure that it is true.

So why then do we believe it? We believe it because we trust that God is speaking to us and that when he speaks to us, he tells us the truth. We believe the testimony of the Bible when it claims to be from God. We believe the witness of the prophets and the apostles and of Jesus Christ himself who came to this earth full of grace and truth. This kind of faith is not merely “blind trust”, which might be right but also might not be right. Rather our heart and mind recognize the voice of the good shepherd, Jesus Christ, when he speaks in the Bible. We respond to his call to repentance, his call to believe the good news of salvation through the Lamb of God who was given for the forgiveness of sins. Living by faith means to put one’s trust in God, giving oneself over to him knowing that he will not let us down. We cannot prove rationally everything that we believe by faith. There are no mathematical proofs. Trust is required but it is not “blind trust” with no evidence. The evidence of God’s glory is abundant in nature and everything God has created. The evidence of God’s grace and mercy and justice and holiness is abundant in Scripture. God’s Word and God’s commandments are clear and delightful to those who love God and live by faith.

But faith is more than only believing that the Bible is true. Faith is also something which must be personal and individual. Each person who lives by faith must have a personal relationship with God and the only Saviour Jesus Christ. Faith includes being certain that the work of Jesus Christ and all his benefits which he has obtained applies to you personally. It is not just that the gospel message is true and factually correct but it is that this gospel message affects me now in 2015. To have true faith means that I believe that Jesus Christ died for me and has given me forgiveness of sins and peace with God. This is what the apostle Paul means when he writes in Romans that believers are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. God declares believers to be righteous because of the faith which they have. Abraham believed God and God credited this belief, this faith to him as righteousness. Our faith has consequences; it gives us peace with God. We receive this peace with God on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. Our faith is not the

ground of our righteousness before God but it is the means by which we make Christ's righteousness our own.

Are you living by faith? Is your life characterized by trust of the Lord and belief in the work of Jesus Christ? When we believe the gospel, then we would like to always live by faith; that is our desire. But while we live in a sinful world and while we ourselves are not yet perfect but prone to sin, our life of faith is not always what we would like it to be. All too often it is easier to live by sight rather than by faith. Living by sight is what we are naturally inclined to do. It can be easy to forget God whom we have never seen. Truly living by faith, being certain of what we cannot see, is and remains difficult in this life.

This reality of our life now comes out clear in the story of the boy with an evil spirit in Mark 9. The father of this boy with the evil spirit brings his son to Jesus and he begs Jesus to help him. He says to Jesus, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). Then Jesus responds, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24). This response summarizes the experience of faith in the life of believers. The man does believe. He does trust that Jesus is able to help him. He believes Jesus' words that everything is possible for him who believes because the one who believes puts his trust in God alone. The man goes to Jesus in his distress. He has true faith. And yet he also had nagging doubts and uncertainties. Can he really trust Jesus to do this? Will he really be able to help?

Our struggle may not be exactly the same as this father's struggle but still we can identify with it. Perhaps you wonder whether the gospel itself is even true, whether you can trust what the Bible says. Or perhaps you have difficulty praying to God and wonder whether God hears your prayers and question why God does not seem to be answering you. Or it could be that your doubts come out in a sinful life-style, failing to truly desire to live according to God's good commandments. There are many ways in which our weak faith becomes evident in our lives. We do not serve the Lord with the perfect faith he desires but we need to struggle against our sins, also our sins of doubting and lack of trust in God. Then the words of the father in the story, "Help me overcome my unbelief!" also become our own words.

How can we overcome our unbelief? How can we help our struggling faith to become stronger faith? The only source of help in overcoming our unbelief is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He is the one who will help us to overcome the doubts and weaknesses that we have, the unbelief that we still experience because of our ongoing struggle against sin.

When you struggle with doubts and uncertainties about whether the gospel is even true in the first place, then enter the workshop of the Holy Spirit, his Word. Open it and read it with a receptive and willing heart. Pray to God so that your heart will be opened so that you will again become convinced of the truth of his Word. Knock and the door will be opened to you. When we

ask God to help us in this, he will answer us. While we may fail and prove to be unfaithful and untrustworthy, God will never let us down. Hold on to him and you will never be disappointed. Go to him in sincerity of heart and he will give you the strength and insight that you need to trust him fully and rely upon his Word of truth.

When you struggle with sin or with what seem to be unanswered prayers, go to the Lord for relief and lay it all before him in confession and humility. Tell the Lord everything that is on your heart and acknowledge your weakness and iniquity. He will never despise those who come to him with a contrite and sincere heart. Go on in the strength of the Lord alone, never trusting in your own abilities. Remember that he has given to you his promised Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts! Lift up your eyes to Jesus Christ and be encouraged by the fact that he understands our struggles for he was a man on earth as well, though without sin. He will plead for you before the Father and the Holy Spirit will plead for you from your heart here on earth and give you the words to speak when you are unable to.

In all the trials and difficulties that you may experience in this fallen world, never give up faith. Never doubt the words of our faithful God and Father. He who has shown his faithfulness throughout our lives will continue to show it also in our time of need. He will never abandon us but he will hang on to believers and work in them through his Spirit so that our faith might be strengthened and renewed and so that our faithful God might receive all the praise and glory forever.