

The Importance of Faith

**Without Faith It is Impossible to Please God:** The author of Hebrews says in chapter 11 verse 6, “*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*” Our goal is “Living to Please God.” To do that, we must not only possess faith but understand faith and its function in Christian life. This verse gives us a starting point. Faith in God involves believing that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

**What is Faith?** Many people believe religious faith to be the only kind of faith. It isn't! Faith is necessary any time action is required in the presence of uncertainty. I'm confident you recognize that is almost all the time.

Religious faith will almost certainly come to mind whenever faith is mentioned. For that reason, people who look down on religion, often mock the idea of faith, thinking they are mocking religion. They say things like faith is just a Pollyanna attitude or a hope for pie in the sky. They say faith is stubborn belief without evidence. Even worse, some say faith is stubborn belief in spite of contrary evidence.

Underlying such contempt for faith is the thought there is something irrational about faith. The assumption is that somehow decisions and concepts should and can be justified in a “scientific” way based on concrete evidence and rational thought. Faith and the “God Hypothesis” are considered unnecessary. Clear thinking and concrete scientific evidence are thought to be able to provide all the answers needed in life. That is a mistaken conclusion. Science cannot answer any of the big questions. Why something exists rather than nothing? Why are we here, what is our purpose? What happens when we die? Is there anything other than material things? Does God exist? What is the basis for moral law? Such things are beyond science.

**Faith Necessary to Life:** In general, faith can be described as a settled attitude of trust in something or someone. It is a strong belief that the trusted something is worthy of acceptance as it appears. From that perspective, faith is a universal necessity for human life. It is not possible to live in the world of people, ideas, and

things without some measure of *trust*. All of life is risky, some things more so than others. Faith enables “risk taking,” which is action before knowing the consequence.

**Faith Always has an Object:** Faith is always in “something.” Objects of faith include God, personal abilities, ideas, government, wealth, power, position, and many other things. The objects in which a person places their faith tells a lot about that person. Some people trust wealth and power, some intellect, some strength, some their connections. By virtue of being human, every person trusts. We will call that trust *natural faith*.

**Having Faith or No Faith is a Forced Decision:** Choosing to make no decision about faith in something is the same as choosing to have no faith in that something. You can choose to have faith in something, or choose to have no faith, but you cannot choose to be agnostic about a faith decision.

**Natural faith is a Necessary Impetus for Life:** Life involves constant uncertainties. Life must proceed in the face of those uncertainties. Natural faith enables people to live life one day at a time, one decision at a time, even though they correctly feel they don’t know everything they need to know. Of necessity, they trust things and people (banks, cars, doctors) to be what they appear to be. They trust things will remain the same. When things change drastically (bank closure, flat tire, doctor retires), it is always a surprise. People plan for tomorrow based on what they know today, counting on tomorrow to be much as today. Yet everyone realizes the future is unknowable and full of unknown “unknowns.”

**Common and Supernatural Grace:** Grace involves at least two different ideas, and so does faith. When Christians talk about grace, they differentiate between *common grace* and *supernatural grace*. Both are from God. Common grace falls on all people alike, believers and non-believers. Supernatural grace is a gift of God to those He is redeeming. Supernatural grace does not replace common grace but is in addition to it.

**Natural and Supernatural Faith:** Faith is likewise differentiated into *natural faith* and *supernatural faith*. Both are from God. *Natural faith* is given by God, through the process of natural birth, to all people alike. *Supernatural faith* is a gift

of God coming through the process of regeneration and supernatural birth into God's family. It comes to everyone He is redeeming. Supernatural faith does not replace natural faith but is in addition to it.

Natural faith trusts in things such as people, ideas, organizations, government, etc. Supernatural or believer's faith is trust in God, His promises, and His self-revelation in the Bible. What basis is there for "trusting God?" First God's self-revelation in the Bible. Then thousands of years of testimony of individuals. There is also God's self-revelation in creation. As seen in Romans 1:19-20 and Psalms 8 and 19, nature reveals aspects of God. In fact, to anyone sensitive and observant, nature presents overwhelming evidence for God's existence.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning dramatically said in Aurora Leigh, Book 7, 1857:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush aflame with God.  
But only those who see take off their shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries!*

There is sufficient information in nature about God, available to anyone who pays attention, to convince them God exists. A foundation for faith in God is not difficult to find. But you must believe He exists, and must earnestly seek Him. If you insist God does not exist, your belief will be always be confirmed in spite of all the signs He does exist, because you will see but not perceive the signs of His existence.

**Elements Common to Natural and Supernatural Faith:** While natural and supernatural faith have common elements, there are also important differences. The author of Hebrews begins chapter 11 with a description of faith and an example.

Hebrews 11:1-3: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."*

Natural and Supernatural Faith both are concerned with things which cannot be seen, proven, or verified by the senses. Faith is assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Many real things cannot be seen. A mother's love for a child (consequences of her love can be seen but not the love itself). All thoughts and feelings are invisible to others. There may be externally observable effects, but the thoughts and feelings themselves are invisible. The author's example of such conviction about something not available to our senses is "*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*"

**Doubt and Faith:** It is often considered that doubt is the opposite of faith. But that is wrong. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. Doubt or uncertainty is a necessary condition for faith to exist. Without uncertainty, there can be no faith. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith believes in the face of uncertainty and doubt. Unknowns give rise to doubt. Future events are uncertain. Faith and doubt are found together. A man asked Jesus to help his son. Jesus responded that everything was possible for one who believes. The man said in Mark 9:24, "*I believe; help my unbelief!*" We often have faith and doubt about the same thing. Faith in God brings hope. Doubt about information received can lead to discovering truth. Both hope and truth are needed.

There are many reasons to believe God exists and is who He says He is. But there are also reasons for doubt. God is said to be totally good, all powerful, all knowing, and sovereign in all things. Why then do infants die, deadly tornados devastate and kill, cancer happen, bad people prosper, good people suffer? Is God not sovereign over these things? Why does He permit them to happen? No easy answer.

Faith in God is necessary because we don't have sufficient information to understand the good and the bad in the world. Faith overcomes doubt. Doubt causes striving to learn more and understand better. Because we doubt, we earnestly and diligently seek truth.

Hebrews 11 provides examples of people who sustained faith in God in the presence of strong reasons for doubt. God promised land to Abraham and promised his descendants would become a great nation. Neither thing happened in Abraham's lifetime, but he trusted God to the end.

Abraham's son Isaac lived in the promised land all his life, but always as a nomad. He possessed no land of his own. By faith, on his death bed Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. Jacob died in Egypt, not the promised land. By faith, before he died, he bowed in worship and blessed each of the sons of Joseph. By faith, at the end of his life, Joseph prophesied that his people would leave Egypt. He gave instructions to take his bones with them when they left.

Some 400 years later, the exodus occurred, and the Israelites took Joseph's bones with them. They finally took the land promised to them by God and began to become a nation. For hundreds of years, they looked forward with assurance to the fulfilling of the hope of God's promise to Abraham. They were convicted that, though they could not yet see that fulfillment, it was going to happen. It did!

**Validity of Faith:** The validity of both natural and supernatural faith is determined by the trustworthiness of its object. The Hebrews through all their difficulties as nomads in the promised land, and through slavery in Egypt, trusted their trustworthy God. Trust in an untrustworthy object is dangerous.

Consider the simple example of walking beside a frozen lake and deciding whether or not to step out on the ice. In faith I may believe the ice is thick enough and strong enough to support my weight. How strongly I believe that to be true has nothing to do with whether or not the ice will support me. Falling through the ice, or being able to walk on it, depends only on the strength (trustworthiness) of the ice. With that example, we ask the next question.

**Is A Strong Faith Better Than A Weak Faith?** The most important aspect of faith is the trustworthiness of faith's object. The advantage of a strong faith is that it may be more likely to lead to action than a weak faith. But when faith produces action, the strength of faith is not particularly important. The trustworthiness of that which is trusted is what matters. We eat trusting the food will not harm us, we drive automobiles on the interstate trusting the steering and tires will not fail.

The future is unknown and unknowable. By faith, we assume every action we take will produce the desired result. Everyone assumes tomorrow will come, and the sun will rise as usual. When I swing a hammer, I assume it will strike the nail, not

my thumb. That is natural faith in action. Whether the hammer hits my thumb or the nail depends on my skill not on the strength of my faith in my skill.

It would be great if concrete evidence were available to give confidence that every planned action would accomplish its intended result. But how could that be? There are too many things unknown and unpredictable. When we “act,” we often find ourselves in “if only” situations revealing our lack of knowledge and ability to foresee details of what could occur. If only I had known the interstate would be blocked, I would have gone another way. If only I hadn’t bought that stock just before it tanked. If only I had taken time to listen, I wouldn’t be in this awkward situation.

**Faith in Trustworthy Objects is the Goal:** Faith in trustworthy objects is the goal. If God, as He says, is creator, savior, sustainer and sovereign in all things, then faith or lack of faith in Him is the biggest deal in every person’s life. The rewards are great though not necessarily in mortal life. Commitment to God can lead to being looked down by other people and sometimes to persecution. The author of Hebrews and other biblical sources insist that the future reward for being faithful to God is worth any present distress. If God is who He says He is, has done what He says He has done, and will do what He says He will do, there can be no doubt of the truth about future reward versus present distress.

**Sources of Knowledge:** How do we come to know anything? Almost everything a person knows comes through the testimony of others, directly in personal interaction, or indirectly from writings, recordings, paintings, etc. There is little any person personally proves or witnesses. Is the testimony we receive trustworthy? We usually assume so (sometimes to our regret). Natural faith leads the way in enabling us to accept as true that which we hear, read, or learn in other ways. Determining the trustworthiness of a knowledge source is a vital but separate issue. To a Christian, the most reliable source of information about life is found in Scripture.

**Faith in God:** Christian faith trusts God to be true and trustworthy. Believers live their life counting on God’s promises. Things hoped for include things like future blessings at Christ’s return, final glorification, entrance into heavenly rest, and other benefits of the culmination of salvation (Hebrews 9:28). There are many things not detectable by our senses, though they presently exist. Some examples include Christ’s

ongoing High Priestly ministry in heaven, access to the presence of God, full pardon for sin's penalty through the work of Christ, and constant experience of spiritual growth which cannot be seen, though some of its results can be seen.

In expressing faith in God, believers take an active part in God's promises. As pointed out, not all reality can be seen. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "***For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***" And then in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "***for we walk by faith, not by sight.***"

Faith in God is necessary to understand Scripture. For example, no one was present at creation to record events. Everyone is confronted with a universe already existing. The event of creation involves a reality unseen by any human, a reality of exceptional importance which generated the world we can see, touch, hear, and smell. Our understanding of creation is through faith. From that which was created we may infer God's power (Romans 1:20), but not the manner of creation, and not its creation by God's word. Nor do we know what "created by God's word, means except that He was the cause of all things.

**How Does Supernatural Faith Function?** Of course the short answer is we don't know. But there are insights. Jesus often used physical parables and analogies to explain spiritual things. It occurred to me that biblical faith is like a "valve" in the link from God to us. It can be either open or closed. It was closed as a consequence of the Fall. It is opened by God's regenerating power. God's common grace (to all people) provides worldly benefits even though their faith valve is closed, but His saving grace is blocked. When God chooses to open the "faith valve" through regeneration, He gives understanding of the truth of what Christ has done. We see this in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "***For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***" God, who created light by the power of His word, gives the light of knowledge and understanding of Christ. Biblical faith, which is the gift of God, is the power of God enabling us to receive the glory of Christ.

**Faith as a Continuing “Means” of Grace:** Hope for salvation is found in the gospel. Faith is the God-given key to open the way to salvation. By grace through faith we receive the salvation wrought by Christ. Through that same “means,” the Holy Spirit works to transform us into a moral likeness of Christ, a process called sanctification. Sanctification is “making holy.” In the process of sanctification we are enabled and required by God to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, as God works within us (Philippians 2:12-13). Salvation produces love. Love for God and other people is always a result. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:13, ***“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*** Love for God is expressed by obedience to His commands (John 14:15).

The Spirit does the hard work (impossible for humans) of transforming us from the inside out. What we can do and are required to do is to maintain behavior and thoughts which cooperate and correspond with the work of the Spirit. Through faith God gives us the grace to do what He asks of us. Faith is the “means” God uses to develop within us the fruit of the Spirit and the “means” He uses to reach out to others through us. Faith enables a believer to draw on God’s power to live a life of sacrificial love. “Hope” sees future glorification. “Faith” enables action in the here and now. “Love” is both now and forever.

**God’s Grace Enables Minds to Understand:** Paul says in Romans 10:17, ***“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*** Thus, hearing the gospel is vital, but is it enough. Note what Jesus says in the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:19, ***“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.”*** Understanding is essential. The result of hearing the gospel without obtaining understanding is to have the word of the gospel snatched away.

How is the good heart soil in which the gospel will prosper to be obtained? There is only one way. God must regenerate the heart causing it to be receptive to the gospel. God’s grace through faith (the “means” though which we receive God’s grace) enables us to understand the gospel and be saved. Understanding is essential – something we are to work for diligently. Though the good soil comes from God, with no input from us, we must participate in the work which leads to an abundant



crop. We must be obedient, put off evil things, put on the righteous, think worthy thoughts, do the good works God prepared for us to do.

**Receiving Christ as the Object of Faith:** Faith receives Christ Jesus – believes with confidence in Him and what He accomplished. Justification was paid for and made possible by Christ’s atonement on the cross. Acts 16:31 says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”* John 1:12 says, *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* Everyone in their natural fallen state suffers from a closed “faith valve.” To receive Christ as Savior and Lord the “faith valve” must be opened by regeneration, that is, by being *“born again of the Spirit”* (John 3:3), becoming a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). You must be made spiritually alive (Ephesians 2:1-4). No one can truthfully say, *“Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

**How Do We Keep Our Faith “Valve” Open, Ready to Receive God’s Grace Inputs:** Praying, studying and meditating on God’s Word, meeting and worshipping with other believers, striving to be obedient in all we do, responding to God’s call, and striving to properly use all the gifts, talents, and abilities God gives us. Our relationship with the indwelling Holy Spirit is vital. We are to not grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), nor quench Him (1 Thessalonians 5:19), but to live and walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). We are to strive to live life consistent with the Spirit’s guidance, as given in the whole of the Scripture, of which He is the originator.

**Nine Scripture verses on the importance of Biblical faith:**

- (1.) Hebrews 11:6 without faith it is impossible to please God.
- (2.) John 6:29 the work of God is to believe in Him whom He has sent.
- (3.) Romans 1:17 the righteous shall live by faith.
- (4.) Romans 14:23 and everything that does not come from faith is sin.
- (5.) Romans 3:2 justified by faith alone.
- (6.) Ephesians 2:1-9 saved by grace through faith.
- (7.) Galatians 5:6 the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
- (8.) 1John 5:4 this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith.
- (9.) Luke 18:8 when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth.