

**Introduction:** This lesson continues the study on faith begun in lesson 11.

**The Importance of Faith:** Natural faith is vital in living a normal life. Faith in God is vital to spiritual life. Paul talks about the importance of faith in several places, one of which is Galatians 5:6. He contrasts “signs with reality.” Circumcision in Judaism was an important sign of being included in the covenant with God. In Christianity, baptism is often said to have replaced circumcision. In Galatians Paul says that symbols of membership in the New Covenant are not adequate to show a genuine relationship with Christ. Galatians 5:6 (NIV) *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”*

Circumcision, important as it was to the Jews, is merely a “sign” of their being in covenant relationship with God. Some mistakenly believed circumcision was the “way” in which one entered God’s covenant. Similar problems were arose about the New Covenant. Some believed baptism was the “way” a person achieved a saving relationship “in Christ.” The function of baptism is to serve as a public sign indicating the person being baptized has already experienced regeneration and is “in Christ.”

Paul emphasizes that in identifying with Christ the *“only thing that counts is faith.”* Baptism is a secondary action publicly acknowledging a person’s claim of a saving relationship with Christ. God’s regeneration of their heart and His gift of faith that accompanies regeneration is what counts. Faith in Christ’s saving work is the one and only requirement to be “in Christ.” That faith is God’s gift. Being in Christ has effects. Faith in Christ and His saving works always results in “love.” So faith in Christ expresses itself in all its actions through love. Love for God is expressed through obedience (John 14:15). Love for others is expressed by acts of kindness.

Colossians 1:5 (NIV), *“the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.”* Faith and love flow out of the hope awakened by the gospel. First hope and then faith bringing about a chain of wonderful change in life including forgiveness for sins on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, the gift of the indwelling Holy

Spirit, a loving relationship with God, peace with neighbors, and joy in the midst of life (all of which *we hope for*). These realities, though invisible, are personally appropriated. As a result, love for both God and others flows from the sense of gratitude which faith has awakened. Faith and love flowing from hope are central to all Christian living.

Faith is necessary to understand Scripture. No one was present at creation to report on events. Humans are confronted with a pre-existing universe. The event of creation involves an unseen 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 appreciate God's power (Romans 1:20), but we can't know the manner of creation.

### **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.

**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.***" "Hearing" the gospel by the spoken or written word is vital, but is it sufficient? 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.***" You must hear the gospel, but understanding what you hear is vital. Hearing the gospel without seeking understanding risks having the word of the gospel snatched away.

How can good “heart soil” in which the gospel will prosper and yield a good crop be obtained? There is only one way, and that is for God to regenerate your heart creating the good “heart soil.” God’s grace (that is using His power to cause good things to happen) through faith (which is the “means” though which we receive God’s grace) enables us to understand the gospel and be saved. Sometimes God provides knowledgeable people to guide us to understanding. Hearing is necessary but not sufficient. Understanding is necessary. Understanding is something that must be diligently worked for. The good heart soil comes from God with no input from us, but, to produce an abundant crop, we must participate in the work of tilling the soil and pulling weeds. Tilling our heart soil and pulling weeds means we are to be obedient to God, put off evil things, put on the righteous, think worthy thoughts, and do the good works God prepared for us to do.

**Receiving Christ as the Object of Our Faith:** God’s gift of faith is accompanied by justification (declared righteous before God.) Faith which justifies receives Christ Jesus, that is believes with confidence in Him and what He has accomplished. Such faith comes only from God. 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.*”

As we mentioned earlier, in their natural fallen state, everyone suffers from a closed “faith valve.” To receive Christ as Savior and Lord the “faith valve” must be opened by regeneration, “*born again of the Spirit*” (John 3:3). In this way a person becomes 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).

**Doubt and Faith:** People often consider doubt to be the opposite of faith. But that is wrong. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. Faith is only necessary where doubt or uncertainty exist. Where certainty prevails, faith is unnecessary. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith believes in the face of uncertainty and doubt. Again, if certainty exists, there is no need for faith.

Unknowns give rise to doubt. All 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!”*** That seems so right. We often have faith and doubt about the same thing. Faith in God brings hope. Doubt about information we receive can cause us to work to discover the truth. Hope is the motivation that inspires us to work to understand unravel doubt and reach the truth.

Faith in God is necessary because His existence cannot be proven by scientific methodologies. In general no one is able to obtain sufficient information to understand the “why” and “wherefor” of the good and the bad in the world. Every explanation has doubt associated with it. Faith overcomes such doubt and enables action without knowing with certainty what the outcome will be. Because we doubt, we earnestly and diligently seek truth.

**Men and Women of Faith:** The ancients were commended for steadfast faith in God. Hebrews 11:4-39 extolls many of the faithful men and women who lived under the Sinai covenant in Old Testament times. All who are mentioned knew of God’s promises. None of them lived to see the complete fulfillment of God’s promises. All experienced ups and downs in their lives. Some experienced incredibly horrible persecution. Can you imagine being sawn in two? In Hebrew tradition that is what happened to the prophet Isaiah. Yet each hero and heroine of faith mentioned was enabled to persevere to the end, holding to their profound trust in God and His promises.

The author’s catalog of heroes and heroines of faith begins with examples from the early chapters of Genesis, people who lived during the time before the flood (Abel, Enoch). Each example is intended to inspire the readers to exhibit similar faith. Each person cited was motivated by God’s unseen reality and His revealed purposes. Their faith found expression in their obedient faithfulness.

Verses 11:7-16 give examples of faith that is obedient and persistent. Verses 11:17-23 show faith which looks beyond present circumstances to a future based on the promises of God. Verses 11:24-28 show faith which adheres to God’s principles

as it deals with difficult choices. Verses 11:29-38 show faith vibrant in victory and persevering in defeat. Verses 11:39-40 show faith fulfilled.

**Hebrews 11:4-6:** *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. <sup>6</sup> 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.*

**Commendation of Abel:** Abraham and Moses have been held up as models of faith and perseverance. Verses 11:4-7 remind us true faith was practiced long before Abraham and Moses lived. Abel and Cain, the sons of Adam and Eve, lived quite different lives. We are told each brought an offering to God. Cain, the farmer, brought fruits and grains; Abel, the shepherd, brought fat from the firstborn of his flock. God commended Abel by accepting his sacrifice. Cain's offering was rejected, perhaps because of Cain's pride and self-sufficiency caused him to desire independence from God. The author says that by faith, Abel, though dead, still speaks (seemingly a reference to Genesis 4:10 to Abel's blood crying out from the ground.) Another possibility for God's rejection of Cain's offering might be that God had explained to them that "blood" was necessary to cover sin and Cain didn't believe that to be true.

**Enoch Commended for Pleasing God:** Enoch's life overlapped with Noah's. Enoch was the seventh from Adam. Most people were degenerating into a severe form of godliness which was soon going to be punished by God's wrath in the form of a devastating Flood. In Genesis 5:21-24, two important truths about the faith of Enoch are seen. (1.) Enoch pleased God by turning away from the godlessness of the people around him. (2.) He maintained a personal relationship with God which became so intimate that he was taken to heaven without experiencing death.

For the first 65 years of Enoch's life, he did not follow God. It appears the birth of Enoch's son, Methuselah, and God's revelation of the coming Flood judgment (mentioned in Jude) caused Enoch to turn to God. He walked with God for the next 300 years. The flood occurred shortly after Enoch was taken by God.

The author treats Enoch's outstanding faith as a general example for all believers. In Hebrews 11:6 he 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.***" No matter the intensity and excellence with which it is done, God cannot be found through human reasoning or scientific research. God's self-revelation in Scripture provides the necessary information for finding Him.

But Scripture is not all of God's self-revelation. Paul says in Romans 1:19-20 and the psalmist says in Psalms 8 and 19 that nature reveals much about God. There is sufficient information about God in nature, available to anyone who pays attention, to convince them God exists. To find Him, a person must earnestly seek Him, and God must intervene with regeneration.

**Hebrews 11:7:** "***By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.***"

**Noah Believed God:** In faith Noah believed God at a time when the world around him paid no attention. Noah "saw" and believed the coming of the Flood which was 120 years in the future. In Noah's fear of the coming catastrophe, he obeyed God and build an ark of wood, by means of which his family was saved from the Flood. Noah's obedient faith *condemned the world* by his believing God while the world ignored God's warning. Noah persevered through mockery and jeering as he built a huge ship in an area about a hundred miles from the nearest large body of water. Noah's trust in God made him *an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*. Jesus used "the days of Noah" as representative of the condition the world would be in before his own second coming. He indicated His followers must be prepared to face the same kind of scornful hostility Noah met day after day

Noah is the first individual in Scripture to specifically be called righteous (Genesis 6:9). His sturdy, obedient faith stands forever as an example of persistence against the hostility that always seem to be against those born of God. In these three men, Abel, Enoch and Noah, we are shown that faith waits, faith grows in intimacy, and faith persists. Without these qualities it is impossible to please God. Yet none of the three were without faults.

**Hebrews 11:8-19:** *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

**Faith in Action:** James 2:14, 2:20 says, *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ... Do you want to be shown you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”* This is not a statement that works are necessary for faith. On the contrary, it is a statement that true faith is always accompanied by good works which God prepares for each believer. Biblical faith in action is often dramatic. With Abraham and Sarah the author continues examples of faith-actions in the face of difficult circumstances. The common element among all his examples is “out-of-the-ordinary actions by those with faith,” things not commonly seen among people who don’t have Biblical faith.

The overall message is that believers demonstrate by their lives that it is possible, with God’s help, to stand firm and persevere in faith whatever hardships are encountered. In some instances God saved faithful people from dreadful situations. In other cases faithful people died horrible deaths. But whether saved from suffering or dying in affliction, each person is honored for steadfast trust in God.

Were they perfect? By no means were they perfect. Some committed abominable sins, but they confessed, repented, and continued on the road God set

before them. Some suffered long term consequences of their sins. God demonstrated His love and grace in dealing with them, showing us that sinners can come to Him and find forgiveness and restoration. In God's grace, they were enabled to persevere under dreadful trials.

When God regenerates hearts and gives the gift of faith, even the worst sinner can accomplish in faith whatever God asks. All people, all their mortal lives are subject to human frailty and sin. That is true even for the greatest saints, All need the saving grace of God. Think of Moses, the great Law Giver, who killed an Egyptian and buried him in the sand. He later did things in anger which kept him out of the Promised Land (that is, until Christ stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and Moses visited with Him). Think of David, a man after God's heart whose sin with Bathsheba led to many horrible results. God is a loving God – gracious and good. He rewards those who earnestly seek Him, but earthly life in a fallen world is risky and there may be consequences of sin in this life even when the sin is forgiven.

**Abraham:** Abraham appears as the pre-eminent model for believers. At age 75, living in a city in Mesopotamia, Abraham was called to leave his home and prosperous situation to go to a land God would show him. God promises to make of Abraham a great nation and to bless him, making his name great so that he will be a blessing to others. God said He would bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who dishonor him. All the families of the earth are to be blessed in Abraham.

So Abraham in faith left his home not knowing where he was going. He went to Haran and stopped for a while there. He prospered in that city, but God told him he had not yet reached his destination. Abraham once again departed, still not knowing where he was going. At every point, Abraham responded with unwavering obedience to God's call and promises.

When Abraham reached the land God promised him, he lived there as a resident alien, living in tents and never owning anything except the cave of Machpelah in Hebron which he bought as a tomb for Sarah. It is remarkable for a prosperous man to leave his home and follow God's leading with no knowledge of where he will end up. The author says that Abraham did this trusting God meant what He said in His



promise and would produce on earth, a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God (verses 9-10).

By faith, Abraham was enabled to look from his day to the future end of time when God would cause a city with eternal foundations to come down from heaven onto earth (as seen by John and recorded in Revelation 21). Abraham longed for the heavenly city where everything functions according to God's order. People dwell in harmony, peace, blessing, beauty, and liberty. He was content to grasp that revelation and live in anticipation of it. Jesus states that idea in the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

**Sarah:** The highlight of Abraham's faith experience was the birth of a son, Isaac. Abraham was now a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, God had more than once expressly told Abraham he would have a son who would produce a long line of descendants. Paul, in Romans 4:19, observes that without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God. But, by faith Sarah received power to conceive (v 11). Sarah laughed at the very idea of having a child at her age. God countered her doubt with a question in Genesis 18:14, *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* Then in Genesis 21:1-2a we read, *"The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did too Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age."*

When God fulfills a promise to a person, He first awakens faith. Sarah's growth in grace and spiritual maturity is witnessed in 1 Peter 3:6. Sarah and Abraham shared faith in God's promise. The result was *descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* (v 12).

**The Meaning of Verse 12:** This verse seems to refer to both spiritual and physical descendants. Abraham was promised in Genesis 13:16, *"I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth."* Some thirteen years later, when God announced the birth of Isaac (Genesis 15:5), here is what happened. *"And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* These two

references seem to be to two different lines of posterity: (1.) A heavenly posterity (as many as the stars in heaven) which includes all who are in Christ (Galatians 3:29). (2.) An earthly posterity (as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore) including all the physical descendants of Jacob's twelve sons.

This interpretation agrees with Paul's statements in Romans 11:11-12 that despite the formation of the church (the heavenly posterity), God has not yet finished with his people Israel (the earthly posterity). The blending of these two lines will be found in the city for which Abraham looked, on whose gates is written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and on its foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:12-14).”

**What is Next?** Faith part 3.