

FAITH IS TRUST IN GOD

- A. Introduction: For the past several weeks we have been talking about the relationship between grace, works, and faith as part of a larger discussion on the importance of getting to know Jesus as He is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus, or close associates.
1. These men wrote to tell the world what they saw and heard. Their writings are our only fully reliable source of information about Jesus—Who Jesus is, why He came to this world, and what it means for us.
 - a. One of Jesus' original apostles, John, wrote a biography of Jesus (a gospel) to clearly state that Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. John's desire was that through the information in his book, men and women would believe on Jesus and receive eternal life from Him. John 20:31
 - b. John 1:14-17—In the opening passages of his book, John wrote that Jesus is full of grace and has given us grace upon grace. We've been examining what this means and have more to say tonight.
 2. First, we need a short review. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him. Sin has disqualified us for our created purpose. Eph 1:4-5; Rom 3:23
 - a. There is nothing we can do to remove the guilt of sin and restore ourselves to God's family. No amount of good works, nor any kind of suffering on our part, can do it. Rom 5:6-8
 1. Through the Cross of Christ, God did for us what we can't do for ourselves. He paid the penalty for our sin. Because of His sacrificial death, when we believe on Jesus, God can justify us (declare us righteous), treat us as though we never sinned, and restore us to the family.
 2. The Cross is an expression of God's grace. Grace is God's unearned, undeserved favor and love expressed toward mankind. Rom 3:23-25; John 3:16; I John 4:9-10; etc.
 - A. Grace is given, not because of something in the one who receives it, but because of the character of the one who gives it.
 - B. Grace emphasizes the disposition of the one expressing it. God is full of grace or gracious. The Greek word for gracious means useful or providing what is needed.
 - b. Eph 2:8-9—Salvation comes to us by God's grace through our faith and not because of our works, so none of us can boast. Works is anything we do to try to earn or deserve something from God.
 1. Most Christians understand that they didn't earn their initial salvation from sin through their efforts. But once saved, far too many begin to relate to God through their works or efforts.
 - A. God will help me if I pray enough, fast enough, work in the church enough. Or, He won't help me because I haven't done enough, I'm not worth it, He doesn't care about me, etc.
 - B. But everything we receive from God both before and after we're saved—deliverance, healing, protection, provision, strength—is an expression of His grace and loving kindness.
 2. The Greek word for salvation (*soteria*) denotes deliverance and preservation. It is used in the New Testament to mean deliverance from danger, safety, and health—all the blessings given to men and women by God in and through Jesus Christ.
 - A. We receive salvation and its related blessings by grace through faith, or by believing what God says about Himself and what He's done for us through the Cross of Christ. Faith is actually trust in God. Trust is reliance on His truthfulness, faithfulness, and power.
 - B. We don't earn salvation through our faith nor do we get glory for our faith because faith comes to us from God through His Word. As we get to know the Lord through His Word (the written Word, the Bible) our trust in Him grows. Rom 10:17
- B. Faith and believe come from a word that means persuasion. When we see the Lord as He is—His goodness, love, truthfulness, reliability and faithfulness—we become persuaded that we can trust Him. Ps 9:10
1. Faith, by definition, must have an object. In other words, it must be directed at someone or something. Faith is trust in something or someone. The object of our faith is Jesus—God Incarnate. Heb 12:2

- a. Faith can be challenging for us because the object of our faith (the Lord Jesus Christ, Almighty God) is invisible. We can't see (perceive) Him or His kingdom with our eyes. Col 1:15; I Tim 1:17
- b. Over the past several decades, a lot of teaching in the church has focused on our faith—how to get it, how to increase it, how to work or exercise it so that it produces results.
 - 1. Consequently, for many of us, the object of our faith has become our faith—what we must do or must believe to get what we want from God. Our trust is in what we do rather than in God.
 - 2. And, because we must believe something we can't see or feel, faith has become a form of pretending. We walk around declaring that we already have something when we clearly don't have it, but we're afraid to admit it because that might keep us from receiving.
 - 3. We've been told that if we keep believing and saying that we have it, we'll get it. This has put the focus on our faith. Our trust is in our technique or our efforts rather than in Jesus.
- c. But, is that the way faith is presented in the New Testament? If your only source of information about what faith is and isn't, was the New Testament, you would realize that much of what many of us think we know about faith isn't in the New Testament.
- 2. The epistle to Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were facing persecution. The author (most scholars believe it was Paul) wrote to encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what.
 - a. As part of his encouragement, in chapter 11, the author listed a number of Old Testament men and women whose stories were familiar to his readers.
 - 1. Each person was commended for their faith. When we read the historical accounts of their lives we find that they trusted God and believed what He told them.
 - 2. Their words and actions were not techniques they used to get something from God. They were an expression of the fact that they trusted and believed what God said.
 - b. Consider two examples: Abraham and Sarah. When they were too old to have children God told them that they would have a son. Gen 15:4-5
 - 1. Heb 11:11—By faith (trust in God) Sarah received strength (grace) to deliver a child when she was too old, because she judged God, who promised them a child, faithful.
 - 2. Rom 4:21—(Abraham was) fully satisfied and assured that God was able and mighty to keep His word and to do what He had promised (Amp).
 - A. Note that their trust (faith) was in God and His faithfulness to keep His Word—not in their ability to believe, exercise, or act on their faith.
 - B. Their faith had an object—Almighty God. Their focus was on God. Their faith wasn't a technique or method. It was persuasion based on God who is faithful
 - C. They didn't pretend they had a son before Isaac was born. They were confident that a son would be born because God is faithful and keeps His Word.
- 3. Rom 4:17—People mistakenly take something Paul that (an eyewitness of Jesus) wrote about Abraham and use it to say that faith is calling what is not as though it were so that it will become. However, Paul wasn't writing about what we can or should do. He was writing about who God is and what He does.
 - a. Paul in the middle of making the point that Abraham is the father of all who are made right with God through faith, Jew and Gentile (Rom 4:16). This is a fulfillment of a promise He made to Abraham in Gen 17:5—For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations (NASB).
 - 1. Then Paul makes a comment about God's greatness. Rom 4:17—(Abraham) was appointed our father—in the sight of God in whom he believed, Who gives life to the dead and speaks of the non-existent things that [He has foretold and promised] as if they [already] existed (Amp).
 - 2. This has nothing to do with Abraham (or us) calling things into existence. The original readers would have never understood this to mean that we by our faith brings things into existence.
 - b. When we read Abraham and Sarah's story we find that God (the Word, Preincarnate Jesus) appeared to them a number of times and restated His promise to give them a child. Through repeated

exposure to the Word of God, their faith or trust in God (to do what they couldn't do) grew and they became persuaded that God would keep His Word to them.

- C. Much of our trouble with understanding grace and faith comes out of misunderstanding the nature of life in a sin damaged world. We wrongly presume that troubles come our way because God is displeased with us.
1. But here's no such thing as a problem free life in this broken world. Jesus said that in this world we'll have tribulation. Moths and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. John 16:33; Matt 6:19
 - a. God does not bring trials, tribulation, moths, rust, or thieves into our lives. He is good and good means good. Jesus (God Incarnate) shows us what God is like—what He does and doesn't do. If Jesus didn't do it then God doesn't do it (lessons for another day). John 14:9-10; John 5:19; etc.
 - b. Circumstances (good or bad) are not expressions of God's greater or lesser love for us. They are the result of human choice—going back to Adam. His sin unleashed a curse of corruption and death that altered human nature and the earth itself. Rom 5:12; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 3:20; etc.
 1. We deal with the effects of sin in this world every day. Even though our hearts have left the pigpen and we've come back to our Father through faith in Jesus, we still live in the pigpen.
 2. People make wicked choices that affect us. Things wear out and break. Our bodies are subject to sickness, injury, old age, and death.
 - c. Many wrongly presume that if all is going well at the moment, not only is God pleased with them and/or their strong faith is keeping trouble and hardship away from them.
 1. When troubles come, the first thought many have is: Why is this happening? What have I done wrong? If they think the Lord has no ground to be displeased because they're sure they've done what they need to do to exercise their faith, they get angry at Him and accuse of being unfair or untrustworthy.
 2. Not only is it important to know that troubles don't come from God, you must also understand He has and hasn't promised to do for us in this life. He has not promised to stop trouble yet, nor has He promised to fulfill all your hopes and dreams in this life. God's promise to us now is grace in the pigpen. He will get us through until He gets us out.
 2. Paul, who wrote 2/3s of the New Testament documents, was a master at living by grace through faith. We can learn much from him about God's grace, our faith, and our circumstances.
 - a. If circumstances are an expression of God's greater or lesser favor and love, an expression of His displeasure with us, or a sign of our unworthiness or weak faith, then God couldn't stand Paul and his faith was extremely weak.
 1. From the time Paul became a Christian until the day he had his head cut off for his faith in Christ, he had continual trials: He was jailed, beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, and lied about. He faced the rigors of travel in the ancient world. He was often cold, hungry, thirsty, and weary. He had the pressure of the care of the churches he established. II Cor 11:23-29
 2. Yet in his many writings, there is no hint of: Why is God doing this? Why is He letting this happen? Is He mad at me? How did I displease Him? Do I need to believe harder, confess the word more fervently, or pray more earnestly?
 3. His testimony was: In the midst of all these things I am more than a conquer through Him who loves me and gave Himself for me. No matter what my circumstances are, I have learned to be content. Rom 8:37-39; Phil 4:11-12
 - b. You may recall that Paul was an ardent persecutor of Christians—he opposed the Lord. He was responsible for the jailing, suffering, and death of many Christians (Acts 7:58; Acts 8:2; Acts 9:1-2; Acts 22:19-20; Gal 1:13; I Tim 1:13). Consider some statements Paul made.
 1. In the context of God calling him to be an apostle Paul wrote I Cor 15:9-10—I am the least important of the apostles. I'm not even fit to be called an apostle. I tried to destroy God's

church. But because of God's grace, I am what I am. And his grace was not wasted on me. No, I have worked harder than all the other apostles. But I didn't do the work. God's grace was with me (NIRV).

2. In the context of God telling Paul that His grace (strength) was what he needed to face the challenges that came his way Paul wrote in II Cor 12:9—Now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ (His grace) may work through me (NLT).

3. Shortly before Paul was executed for faith in Christ he wrote in a letter to Timothy, his son in the faith: II Tim 2:1—So, my son, be strong in the grace that Jesus Christ gives (J.B. Phillips); be strong—strengthened inwardly—in the grace (spiritual blessing that is [to be found only] in Christ Jesus (Amp).

c. Paul lived with the consciousness (awareness) of God with Him and in him by His Spirit to strengthen and empower him by his grace as he kept his focus on Jesus (more on this next week).

3. Paul understood that faith in God does not mean no more problems. Faith in God is trust in Him, which brings grace in the form of strength, provision, peace, hope, and joy in the midst of the problems.

a. Paul understood that God is able to use the harsh realities of life in a fallen world. He causes them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family of sons and daughters who will live with Him forever on this earth, once it has been renewed and restored at the second coming of Jesus.

1. Paul called the troubles he faced in his life momentary and light. He knew that in comparison to forever (life after this life), they were temporary and therefore did not weigh him down.

2. II Cor 4:17-18—We view our slight, short-lived troubles in the light of eternity. We see our difficulties as the substance that produces for us an eternal, weighty glory far beyond all comparison because we don't focus our attention on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but the unseen realm is eternal (TPT).

b. Notice that Paul kept his attention focused on things he could not see. There are two kinds of unseen things—things we can't see because they are invisible, such as God and His kingdom of power and provision, and things we can't see because they don't exist yet. They are still to come.

1. These unseen realities are revealed to us in the Bible. Through the pages of the Scriptures we see God as He truly is and we learn what He has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us by His grace through our faith.

2. Faith in God is trust in God. Trust grows as we get to know Him through His Word. Paul is the one who wrote that we must run our race looking unto Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). Jesus, the Living Word, is revealed in the pages of the written Word.

4. Faith is not a complicated system of what we can or cannot say or what we must do to show that we have faith. Faith is the spontaneous response of our heart to God as He is revealed in His Word. No one has to tell you how to act or speak your faith (trust). It shows up in your words and actions.

D. Conclusion: The greatest gift you can give yourself is to become a regular reader of the Bible, especially the eyewitness documents—the New Testament. Read it over and over, start to finish, until it becomes familiar to you. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading.

1. When you get to know Jesus as He truly is, your faith (trust) in Him will grow to the point where you're fully persuaded that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God and that He will get you through until He gets you out.

2. Remember, Peter was able to walk on water when he kept his attention on Jesus. Much more next week.