

Introduction: Our primary topic for the next 3 lesson is FAITH. As believers, we know “faith” is vital to our well-being. What role has faith played in history? Hebrews Chapter 11 is famous as the Bible’s Faith Hall of Fame. It mentions Old Testament believers whose faith in God and His promises led to amazing accomplishments. These heroes and heroines of the faith will be remembered and admired as long as the Bible is read.

Before considering the individuals the author includes in the Faith Hall of Fame, we will examine faith (1.) from a general perspective (natural faith) and then (2.) saving and sustaining faith in God. A few questions to help guide this study: (A.) What is natural faith? (B.) What is supernatural faith? (C.) What is the difference between “saving” and “sustaining” faith and how do they interact? (D.) How are natural faith and a believer’s faith in God different? (E.) Is strong faith better than weak faith? (F.) Are faith and doubt incompatible? (G.) How do faith and knowledge interact? (H.) Is there a way other than “faith or doubt” to deal with things unseen and unprovable? (I.) What does the Bible have to say about the importance of believer’s faith? (J.) What is the most important fact about faith of all types?

Faith Preliminaries: Many people consider faith only in relation to belief in God. But in fact, faith is a general concept necessary for everyday life.

It is common today for people to have disdain for people who believe in God. In an attempt to mock Christianity, they mock the concept of faith. People say things like “faith is just a Pollyanna attitude, a hope for pie in the sky,” or “faith is stubborn belief without evidence.” Even worse, some say “faith is belief in spite of strong contrary evidence.”

People say such things because they believe faith is irrational. Faith is assumed to have been common and perhaps useful in the ages before science was fully developed but unnecessary today. The assumption is that decisions, concepts, and assertions of truth can be verified in a “scientific” way based on concrete evidence and rational thought. Faith and the “God Hypothesis” are considered unnecessary.

Necessary but not Sufficient: Clear thinking and concrete scientific evidence are necessary and useful. But they are not sufficient to provide all the answers needed

in life. Science **cannot** answer any of life's "big" questions. Why does something exist rather than nothing? Why do people exist, and what is their purpose? What happens when people die? Are there immaterial as well as material realities? What is the basis for moral law? Does God exist and if so what is His nature? Such questions cannot be answered by science.

Science deals with the natural world of "detectable" things. Science has definite limits. Science does not make moral judgments, no decisions on right, wrong, good, or bad. Moral people make moral judgments. Science can't make aesthetic judgments. It cannot say whether a performance of a Beethoven symphony is beautiful or dreadful. Beauty is an assessment made by individuals. Science doesn't specify the proper use scientific knowledge. Science can reveal how to recombine DNA in new ways, but it cannot say whether it is morally right to do so. Science can draw no conclusions about the likelihood that immaterial things exist, nor can it draw conclusions about possible supernatural phenomena.

Science describes what and how of the material world, how it functions, and how it changes, but people must make the moral decisions on to how to use that knowledge for good or bad. Science has contributed great advances which have been used for good. But science has also contributed great advances which have been used for evil purposes. Things are not good or evil in themselves, but the use people make of things can be good or evil.

As believers, we know faith in God and His promises is vital to our redemption. What is the nature of that faith and how does it fit in the world of people and things? Science deals with scientific methodology which requires natural faith, but science has nothing to say about supernatural faith in God.

Natural Faith is Necessary to Life: "Scientific methodology" accomplishes great things in its proper sphere, but most of life must be lived in other spheres. Faith is necessary to living day by day.

A general definition of faith might be "a settled attitude of trust in something or someone." Faith always has an object. It is always trust in something or someone. Objects of faith include God, specific people, personal abilities, ideas, government, wealth, power, position, and other things. Thinking about that list, though it is incomplete, reveals that faith is a universal necessity for human life. Human

knowledge is always limited and incomplete. Yet we must make decisions and take action on what we know even though we know it is incomplete and perhaps full of errors.

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 much more so than others. Faith enables “risk taking,” by which is meant “taking action before knowing the result of that action.” By virtue of being human, every person possesses that kind of faith, or trust in people and things that enables “risk taking.” That is “natural faith.”

Faith’s validity depends on the trustworthiness of its object. Trust in untrustworthy objects is unfortunately common, but very dangerous. Consider a simple example of walking beside a frozen lake. Suppose I am confident the ice will support me, so I walk out on the lake. That’s natural faith taking risks. Though I may have great confidence the ice will support me, the strength of my confidence has nothing to do with whether or not the ice will support me. Supporting my weight depends **only** on the strength (the trustworthiness) of the ice.

Everyday Life Involves Trust or Natural Faith: When you consider taking an unaccustomed action, you evaluate the likelihood the action will have the result you anticipate. If you have doubt about the result, you probably won’t take that action unless forced.

Life is filled with uncertainty about outcomes. That means there will be an abundance of unanticipated consequences. Life must proceed in spite of uncertainties. The trust involved in acting in the face of uncertainties is natural faith. Natural faith enables people to live life one decision at a time, one day at a time, even though they correctly feel they don’t know everything they need to know to be sure what the outcome of their actions will be.

People constantly act before knowing the outcome of their actions. You may be about to do something you have done many times, always with the same result (like turning on a light). That gives you a feeling of certainty of the result of flipping the switch. There is a high probability you are right. But there is no certainty. Strange things can and do happen. The power may go off just before you flip the switch.

Of necessity, people trust common things in their life to be as they appear to be. They trust people, banks, cars, doctors, etc. Further they trust things to remain

essentially the same. When things change drastically (bank failure, flat tire, doctor retires), it is always a painful 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.” Trust in people and things is necessary to life. That trust is natural faith. Even scientists must have natural faith.

Differentiating between Natural and Supernatural Faith: When believers 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 in addition to common grace and is God’s gift to those He is redeeming. A similar distinction is to be made between the two broad varieties of faith.

Natural and Supernatural Faith: The two broad varieties of faith are **natural (or common faith)** and **supernatural faith**. Both are from God. **Natural (or common) faith** is given by God to all people alike through the process of natural birth. Natural faith enables life to proceed. **Supernatural (or Biblical) faith** is a gift of God received through the process of regeneration and supernatural birth into God’s family. It is given by God to everyone He is redeeming. Supernatural faith is added to those being saved as an addition to the natural faith possessed by all humans. Supernatural faith enables spiritual life to proceed.

Natural faith trusts in certain people and physical things like automobiles, telephones, calculators, etc. Natural faith also trusts in selected ideas, organizations, and governments. Supernatural or believer’s faith trusts in God, His promises, and His self-revelation in the Bible.

What basis is there for “trusting God?” God has revealed Himself in the Bible. There are thousands of years of testimony from individuals who have believed that revelation. There is historical and archeological verification of many Biblical facts. God also revealed Himself through what He created. As seen in Romans 1:19-20 and Psalms 8 and 19, nature reveals many aspects of God. In fact, to sensitive, observant people nature presents overwhelming evidence for God’s existence.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning captured the idea 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!**

In nature there is sufficient information available about God to convince a diligent observer that God exists. A foundation for faith in God is not difficult to find. But to grasp that foundation, you must believe He exists and earnestly seek Him. If you insist God does not exist, your belief will be always be confirmed in spite of contrary signs. The final point is that when you believe He exists and diligently seek Him, He will regenerate and give you faith to believe all He has done and will do.

Is a Strong Faith Better Than a Weak Faith? The most important aspect of faith is the trustworthiness of faith's object. Strong faith has a possible advantage in being more likely to precipitate action than is weak faith. But strong faith is no more trustworthy than weak faith. When faith produces action, the strength of faith is not the important issue. The vital issue is the trustworthiness of that which is trusted. 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 our every action will produce the result we intend. 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 justify confidence that a planned action would accomplish it's 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. God, as creator, savior, sustainer and sovereign in all things, is absolutely trustworthy and faith or lack of faith in Him is the biggest deal in every person's life. Walking in communion with God is in itself rewarding. The potential rewards are great, though not all rewards will necessarily occur in mortal life. Commitment to God can have downsides from a human perspective. For example it can lead to being looked down on by other people, sometimes to the point of 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 of the value of future reward compared to present distress.

Sources of Knowledge: Almost everything a person knows comes through the testimony of others. There is very little any person personally proves or witnesses. Clearly it is critical that the testimony we receive be trustworthy. How do we determine trustworthiness? In life, we usually assume most sources of knowledge to be trustworthy (sometimes to our regret). Natural faith (or trust) leads the way in enabling us to accept as true the things we hear, read, or learn in other ways. We gradually learn by experience that not everything we learn is trustworthy and strive to filter out the untrustworthy. Techniques for determining the trustworthiness of a knowledge source is a vital but separate issue. You can depend on Scripture but not on every interpretation of Scripture.

Elements Common to Natural and Supernatural Faith: There are common elements to the two types of faith but also differences. How are we to understand the likenesses and differences? Verses 11:1-3 proved some help.

Hebrews 11:1-3: *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³By 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.”*

What is Faith: Whether “natural” or “supernatural,” faith inherently deals with things which cannot be seen, proven, or verified by the senses. Notice

every future event, every action meets these requirements. Two characteristics of faith are: (1) a sense of internal assurance (*being sure of what we hope for*) and (2) a certainty that there are realities which we cannot detect with our physical senses (*certain of what we do not see*).

Rather than a formal definition of faith, the author gives a striking description of the character or nature of faith as an internal assurance of truth and a conviction that there are realities we cannot detect with our physical senses. Things undetectable by our physical senses includes everything future and past, things not yet physically present, not yet happened, or happened with no human observer present. Some past events have been recorded by trustworthy observers.

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

Many real things cannot be seen. A mother's love for her child cannot be seen, but consequences of that love can be seen. A person's thoughts and feelings are invisible to others. Thoughts and feelings may produce externally observable effects, but the thoughts and feelings themselves are invisible. The author's example of conviction of things not seen 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.***"

Faith understands that everything visible was created by the invisible command of God. That "*what is seen was not made out of what was visible*" is an accepted truth of modern science. The scientific concept is that behind everything visible is invisible energy. Energy can be transformed to material things and material things can be transformed into energy. All things can be transformed, but nothing can be annihilated. So where did the initial energy come from? Faith in God's revelation enables grasping reality, without necessarily comprehending all the steps that may be involved. Science strives to understand the details of detectable reality.

Faith in God: Verse 11:6 says, "***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.***" Faith begins with the belief God exists and the hope that He rewards those who seek Him. God initiates faith in a person through

regeneration. The old rebellious spiritually dead heart is regenerated and made spiritually alive. Faith in God is a gift from Him. Having received Christian faith, a new believer trusts God to be true and trustworthy. Believers live their life counting on God's promises. Some things believers hope for with confident assurance include (1.) ***“there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,”*** (2.) the future blessings of Christ's return, (3.) final glorification, (4.) entrance into heavenly rest, (5.) a resurrection body, and other benefits of the culmination of salvation.

Invisible things, things not detectable by human senses, which believers in faith know presently exist include (1.) Christ's ongoing High Priestly ministry in heaven on our behalf, (2.) our access to the presence of God through prayer, (3.) our full pardon for sin through the work of Christ, and (4.) our constant experience of spiritual growth toward glorification. None of these things can be seen, though some results or consequences can be seen.

Not all reality can be seen. By expressing faith, believers substantiate what is promised. 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,¹⁸ 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.”***

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. An analogy recently occurred to me. The analogy is that biblical faith is much like a “valve” in the spiritual link from God to us. It can be either open or closed. In our natural fallen state we are spiritually dead in sins and the faith valve is closed. God opens the faith valve with His regenerating power.

God's common grace (to all people alike) provides real benefits to people even though their faith valves are closed, but His saving grace is blocked unless God opens the faith valve. When God chooses to open the “faith valve,” He does so through regeneration. In regenerating our heart, God 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 to us the light of knowledge and understanding of Christ. Biblical faith 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 door to salvation. By grace through faith we receive the salvation wrought by Christ. Through the same “means,” grace through faith, the Holy Spirit works to transform us into a likeness of Christ in the process called sanctification. Sanctification is “making holy.” In the process of sanctification we are enabled and required by God to work out in fear and trembling the salvation He has provided for us, as God continues to work within us (Philippians 2:12-13). There are things only God can do. He does those things. There are things He enables us to do. We must do those things. Only God can make the necessary changes deep within our inner being. We are enabled and required to “put on” the outward trappings of those inner changes.

Faith and love flow out of the hope awakened by the gospel (Colossians 1:5 NIV). Love for God and other people is always a result of faith. Love for God is shown by obedience to His commands (John 14:15). As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:13, *“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* Christian hope, faith and love are consequences of a regenerated heart. Hope and faith will not be necessary when we are with God. But love will continue eternally and love for God will always be shown by obedience.

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. 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.

How Do We Keep Our Faith “Valve” Open, Ready to Receive God’s Ongoing Grace Inputs? Praying, studying and meditating on God’s Word individually and with others, meeting and worshipping with other believers, striving to be obedient in all we do, responding to God’s direction, and striving to properly use all the gifts, talents, and abilities God gives us. Our relationship with the

indwelling Holy Spirit is vital. Believers are to live and walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). They are to do nothing to grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) or to quench Him (1 Thessalonians 5:19). 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.

What is Next? Faith part 2.