

INCREASING YOUR FAITH

Sermonette by Mark Robertson in June 1994

If you've ever been to your local Bible book store lately you will be amazed at the number of books written about the Bible and related subjects. And over the years the amount of material written and discussed on Bible topics would probably fill 100 book stores and its increasing all the time.

All this writing and talk about religion is not a bad thing but it does have an very unfortunate side effect. The unfortunate side effect is that over the years, the simple plain truth of the Bible has become mired in a great deal of complex words and confusion.

Words have taken on whole new meanings that were never intended. One of the words that falls into this category is the word faith. Faith - one of the most central concepts of the Bible. Yet it can mean so many different things:

Not only can you have a faith, YOU can also have faith and you can use faith. To some faith means miracles. To others faith is something that is given to them as a gift - through no works of their own.

In religious terms, faith today has taken on a life of its own and become one of the most complex issues that a Christian can discuss. And yet of all the issues in the Bible faith was meant to be one of the most simple.

I'll give you an example of how religious things get confusing:

If I asked you a question: "Do you have faith in me?"
The first thing you would probably ask is "In what way?"
"Do you have faith in the premier?" - Same

Yet, when we ask someone "Do you have faith in God?". They would probably just say "yes". The question "In what way" somehow does not seem relevant. Why not? Because when we talk of faith in God the word has new meanings. Why has faith become a fuzzy religious concept? Who knows. In actual fact it's very simple.

The word faith in the N.T. comes from the same word as believe. And both words believe and faith come from the root verb meaning "to be persuaded".

It's pretty simple really: To have faith in biblical terms means that you are persuaded of something. You believe in it.

That's all. And it really is not too much more than that. To have faith of any sort you must believe and be convinced of something.

Faith is too big of a subject for a sermonette but what I would like to do today, is point out a couple major misunderstandings that I feel have come from losing sight of this simple meaning of the word faith.

If we just turn to the faith chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 11, you can see one of the places where the original intent of the word faith has been lost over the years by people not reading the words in context.

People over the years have read the accounts of these mighty men and woman and the great miracles they performed. They've said, "See what we can do if we also had faith. We can have these great miracles in our lives as well."

There is no doubt that God can give people power to do great works but is that the reason why Paul lists out all the names of these people? To show us what great works we can do if we are also filled with faith? Not at all.

Suddenly the picture changes when we read verses 35 to 38. We're now no longer talking about winners but losers! The reason why there was not even a break in thought going from the great miracles to the great tragedies is because it was written for a different purpose.

It's not to teach us about miracles and great wonders but it is here as a witness to courageous people of the past who were totally persuaded of God's promises. They were so convinced of the promises that their whole life changed its focus.

Read some of the verses in the chapter sometime with the correct context in mind. Replace "faith" with "so persuaded by God's promise". Having great faith is not a promise of great miracles - but it's about being totally persuaded that there is a better life ahead.

Rather than just be an inspiration to us, these people in Hebrews 11 should be witnesses. We should think, "If all these people were persuaded so much of God's promises, there must be something in it."

That's what faith is. Being totally persuaded that God's promise of a better life in the future is true. Of being totally persuaded that Christ was the Son of God and died for our sins. Of being totally persuaded that He will come back again. Of being totally persuaded by God's promises to bless and help us throughout the Bible.

Ok, how do you obtain faith? Let's ask the same question in more meaningful terms: How can I be persuaded that these promises of God are true?

It's very simple, to be persuaded on anything in your life you must prove something. Faith must be built on substance. Do you realise that this is the exact opposite from most people believe?

Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition of faith, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." God does not require us to simply hope without any proof. We are not required to believe without any evidence. Faith is built on evidence and substance.

Most people will use the word in the wrong way. "...we've done all we can but the chances look slim. We'll just have to have faith I guess." That is not faith - its hope! What are they persuaded of? Nothing! Faith and hope to some are one and the same but they are totally different. Unless you are persuaded of something - convinced of it totally - there is no faith.

A lot of religions teach that faith is based on a wonderful feeling that fills us at times towards God's way of life. Some will even use that as their proof that they are filled with faith. It is not correct!

To have faith you must believe. To believe in something you must be persuaded and to be persuaded you must prove the point. It must have substance.

There is one last point to mention on this subject. Since our faith is built on substance and evidence then that implies that we can do something to increase our faith. Again this is opposite to what many people think. Many think that faith is something that God gives us and we either have it or we don't. This is a very wrong teaching.

God calls us initially but it is up to us - using our power of logic and reason to prove from the Bible and from nature around us whether these things are so. WE do have control over how much faith we have!

The more we study the Bible the more we can be persuaded that these things we believe are true. We have control over our own mind. The spirit will always be subject to us. God doesn't just jam a persuaded mind into our head. We have to study and become persuaded! How else can we explain the many times that Christ chastised the apostles for their lack of faith if it was out of their control?

It was in their control! They saw the miracles of Christ, they knew that it was the time of the messiah, they had the scriptures, they saw the effects in peoples lives from Christ's teachings. They should have been persuaded - just like the Israelites of old should have been persuaded that God would look after them.

Faith is the key to being a Christian. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." We are given an incredible amount of information to prove that God is God and that His promises are sure.

- We can prove there is a God by just looking at the incredible design of nature.
- We can prove that the Bible is far too amazing to be a work of man.
- We can prove even today that the resurrection took place.
- We have the word of all these Bible witnesses who saw things.
- We have people who gave their lives for this belief.

This is how we become persuaded to believe in God. Not airy fairy - but by study, meditation and prayer. It's very simple really - do you believe him or not?