

LIVING BY FAITH

Message 7

Sept. 4/16

INTRO: Welcome back to our study of faith. It is some time since the last message so let me briefly tell you where we are. We have now finally studied what true faith is. I have defined faith like this: *Faith is a belief held on the basis of any given information which a person deems credible which, on the one hand, does not have certain proof, but which on the other hand gives rise to hope for something that has not yet transpired.* There are all kinds of faith, but there is only one true faith.

With regard to true faith we have said that the very first thing man must come to is that there is a God. And the evidence that there is a God is so amply set out by observing the universe in which we live that only a fool can miss it. So we learn that there is a God from what we call general revelation.

But once we have concluded that there is a God, now we must come to a conclusion on who the true God is. You see, information from the immaterial realm comes to man mainly from two sources, God or the devil. We saw in the early chapters in Genesis that both God and the devil communicated with man.

It is our conclusion that the faith that is placed in Jehovah God, the God revealed in the Bible, is the true faith. And the question is, what evidence do we have that biblical faith is the true faith? Some time ago I mentioned that we had a message called, *Ten Proofs That The Bible Is The Word Of God.* I gave the wrong title. The message title is, "Is The Bible The Word Of God?"

We now want to take a closer look at faith. We have looked at faith in general, but now we want to look at faith in the particulars. It is important that we do so because there are different aspects of faith. We want to look at saving faith; the faith of the individual believer; the whole of the Christian faith and the gift of faith. And you will see why it is important to understand these different aspects of faith.

C. Kinds of Faith

1. Saving faith

a. What it is

So, we come to the first aspect of faith which I have called saving faith. You see, we are all lost because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So we all need to be saved. It is important to note that salvation is not primarily from hell but from sin. When we are saved from sin, the by-product is that we are also saved from hell.

To be saved man must first recognize there is a God and then that the God of the Bible is the one true God. Then I must recognize myself as a sinner, and that I am lost and unless I get saved from my sin, I am going to go to hell and will burn forever. Then I must believe the Gospel; that is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for my sins. Then I must repent of my sins and trust Christ for my salvation. This is saving faith and it is called justification. I am declared righteous by God when I repent of my sins and put my trust in Christ.

But at this point the Christian usually has only a very small part of the whole of the Christian faith. So just before Jesus ascended to heaven He said to His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." There is the beginning. And then Jesus said, "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." And there is growth in the total of the Christian faith.

b. Who exercises saving faith

So we have considered saving faith. This is the introduction to the Christian life. And we ask, who is it that exercises saving faith? It is the unbeliever. This is how he gets saved. He repents from his sins and then trusts in Christ for forgiveness and salvation from sin. This is the beginning. Here the unbeliever becomes a believer. This is the beginning of salvation.

2. Personal faith

a. What it is

The second aspect of faith we want to look at is personal faith. This is each Christian's personal faith. Salvation, in my estimation, involves more than just justification, it involves sanctification. Sanctification is the continual process of being conformed to the image of Christ. In justification God delivers us from the penalty of sin. But in sanctification, ongoing salvation, He delivers the believer from the power of sin by sanctification.

So the unbeliever who is justified by faith, now is to grow in the faith. He is to be continually saved from sin. This is sanctification. And as the believer grows in grace, his faith grows. This is the individual's personal faith. This is the second kind of faith.

One of the things that is not stressed in the way the Gospel is taught in our day is the present tense of the verb to believe. John 3:16 does not say, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever once believed should not perish, but have everlasting life." It says He gives eternal life to those who believe. They believe and go on believing. Believing is simply bound up in obedience. Unbelief is simply bound up in living in sin. Those who go on believing do not go on living in sin, and if they go on in sin, they are not believing. This needs much more attention in today's evangelism.

In salvation, sin is the major issue. Salvation is from sin. Sin must be dealt with and continue to be dealt with in the Christian life. So we are saved when we are justified. We continue to be saved in sanctification or continual belief. And some day we will be saved from sin forever. So initial salvation is deliverance from the penalty of sin. It is called justification. Continual salvation is deliverance from the power of sin in daily life. It is called sanctification. And future and final salvation is deliverance from the very presence of sin, and it is called glorification.

b. Who exercises it

So who exercises individual faith? The unbeliever exercises saving faith. Every Christian after salvation is to exercise and grow in personal faith. Every Christian must have saving faith, but personal faith Christians will be at different levels of growth. It is individual. And so one man said to Jesus, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." To another Jesus said, "May it be according to your faith."

3. The Christian faith

a. What it is

We come now to the third aspect of faith. We may speak of it as the Christian faith. This is the sum total of the Christian faith. Turn to Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:4-6 says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." We are told there is one faith. That is the one true faith. It refers to the sum total of the Christian faith. It is not the Mennonite faith or Baptist faith or any other denominational faith, but the Christian faith. There are some Mennonites who have the true Christian faith, there are very many who are called Mennonites but they are not true believers at all.

Now in this passage we were given seven things of which there is only one. One body. That is the Church, the true Church. There is one Spirit, that is one true Spirit, the Holy Spirit. There is one hope, that is one true hope. And there is one Lord, and one faith, and one baptism, and one God. And what I am after is that there is only one faith. That is, there is only one true faith.

So, when we speak of the one true faith, just what are we talking about? We are talking about the sum total of the Christian faith. The whole of the Christian faith is a vast amount of material. No one Christian can comprehend the sum total of the Christian faith. But the one aspect of the whole Christian faith all true believers must have in

order is saving faith. That is a very small amount of the whole of the Christian faith, but every true Christian must have that in common.

As a Christian grows in faith he adds to his faith. So just before Jesus ascended He instructed His disciples to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. That involves saving faith. Then He said they were to teach them to observe all things He had commanded them. That is sanctification and growth.

Turn to Ephesians 6 (read 10-16). Note verse 16 says, "Above all, take the shield of faith..." The original says, "Above all, take the shield of **the** faith..." Here is the Christian faith. In the Christian life we need as broad an understanding of the Christian faith as possible to overcome the evil one. If you would take any systematic theology, you would find that the whole of the Christian faith involves a huge amount of material. You see, biblical creation is one aspect of the Christian faith. Prophecy is another. Salvation is another and so volumes can be written that deal with the many aspects of the one true Christian faith.

Turn to Hebrews 12 (read 1-2). It says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Now, you see, the Calvinist, who says saving faith comes as a gift from God and that you can't exercise faith until He gives you this gift of faith, uses this verse as part of the evidence for his view. They claim the Lord is the author and finisher of **our** faith. But this interpretation does not fit the wording of the original text which really says He is the author and finisher of 'the' faith. This speaks, not of saving faith or the

Christian's personal faith, but the faith once for all delivered to the saints; the sum total of the Christian faith. And of course, the Lord is the author and finisher of the whole sum of the Christian faith.

b. Who believes it

That then, is the third way to use the word faith. It speaks of the whole of the Christian faith. And now we ask, who is it that believes the Christian faith? All true believers, at various levels of understanding believe the true Christian faith.

So there is saving faith. It is exercised by the unbeliever. Then there is the personal faith of the individual believer. It is ongoing salvation and growth in faith. Then there is the sum total of the Christian faith, and all true believers are at various levels of understanding in the Christian faith.

4. The gift of faith

a. What it is

The fourth and last aspect of faith we want to look at is the gift of faith. So we must ask, just what is the gift of faith? Well, I have mentioned earlier that the Calvinist says that faith is a gift and unless God gives it to you, you cannot be saved. And if you are not one of His elect, you will not get this gift. And the error in that teaching is this: they mix up the gift of faith with saving faith.

The Calvinist says God is the source of faith and if He doesn't give it to you, you can't believe. H.C. Thiessen taught that it is not just God, but God and man that are the source of faith. You will find in their views texts given as evidence which are texts that deal with either the sum total of the Christian faith, or with the gift of faith as we have it here. But one must distinguish between the sum total of the Christian faith, saving faith, and the gift of faith. The gift of faith never refers to saving faith.

We go to 1 Corinthians 12 (read 7-9, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit...")

The words we are interested in are that the gift of faith is given to some. Now you will notice that those receiving the various gifts mentioned here are believers, not unbelievers. But it is important to notice that not all believers receive the gift of faith. The gift of faith is given to some believers, just as only some believers have any of the other gifts.

Go to end of the chapter (read 28-31). We begin with verse 28, "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." So believers are gifted with various gifts.

Why does God gift certain people with certain gifts? For the benefit of the whole body (read 1 Cor. 12:7-10). I might mention as well, nobody chooses their gift. Note verse 11 which says, "But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." A believer does not choose his or her gift. The Holy Spirit does that. Verse 11 says that He gives as He wills. And furthermore, not all people have the same gift. One has this and another that. Just like the members in our bodies have different functions, so all believers have different functions in the church. So, obviously, not all have the gift of faith.

So look at verse 29: "Are all apostles?" Answer? The original text allows only one answer, and it is, "No." That is most obvious. And we go on, "Are all prophets?" No. "Are all teachers?" No. "Are all workers of miracles?" Verse 30, "Do all have gifts of healings?" No. "Do all speak with tongues?" No.

"Do all interpret?" We might add, do all believers have the gift of faith? Answer? No!

Now let us note here that when the Calvinist says faith is a gift, he is talking about saving faith. But when the Bible speaks about faith as a gift, it never refers to saving faith, but the special gift given to some believers. If you study the Calvinist's scriptural support for faith being a gift, most of those references refer to faith as a gift to certain believers, not faith as a gift to non-believers.

Again, Ephesians 2:8-9 is often given to prove that faith is a gift, and clearly here it is saving faith that is spoken of. It says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." So the Calvinist says faith is a gift from God. Unless He gives it, you can't have it. This is quite an involved passage. Let me simply say, and you will have to take it by faith or study it for yourself, that neither grace nor faith is the gift spoken of in this verse. Here is what you can check. In the Greek language, the word gift is in the neuter gender. If either faith or grace are referred to by the gift, then they must be in the neuter. But they are not. They are both feminine words, and neither of them can be meant here.

So what is meant by the gift? Salvation is the gift, not grace or faith. Now if you check me out, you will find that salvation is also usually in the feminine gender. But on occasion, when it refers to the sum total of faith it is in the neuter and Ephesians 6:16 is proof of this. So faith is not spoken of as a gift in this verse.

So, what then is the gift of faith? An internet article I agree with said this: "The gift of faith may be defined as the special gift whereby the Spirit provides Christians with extraordinary confidence in God's promises, power, and presence so they can take heroic stands for the future of God's work in the church. The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and

unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, and His promises. Examples of people with the gift of faith are those listed in Hebrews chapter 11" (Gotquestions.org).

And if we were to look at an example in more modern times, we might look at a man like George Mueller. If you have not read his story, let me encourage you to it. Here was a man who had the gift of faith.

Now right here, let us look at an error that is sweeping the Church called the prosperity Gospel. It is a view that would say every believer should have the gift of faith. So, let us go to a very difficult verse uttered by the Lord Himself. It is Mark 11:24, It says, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Well, that seems almost unbelievable.

We note that Jesus said these words just a few days before He was crucified. Each evening and morning He and His disciples walked from Bethany to Jerusalem and back. On one of those days when they were walking from Bethany to Jerusalem, He was hungry and saw a fig tree with leaves on it and went to see if there were any figs on it. When there were none, He cursed the tree. The next morning, as they are going back to Jerusalem, Peter said, "Look, Rabbi, the tree You cursed has withered away!"

Now look at verses 22-24 (read). What does this most astonishing text mean? Does it teach the prosperity Gospel? Since we do not run into this type of Gospel much in our area let me read for you an article that defines the prosperity Gospel:

Prosperity theology (sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success)^[a] is a religious belief among some Christians that financial blessing and physical well-being is always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations will increase one's material wealth. It is based on traditional interpretations of the Bible in Judaism (with respect to the Hebrew Bible),^[a] though less so in Christianity. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God

and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity.

The doctrine emphasizes the importance of personal [empowerment](#), proposing that it is God's will for his people to be happy. The [atonement](#) (reconciliation with God) is interpreted to include the alleviation of sickness and poverty, which are viewed as [curses](#) to be broken by faith. This is believed to be achieved through donations of money, visualization, and positive confession.

It was during the [Healing Revivals](#) of the 1950s that prosperity theology first came to prominence in the United States, although commentators have linked the origins of its theology to the [New Thought](#) movement which began in the 19th century. The prosperity teaching later figured prominently in the [Word of Faith](#) movement and 1980s [televangelism](#). In the 1990s and 2000s, it was adopted by influential leaders in the [Charismatic Movement](#) and promoted by Christian [missionaries](#) throughout the world. Prominent leaders in the development of prosperity theology include [E. W. Kenyon](#), [Oral Roberts](#), [T. D. Jakes](#), [A. A. Allen](#), [Robert Tilton](#), [T. L. Osborn](#), [Joel Osteen](#), [Creflo Dollar](#), [Kenneth Copeland](#), [Reverend Ike](#) and [Kenneth Hagin](#), end quote.

Now, if this verse teaches what it seems to teach on the surface, it would mean that all of us do not have much faith. I have never heard of anyone literally moving a mountain. I suggest we need to look deeper. Mark 11:25, the very next verse, is used to promote the unbiblical teaching of unconditional forgiveness. It says, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." Now that seems a clear verse on unconditional forgiveness.

But one must consider this verse in light of such passages as Luke 17:3-4 which says, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." There is a passage equally clear but it gives a fuller picture of the subject and that forgiveness requires repentance first. The whole tenor of the rest of Scripture agrees with Luke 17:1-3, while Mark 11:25 is a solitary verse. So Mark 11:25 must be brought into harmony with the rest of Scripture, not vice versa. And just like this, we must look deeper at Mark 11:24.

So let us note that Mark 11:24 begins with the word, 'therefore'. So the explanation lies before this verse. Verse 23 says, "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and

be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."

Verse 23 begins like this, "For, assuredly, I say to you..." The word 'for' of this verse also connects it to something previous. And what does it connect to? Well, it connects to the account of the cursing of the fig tree. Notice in verse 22 that Jesus said to Peter, "Have faith in God." And in verse 23 stresses believing. And verse 24 stresses believing.

What is the faith that is required to remove mountains? Must I believe hard enough? Must my faith be very strong? So the stronger my faith is, the harder I believe the more things I can pray for and receive? Well, let me suggest an alternative to the amount or strength of believing. I suggest that it is not simply how strong my faith is, but what my faith is in. Jesus Himself said in Luke 17: 6, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

The mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds but it is the smallest seed planted in Gardens in Israel. The black mustard seed will grow as tall as twelve feet, so birds could nest in it. I am recommending that it is not how much faith one has, since the mustard seed is very tiny, but the object of one's faith that determines the outcome. Someone has said something like this: It is not how much I believe in a plank that will get me safely over the ditch, but how good the plank is that I have faith in. A lot of faith in a poor plank will land me in the ditch, a little faith in a good plank will get me safely across. There is the mustard seed principle.

So, let us look carefully at the whole context of Mark 11:24. The context is the cursing of the fig tree. The miracle is that it withered in a day (20-21). I have no doubt that the cursing of the fig tree is a picture of the cursing of the nation of Israel for rejecting the Messiah God had promised

them. Right at this very moment they are planning how to get rid of Jesus. Let me just mention that in the series of messages on the latter parables on sermonaudio.com/lhec I give a full explanation of the meaning of the parable. I believe in this parable Jesus shows prophetically what will happen to the nation of Israel. Jesus did not curse the fig tree for some personal reason. He did it because God wanted Him to teach a lesson to all of mankind by it.

Now in Mark 11:14, when Jesus cursed the fig tree, He said, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." When it says *ever again*, the original reads, 'until the end of the age.' The end of the age is the end of the tribulation. Then, when they repent and turn to God, this curse will be lifted and Israel will once again come into God's favor.

So, I view this cursing of the fig tree as the will of God for Jesus. God wanted Him to curse the fig tree to give this message of the cursing of the nation until the end of the age. It is to show what will happen to the nation of Israel. And if you go through the messages of the latter parables I mentioned earlier, you will see how this all fits together. Let me just add that it is always the will of God that all should be saved, but it is never the will of God to force people to that.

And here is my final conclusion. Jesus knew that it was God's will that He curse this fig tree in order to give this prophetic message to mankind. Jesus did what God wanted Him to do. When we know for certain what the will of God is regarding anything, it is not so much the amount of faith but the fact that we know His will in the matter that will accomplish what it is the Lord wants. The requirement is that we must know His will in the matter and then act on it.

So, before I ask Him to remove a mountain behind my house to another place, or to move one there, I must know that that is God's will. Before I ask Him for a new car when I don't have any money, and trust Him to give it, I need to know He wants me to

have that car. If I am not sure of what He wants, I am wise to pray, "Lord, if it is Your will..." So I may pray and ask Him for a lot of things and leave it to Him. But when I pray in faith that He will do it, I need to know it is His will.

Well, I know that leaves some questions unanswered in praying in faith, but that is what I believe is the important point of Mark 11:24. So the Holy Spirit chooses some to have the gift of faith, and to them He reveals God's special will in certain cases so that they know what He wants. So go to 1 Corinthians 12 (read 28-30). Now look at verse 11 (read).

b. Who exercises the gift of faith

Who exercises saving faith? The unbeliever. This is how he gets saved. Who exercises personal faith in Christ day by day? Every believer ought to be doing that. Who exercises the Christian faith? All Christians to varying degrees. Who exercises the gift of faith? Only certain believers to whom the Spirit chooses to give this gift.

CONCL: So, we have looked at four aspects of faith. It is important to distinguish these or one falls into such errors as Calvinism which says saving faith is a gift. The first aspect of faith we looked at was saving faith. There are some basics of one part of the Christian faith, the doctrine of salvation, that a person must believe in order to be saved. Generally a newly saved person will have a very small understanding of the sum total of the Christian faith.

Second, we looked at the individual's faith. Every Christian has a certain level of understanding of the Christian faith. That is the Christian's personal faith. He is to grow in faith. He needs to use whatever is available to him to grow in the Christian faith.

Then third, there is the gift of faith. And the definition I read went like this: "The gift of faith may be defined as the special gift whereby the Spirit provides Christians with extraordinary confidence in God's promises, power, and presence so they can take heroic stands for the future of God's work in the church. The spiritual gift of faith is exhibited by one with a strong and unshakeable confidence in God, His Word, and His

promises. Examples of people with the gift of faith are those listed in Hebrews chapter 11"

And last, there is the sum total of the Christian faith. That is all of the true Christian faith. It is a vast amount of material, which no believer can grasp to its full extent. But every believer is to grow more and more in it.