

Elementary Principles: Faith

Date: Jan 22, 2023

Text: Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Welcome

I love you.

Open your bibles to: Hebrews 5:11

Though we'll spend the majority of our time in Hebrews 10,

Text

11 About this we have much to say , and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of [Messiah] and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.

This is God's word.

Intro

Like I said last week, to prep us for what's new, we're going back to what's old; the basics, the milk.

And what are they?

- Repentance (last week)
- Trust in God

- Instructions before baptism
- The laying on of hands
- The resurrection of the dead
- And eternal judgment

Some of this will be basic to us, and some of it won't be.

Regardless, What matters is what we do with these things from this day forward. Let's get started.

What is Faith?

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of [Messiah] and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works (last week) and of faith toward God (this week)

If the 1st basic is repentance from dead works then the 2nd is the other side of that coin; **faith in/on/towards God.**

Repentance and faith really can't be split apart, but for teaching purposes it's helpful.

So what is faith?

I know Larry just said in his head, *"...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

And Larry's right.

But before we get into that, it's been helpful to me and I think will be helpful to you, to, when you read the word *"faith"* or *"believe"* in your bible, replace it with *"trust"* or *"rely"*

Average Joe

Not because faith isn't the right word; it is, but because *"faith"* or *"belief"* sort of takes on a different meaning in 2023 than what the authors of scripture are actually trying to communicate by it. For example, we live in Oklahoma, and if you asked the Average Joe on the street if they *"believe in God"* they'll likely say *"yes"* even though nothing in their life suggests they have any idea

- who God actually is,

- how God works in the world,
- and what God's promises are.

They might believe a deity exists, some bearded Sky God,

but they don't trust Him and they aren't relying on Him for the things He calls humans to rely on Him for.

They aren't practicing what the scriptures call faith, which is trust and reliance, on God and God's words.

So when we think "faith" let's think "reliance" and "trust"

Trust in God's Carrot & Stick

And faith, trusting in God, really comes down to **two main issues**, especially in the context of Hebrews.

1) Trusting that God rewards righteousness

(Heb 11:6, ESV)

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

2) (the opposite of rewarding righteousness) Trusting that God punishes wickedness.

It's faith in, reliance on, these two promises of God (that's he's faithful to punish and reward) that make or break the human being.

God's chosen means of testing human hearts is faith via carrot and stick,

- holding out the promise of reward for faithfulness (carrot)
- and the promise of punishment for lack of faithfulness. (stick)

We're going to look at this all over the scripture, but this is the main issue in Hebrews.

Something's happening in their community that could lead them to draw back from their **previous faithfulness** to Jesus, and so he's **writing to encourage them in their faith and trust**.

He's not writing to "new" believers who are trusting God for the first time,
these are seasoned saints who've been believing, but they wanna draw back.

So listen to how the author of Hebrews weaves these points (*of God's faithfulness, punishment, and reward*) together later in the letter to make his point about this elementary principle.

(Heb 10:19–11:2, ESV)

19 Therefore, brothers, since **we have confidence** to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...

let us draw near with a true heart in **full assurance of faith**... 23 Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful**.

23 Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope** (what is their hope as Jewish followers of Jesus?

The age to come. The promised rest from **Hebrews 4** which will be brought about by their Messiah.

Hold fast to that...) **without wavering**, (and why should they hold fast to that confession? Why not give up?) **for he who promised is faithful**.

For God is reliable to make good on His promises.

He's not a liar. So hold on.

"Things are difficult for you right now. You're being persecuted because of your confession, but hold on. Keep the faith. Trust God."

Trust God Together

"And help each other trust God:"

24 And let us consider how to **stir up one another** to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to

meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more **as you see the Day** drawing near.

"Because you trust God's promises about His Day, the Day of the Lord, live this way together, live with love and good works."

Don't Sin

And also because you trust/believe/have faith in that Day, don't slink back into sin:

26 For **if we go on sinning deliberately** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a **fearful expectation of judgment**, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses **dies without mercy** on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 **How much worse punishment**, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God....and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; **I will** repay." And again, "The Lord **will judge** his people." 31 It is **a fearful thing** to fall into the hands of the living God.

You see the stick?

To strengthen

- their faith
- and trust
- in God's promises of reward of the coming age,
- he's making clear the punishment,
- the stick,
- that comes for those **who don't trust God**,
- **who don't count God's word as reliable**,
- **is serious**.

God is faithful.

- He wasn't making empty promises in Moses' day about death for sin,
- and he's not making empty promises in the present day about death for sin.

In fact, he says it's **"worse"** now "go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth."

“God’s word is reliable, so live like you trust it.”

So in this section he's bolstering their belief in the punishment that's to come ***for those who draw back from faith,***

Remember

But then he puts his pastoral heart on display.

He begins to *jog their memory*

- *to the times when they didn't draw back,*
- *when they kept the faith*
- *and lived as though they counted God's word as reliable,*
- *even though it would have been easier to quit.*

32 But **recall the former days** when, after you were enlightened, **you endured a hard struggle**

with sufferings, (you did it! You said ***“Yes”*** to the Lord even when it was hard!)³³ sometimes being

publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you **joyfully accepted** the plundering of your property,

Why?

- Why did they joyfully accept their stuff getting stolen?
- Why did they endure being hated and slandered?

Because they lived in faith and trust in God's reliability to bring about what He'd promised.

Because they trusted God.

Because they counted God and his word as reliable.

Because they had faith.

This is what he says:

“You did all this, you struggled with all of this, you endured all of this, why, how?”...[because] you knew (you were confident in, you trusted that, you believed, you had faith) ***that you yourselves had a better possession*** (than the ones that are being stolen) ***and an abiding one*** (better than this fleeting one)

“You guys endured the hardship of this age joyfully, because you believed God’s promise of the age to come.”

This is what faith in God is.

This is the basic, elementary principle we must be trained in by constant practice.

- We trust God’s promises about the future,
- whether reward or punishment,
- and that drives how we live in the meantime.

Faith in eschatology; **the end**, drives discipleship; **the present**.

35 Therefore (in view of how you’ve already lived by faith before) ***do not throw away your confidence*** [now], which has ***a great reward.***

Though they’ve already proven they live by faith; they know how to do it, he has to tell them this again, ***“Don’t throw it away now.”***

And I have to tell you this again, ***“don’t throw it away now.”***

- ***“You lived by faith last year,***
- ***you followed the teachings and example of Jesus***
- ***towards your church,***
- ***your family,***
- ***your friends,***
- ***and your enemies,***
- ***because you knew you had a great reward in the coming age.***

- *Do it again this year.*
- *Don't throw it away now."*

This is the battle of living by faith. You gotta do it again and again and again.

You gotta wake up,

- On days when your stuff gets stolen
- On days when you're persecuted
- On days when the sting of death hits again

put your feet on the floor and say *"God you don't lie. Your word is sure. Your promises are reliable. It's worth it to follow you no matter how difficult things are and no matter how badly I want to draw back. I will live by faith today and not rely on how I lived yesterday.*

(Heb 3:7-19)

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, (!) if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

15 As it is said,

"Today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by

Moses?

They lived by faith before that, right? The passover is survived by faith.

18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

19 So we see that they were unable to enter **because of unbelief**

They trusted God in Egypt. They must also trust Him in the wilderness.

(Heb 10:36)

For you have **need of endurance**, so that **when** you have done the will of God (when you've trusted and relied on Him day after day after day) you may receive **what is promised**.

Carrot.

“Trust me. Keep walking this way. And you’ll receive what I’ve promised. I’m not a liar.”

Trusting in Delay

And then he points them to the Day of the Lord and return of Jesus:

37 For,

“Yet a little while, (a reference to the Day of the Lord and the wrath of God in **Isaiah 26** and **Haggai 2**) and **the coming one will come and will not delay**;

This is faith, right?

He said “a little while” and “will not delay” and yet it’s been a long while and it feels like delay, but faith doesn’t give into the scoffing and mocking spirit and declares, ***“He said He will come. I’m holding on.”***

“Yet a little while, and **the coming one will come and will not delay**;

So in view of that, how will we live?

38 but my righteous one (in the midst of delay) shall live **by faith**.

By trusting that God and His word concerning the end is reliable.

That’s how **we will live and not die when the Day of the Lord arrives**.

And we know this is what he’s talking about because he’s quoting directly from

(Habakkuk 2:2-4, ESV), which says this:

Write the vision (about the coming judgment) make it plain on tablets, **so he may run who reads it.**

So imagine a great big sign that says **“JUDGMENT COMING, RUN”. - GOD**

This is a word from God.

And so if you have faith, *if you count God’s words as reliable*, what would you do when you see that sign? Run;

so he may run who reads it (it being the reliable word of God)

3 For still the vision awaits **its appointed time**; it hastens **to the end**—it will not lie. If it seems slow, **wait for it**; it will surely come; **it will not delay**.

(Notice that Habakkuk says **“it”** will surely come, **“it”** will not delay, wait for **“it”** but the author of Hebrews takes that **“it”** and changes it to **“he.”** “In a little while, **the coming one** will come, **He** will not delay)

4 ...**but the righteous** (in the meantime) **shall live by his faith.**

(CJB) but the righteous will **attain life through trusting faithfulness.**

If you have faith in God’s words about the future, you’ll act accordingly now, you’ll run when you read the vision.

So back to Hebrews

...**but the righteous shall live by his faith.** and if he shrinks back, my soul has **no pleasure in him.**

(Without faith it is impossible to **please** God)

39 But we are **not of those who shrink back** and **are destroyed** (stick) but of **those who have faith** and **preserve their souls** (carrot)

So that’s the whole argument of Hebrews 10.

- God’s promises about the future are reliable; whether judgment or reward
- You’ve lived by faith in those promises in the past.

- Keep doing it.

And then right into Hebrews 11:

(11:1, NIV)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and (ESV) the conviction of things not seen.

What do we hope for? What do we not yet see?

The resurrection of the dead and coming age.

We don't see those things yet, but we don't lose heart, we don't lose faith; we're confident in what we hope for and we're convinced it will arrive.

For by it (faith, trusting God's promises) the people of old (who he'll work through in the rest of 11) received their commendation.

Or (CEV) It was their faith that made our ancestors pleasing to God.

(Heb 11:6, ESV)

6 [For] 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.

He rewards those who live by faith.

He's pleased with those who live by faith.

This is how God has always worked.

The passover in Exodus 12:

God's word says:

- Slaughter the lamb,
- cook and eat it,
- put the blood over your door,
- bake the bread,
- stay in the house
- and you'll survive the coming wrath.

So the people with faith, people who count God's word as reliable, did what?

- Slaughtered the lamb,
- cooked and ate it,
- put the blood over their door,
- baked the bread,
- stayed in the house.
- All night.
- They didn't apply the blood and then go for swim in the Nile. They stayed all night.
- And they survived the angel of death.

The righteous lived by faith.

The serpents in Numbers 21:

Israel is rebelling. Snakes are biting, and people are dying.

God's word says:

- Don't try and heal yourself
- Don't try to fight off the snakes
- Look at the staff in Moses' hands
- and you'll actually be healed from the snake's poison.
- You'll live.

So the people with faith, people who count God's word as reliable, did what?

- Didn't try to heal themselves
- Didn't try to fight off the snakes
- Looked at the staff in Moses' hands
- They were actually healed.
- And they lived.

The righteous will live by faith.

This is the exact example John uses to make the same point about faith in Jesus:

(Jn 3:14–15)

14 And as Moses **lifted up the serpent in the wilderness**, so must the Son of Man **be lifted up**, 15 that **whoever believes in him** (whoever puts faith in Him, whoever trusts Him, whoever counts Him and His words as reliable) may have **eternal life**.

The righteous will live by faith.

Faith is trusting in and relying on the words of God.

- Blood on your doorpost will actually save.
- Looking at Moses' staff will actually heal.
- Trusting in Jesus will actually lead to eternal life.

(Romans 5:1-2, CSB)

"...since we have been declared righteous **by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him **by faith** into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice **in the hope** (what we don't presently see) of the glory of God"

Jesus' Resurrection: Our Guarantee

So why should we have faith? Why should we trust in God's promised future?

Because we have a guarantee; the empty tomb.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-23, GNT)

...the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, **as the guarantee** that those who sleep in death will also be raised.

- Those with faith, keep the faith
- Those without, start trusting today.

