



“Living by Faith”

Kevin Presley

I suppose the majority of people in the world would describe themselves as people of faith. Regardless of their level of church involvement or the depth of theology to which they subscribe, they would still say that they have faith in God. The word *faith* has been generalized to describe almost any kind of religious inclination, persuasion, or involvement. But faith really has a much deeper meaning than that.

Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

This chapter has been called the ‘Roll Call of the Faithful’ or ‘Faith’s Hall of Fame.’ In this walk through the museum of earth’s spiritual history, the Hebrew writer dozens of times uses the phrases *by faith*, *through faith*, or *in faith* to describe the actions of many people who pleased God and reaped the eternal reward. The only way any spiritual relationship can take place between created beings and Creator God—those of us who are within time and space and a God who is outside of time and space—is through faith. We’ve never seen God and we’ve never seen Jesus Christ. We’ve never been to Heaven. But we have a deep and life-changing conviction that such beings and such a place exist, and that is through faith. Where does that faith come from? Today, we’ll take a close look at faith: what it is, what is the basis for it, and what is the result of it. Perhaps then, you and I can truthfully answer the question about ourselves: Am I living by faith?

No word is any more familiar to religious people than the word *faith*. In fact, faith is often used to represent religion as a whole. People who profess that they believe in God or in any kind of supposed intelligent higher power to any degree are often referred to as *the faith community* or *people of faith*. What does *faith* mean? English dictionaries define *faith* as *a trust in someone or something*. When used in a spiritual context, Merriam-Webster says it refers to *a belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion that are based on spiritual apprehension; a strong belief in something for which there is no proof*. That’s

how men have defined the word, but if we don't understand how God defines *faith*, we may be left with some inadequate and even wrong conclusions.

In **II Corinthians 5:7**, the apostle Paul says, **“For we walk by faith, not by sight,”** thus contrasting *faith* and *sight*; one is the opposite of the other. We either walk by faith or we walk by sight. But does that mean that faith is some baseless belief in something, a shot in the dark, or a fanciful wish upon a star? If we believe anything that we cannot see, is that what the Bible means when it says that we walk by faith and not by sight? Or does it mean that we follow our feelings or instincts, or that we wish for something badly enough that we just simply trust that it's going to be true?

Although the world has trivialized and sensationalized faith in those ways, that is not at all what Paul suggests when he says that Christians walk by faith and not by sight. Neither is that what the Hebrew writer means when he says this:

Hebrews 11:1,3 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

He is not suggesting that our faith in God is some wild theory that someone dreamed up; rather, he is saying that our beliefs and our confidence in that which we cannot see by mortal eye and the resulting conviction in our hearts is the basis upon which we live our lives and devote our lives to pleasing God. That's really the sum total of what it means to walk by faith, to live or do something by faith. It doesn't mean that there aren't logical and convincing evidences and reasons for believing in God. As I said, it's not a shot in the dark that we just arbitrarily choose to believe in God. It means that the basis for this faith is not what we've seen with our eyes or experienced with our physical senses. It is different than what we experience here in the mortal realm. It is something above and beyond that.

As I speak right now, I have never been to Australia. I have never set foot on that continent. I have not seen Australia with my own eyes, only a photographic representation of it. Suppose we lived two hundred years ago and didn't even have any photographs of such a place, but just the credible testimony of those who had been there or who had firsthand knowledge of its existence. Now, I do not have that firsthand experience, but I have every confidence and every reason to believe, as I'm sure you do, that Australia does exist. I can purchase a ticket, make all of the arrangements and preparations, then board a ship or today, an airplane, and though I've never seen Australia with my own eyes, there would be no doubt in my mind that that ship or airplane could take me to such a place called Australia. Our faith in God is much like that. I have not seen God, but I am fully convinced that He exists. I have not seen Jesus Christ, but I have every confidence that He not only lived on this earth, but that He rose again and still lives. Thus, I have dedicated my life to Him. You see, that confidence provides a foundation for the life that I now try to live. In a nutshell, that's what we mean by *living by faith*. I want to look at three things about biblical, saving faith and they are what I'll call *the truth factor*, *the trust factor*, and *the test factor*.

I. The Truth Factor

What is truth anyway? And why do we believe it? What is the basis of our faith? Greek scholars and lexicographers such as Joseph Thayer say that the word *faith* as it is used in **Hebrews** means *a conviction of the truth of anything*. W.E. Vine says that it is *a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing*. Sometimes you'll see a sign or placard or a t-shirt that just says, “BELIEVE.” But that leaves us with a question: believe *what*? Is faith just believing? There is more to it than just the act

of believing. Does having faith mean believing something that we really can't know is true? No, it means being convinced that the testimony of another is true and acting accordingly.

Romans 10:16-17 “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

So, we see what is meant by faith here: faith is believing a report or a testimony. ***Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*** Faith is what results from what God has revealed to us about Himself. We believe in God, and we believe God based upon the revelation of God. God has indeed revealed Himself to us so that we can and do believe in Him. He is concealed from human sight, and therefore we cannot look at Him with our eyes. I don't know that God exists on the same basis that I know that my next-door neighbor or my wife or children or my mother and father exist, because I can see them with my eyes. But God HAS revealed Himself to us in other ways. First of all, there is God's *natural revelation*. Look again at **Hebrews**.

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Faith provides the foundation of our allegiance to God and our living for God.

Hebrews 11:3 “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

If the origin of the universe or of time, space, and matter could be explained by things that we could see, there would be no need for faith. But you cannot explain the universe by what is seen. For one thing, none of us were there when the universe came to be. Any idea that we accept about the origin of the universe must involve some measure and some type of faith. You cannot explain the origin of the universe by what we presently see with our eyes. Now, I am well aware that the theories of science, should you subscribe to them, try to explain and posit the origin of the known universe, but the fact is that those theories only push the question back to another stage. The question science cannot answer is: how does something come from nothing?

You may propose that a “big bang” billions of years ago and subsequent cosmic evolution explains the universe, but if that indeed happened, it still does not explain the beginning. Scientists may say that all life as we see it today can be explained by billions of years of chemical and biological evolution. But even if that were true, you still have not gotten back to the beginning. How would intelligent life randomly arise from dead, inorganic, unintelligent matter?

You see, it's reasonable and logical that if life comes from life, which science affirms that it does, and if life and all the things that sustain life and all the creation around us are so mind-blowingly complex, that if you go back to the very beginning, there must be a transcendent, intelligent, self-existent force behind it all, because something cannot come from nothing. Something cannot create itself, and certainly intelligent life cannot just randomly, accidentally, or haphazardly arise from dead, inorganic matter that supposedly just came to be, somehow, all by itself, unaidedly. Rather, the psalmist declared:

Psalms 19:1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handywork.”
Paul declared:

Romans 1:20 “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead;”

So, God’s fingerprints are all over His creation. His power and His nature are even seen within the things that He has created. We don’t have time to go into detail about that, but that is where we begin. Faith is a conviction that is based upon evidence or testimony of something which we otherwise cannot see. God’s natural revelation—the things that surround us, the things that are, the things upon which God has left His fingerprints and His footsteps—becomes the basis for a belief in and a basic understanding of the existence of God.

Then, that takes us to the next step, where God has revealed Himself to the world *supernaturally*. He has revealed Himself through His word, through the Bible, through the record of Jesus Christ who came to earth being the very image of God. Despite what the cynics and scoffers want you to think, there are multitudinous reasons to believe that the Bible is a divine and supernaturally given book. The foreknowledge of several amazing scientific discoveries is inexplicable unless the Bible came to us from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The earth being round, which we take for granted, wasn’t taken for granted a few centuries ago. The vastness of a universe, that for the overwhelming majority of human existence we were unable to know or even begin to ascertain. Things about the human body, such as DNA, were eluded to by the psalmist three thousand years ago (**Psalm 139**). And there is the fulfilled prophecy of the Bible. If you’ll give the Bible a thorough, fair hearing, you’ll find that things were spoken about that occurred in the first century--things that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ--that were written down hundreds of years and in some cases over a thousand years before they took place. The testimony of scripture is credible! A man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in the first century A.D., was crucified, and according to hundreds of witnesses, was resurrected from the dead. There is more evidence for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ than there is for the existence of many historical characters whom all of us take for granted existed and have no doubt in our minds lived.

There is manuscript evidence of the ancient authenticity of the Bible that far outweighs the evidence for other works that virtually no one questions the veracity and origins of. You see, friends, don’t just dismiss people’s faith in God; there is reason for it. Faith is based upon revelation from God, and if faith is a conviction based upon hearing, that means to have faith means to believe and to be faithful to what God has said. There are many things which people pass off as religious faith that really have no biblical basis. If God didn’t say it, if you can’t read it in God’s word, there is no legitimate basis for believing it.

We need to think about that when it comes to all of these hundreds of conflicting churches and doctrinal beliefs that we have in the world today. One person’s faith is not as good as another person’s faith if what those people believe is different and contradictory. Faith is not a hunch, a feeling, a personal idea or preference. Faith is a conviction about something not physically seen, but rather based upon credible testimony, which is the word of God.

The point I’m making is that truth is transcendent. Truth comes from God.

John 17:17 “...Thy word is truth.”

Faith is a persuasion, conviction, or belief in that truth that produces a fidelity to God through, again, His word.

II. The Trust Factor

Then, there is the trust factor in faith. Not only must my conviction be based upon the revelation of God, but I must also be willing to trust God based upon that revelation. That is involved in the idea of conviction: trusting God.

II Corinthians 5:7 “For we walk by faith, and not by sight:”

Faith is believing in something we cannot see. There is an element of trust involved. Back to my earlier illustration: if I leave for Australia having never been there, I may be fully convinced and convicted that Australia exists and I may fully anticipate arriving there. But I do so trusting the testimony I have heard about it. Thus, faith in God involves trusting God, what He has said, what He has promised, and thus also what He has commanded.

If I must jump out of a window of a burning home and I'm told that you are standing on the ground below and will catch me, regardless of how true that statement is, it certainly involves a trust on my part before I jump. I trust that what you've said is true. I trust that you are able to see the situation from a better perspective than I can and that you know what is best. I trust that you are not only able, but that you will catch me when I fall.

A lot of people will buy into this idea of faith if it just means mentally assenting to God's existence or some whimsical wish that they have for what they'd like God to do for them. If they can treat God like a cosmic vending machine and sort of cross their fingers and have a lot of hope that He will do what they ask, that's what they think of as faith. But that's really not faith. Faith is trusting God and taking Him at what He has said.

Again, some things must be accepted without seeing them. I have ample reason to confidently believe that God exists and that He has spoken to us through His inspired written word. Because of that firm persuasion or confidence, I have thus decided to take everything in His word by faith. I don't need a scientist to explain to me how the miracles of the Bible could've taken place, for example. The rise of modernism comes from faithlessness. In the 1800's when the modernists began to question the miracles of the Bible, that's because people didn't want to have faith in the Bible. They didn't feel that they could have faith in the Bible.

But the scientist using scientific method can't tell me how those miracles took place, and if I am relying on science, then I'm not going to believe in those miracles. There is no physical explanation for the universe by divine fiat. There is no scientific explanation for the flood or for the many supernatural events recorded in the Old Testament. There is no scientific rationalization for how a baby could be born of a virgin, how a man could walk on the waves of the sea, how the dead could be resurrected, and on and on we could go. But I accept those things by faith.

On an even more personal level, that also means that I accept God's commandments by faith. I don't question what God in His word says that I am to do, how I am to live, how I am to worship Him. For example, I don't tell God that I just don't understand why baptism can have anything to do with forgiveness of sins and since I don't quite understand that and since it doesn't fit my way of thinking and my reasoning, I just don't accept what it says and I'm just going to try to explain it away or dismiss, ignore, and deny it. Even though the Bible says:

Acts 2:38 “...Repent and be baptized every one of you in name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;”

Jesus’ words could not have been plainer. Faith doesn’t say *what difference would it really make how I worship? How we sing? How we commune? Whether a man or woman does the preaching? I just don’t see how that would make a difference. It seems to ME...* Ah-ha, there, you’re stepping outside the realm of faith. If God has spoken, I must take Him at His word. Faith is not only taking Him at His word, but also pledging obedience to Him in response to His word—regardless of whether I like it or I understand it. That leads me to my third point.

III. The Test Factor

Hebrews 11 catalogs the many people who lived before us and lived by faith. As you read through this wonderful chapter and think about the lives represented there and you read the Old Testament accounts of their lives, you learn that it wasn’t easy. It certainly wasn’t sunshine and roses. It was costly, perilous, and caused many of them to lay down their lives. And true faith today requires that we believe and obey God as well. It is a conviction. Regardless of whether we understand what God has said or we like what He said or find it pleasant or palatable, whether it is easy or difficult, we still believe and follow God. It is not faith if we place conditions on whether or not we will believe it and heed it.

I saw a quotation a while back that said, “If your god allows you to do whatever you please, then your god is really YOU.” You don’t have faith in God if you do what YOU want and set aside what God tells you to do. **Hebrews 11:8** shows us that faith demanded that Abraham leave the riches, comfort, and familiarity of his home in Ur to travel hundreds of miles to a land that he’d never seen. That’s faith. Faith moved Noah to obey and build an ark even though he didn’t know what a flood was all about. That’s faith.

So, the question is, are you living by faith?

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