

“How shall we then live?” Series #2

BY FAITH

Review:

The question: How shall we then live? calls us to think through the basics of how our heavenly Father desires His children to live in this world.

The answer in our first session was: to live rooted in the conviction that God has placed us into “Christ” and that our daily life is lived IN UNION WITH CHRIST.

Our life is rooted in the truth that we have this incredibly intimate relationship with Christ. It is trying to do our best for God, but by faith surrendering ourselves so that He can do His work in us and through us.

This is one of the secrets of living the Christian life and running well all the way to the end. His divine energies working in and through me producing the fruit that brings honour to the Father’s name.

Examples:

- He is my righteousness – not my trying to live right, but knowing that He has fulfilled all righteousness, I now live on the foundation that I am righteous in God’s sight because God has imputed to me the righteousness of Christ.
- The same is true of the way of sanctification and holy living. Jesus is more than just “the holy Son of God” and the One who was perfectly holy. By God placing us into union with Christ, we can now work in union with His divine power and life to lead us along the way of living out the holiness that God has already placed within us.

Key Scripture: 1 Cor.1:30.

BELIEVING

Introduction:

Today we want to answer the question: What does the biblical word “believing” really mean? Or expressed in another way: What does it mean to live by faith?

None of us will doubt the centrality and importance of faith in our Christian journey. None of us can read the Bible with our eyes and ears open and miss the frequent occurrence of such key words as “believe”, “trust”, “faith”.

It is unmistakably clear that God expects and asks of us to put our trust in Him, to believe in Him, to have faith in Him. In other words, from the beginning to the end of God’s Word, BELIEVING, HAVING FAITH IN GOD is how our Father wants us to live.

Key Scriptures: John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Gal.2:20; Eph.2:8,9.

This means that BELIEVING or HAVING FAITH is both for the beginning of our Christian journey and for every step along the way. We are now called “believers” because we believed what is written about Him in the Scriptures about Jesus and received His gift of forgiveness and life by faith. This is what we will be doing again and again as we meet with “unbelievers”. We will be calling them to believe in God, believe in Jesus, believe in what the Bible says.

But that’s just the beginning as we know. We are to “walk” or live by faith. See Rom.1:16,17; Col.2:6,7.

It also needs to be seen how God hates “unbelief” – see how Jesus responded to His disciples unbelief or little faith (see Matt.8:26).

Key questions:

- What does it mean to “believe” and “to live by faith”?

- When God calls us to believe and have faith, what does HE mean?
- What is the nature of true faith?
- What is authentic believing as a way of life?
- And are we living by faith?
- Is a humble and wholehearted trust in God in every area of our lives a distinctive mark of our Christian living?

What does the Bible teach us about true faith?

Luke's Gospel (see Handout)

Task:

- Read through and study these verses and note some of the threads or emphases.
- Note what Jesus commends as true faith.
- Note also what Jesus sees in His disciples as “unbelief” and how He responds to that.

John's Gospel (often known as “the Gospel of Belief”):

1. John in his Gospel uses “believe” as a verb over 90 times; never “faith”. This teaches us that “faith” and “belief” is an activity rather than a statement (an intellectual proposition).
2. John often uses the verb “to believe” together with the Greek preposition “eis” (in or into). See John 1:12; 3:36.

Defines the goal of believing, or places the stress and focus of the act of believing upon the person “into” whom the faith is placed, or the object of one’s believing.

Hence faith is primarily active and is focused upon the goal or object of its trust. The action taken is in keeping with the nature of the person who is the goal of faith.

“Believing” in the biblical understanding at its very root is an act of trust, of “entrusting one’s self to” or “into the hands of” someone in a daring and total sense. Hence the English word “commitment” is linked inseparably with true faith and believing.

Illustrations:

a) When a father invites his son to jump from a high point into his arms, the faith of this small child is rooted in his absolute trust and confidence in the person of the father – his strength, faithful word, righteous character (only intending good, never evil) etc. The child throws himself into the arms of his father in total confidence in the good will and the strength of the father. Maybe there is a moment of fear but that does not stop him from taking the daring step.

b) A young lady who “commits” herself to a young man in marriage. Marriage is a clear biblical picture of a person coming to faith in Christ – entering into a life-long and eternal covenant with this Person called Jesus, the Christ. In a human illustration, it is not a mere intellectual believing that this person is a nice man and would make a good husband. Rather this belief is translated into action and leads to taking the risk of giving one’s self en toto to that man in the belief that he will keep his promise and will care for her in every way.

3. Very often in John’s Gospel “believing” is in the present tense rather than in one of the past tenses (aorist or perfect). This means that it is an ongoing act rather than a one-time act at some past moment of time. A true “believer” or Christian is NOT known in the Scriptures as a person who makes a decision for Christ at some past time but rather as a person who has faith, who believes in the present moment. See John 11:20-27.

ABRAHAM as the example of true FAITH.

Task:

Read through the NT verses and passages where Abraham and his faith are mentioned and described.

- What do these verses confirm to us about the faith that pleases God, that God accepts?
- The Bible calls all children of God “sons & daughters of Abraham”. Write down some specific truths based on what the Bible says about Abraham’s trust/faith in God and what that means to us.
- Are you showing in your life and walk with God that you have genuine faith? In what particular areas of trust in God would the Spirit of Christ say to you: “O you of LITTLE faith”? Consider God Himself looks upon your “little faith” and how it affects your growth in His grace.
- Bring each response of “little faith” before God’s throne confessing it without any denial or excuse, receiving God’s word of forgiveness, then setting your heart and your mind towards a life of faith in each of those areas. Think through some definite action steps in at least one area of your weak faith.

Common evidences of “weak faith” among believers

1. **A spirit of unbelief** – by “spirit” is meant a predisposition towards, an attitude that marks a person’s life – like the OT Jews who had witnessed His glory and experienced His goodness but refused to believe Him for the next challenge, danger or difficulty – see Hebrews 3:5-4:11, “unbelief” is tasting or experiencing God’s kindness in one instance but then refusing with a stubborn and hard heart to trust God in later tests and trials. The Scriptures clearly teach God’s judgment of “believers” who test God through such an unbelieving attitude. Such people cannot please God. See Heb.11:6.
2. **Keeping man’s rules and regulations** – living by depending upon keeping rules and regulations in order to please God, in order to gain God’s help (eg through prayer), in order to be used by God. See verses/references from Galatians to “faith” and “believing”. Such Christians may profess to be true believers in Jesus Christ, but in real life they do not live by faith but their real search for significance and a right standing before God is based upon their performance as a Christian, that is, their keeping up to man-made rules and laws. Note the strength of Paul’s argument and concern for the Galatian believers who had fallen into this trap.

3. **Dominated or controlled by fears and anxieties** – a deep and ongoing fear that somehow the circumstances of my life (or the life of my team, the church, our nation) are out of control; that unless we step in and do something, terrible things will happen. Driven by underlying fears, an anxious spirit
4. **A spirit of negativity** – as a predisposition instinctively expecting the worst case scenario to happen; that things will turn out badly or against me. This is rooted in a spirit of unbelief.
5. **Hidden faith/trust in one's own mind and intellect** – the need to know and understand all things ahead of taking the leap of faith (“I understand; therefore, I believe!”) Imbibing the spirit of this age that refuses to believe anything that cannot be proven by the scientific method (a critical observation of information or evidences using the five senses leading to certain conclusions).
6. **A critical spirit** – scepticism, cynicism that “tests” God as in reality it despises or makes a mockery of God’s faithfulness, kindness and goodness to His people, something that dishonours God’s holy name
7. **A spirit of doubting** – a negative form of doubt that leads to a proud questioning of God’s goodness and kindness, His power to change things, or His sovereign control over all the circumstances of life. VERSUS humbly and simply trusting in God’s holy character and purposes regardless of what happens.
8. **Demanding some proof, evidence or sign first** – “seeing” versus “believing” – see John 4:48; 6:30; 20:25,27,29; 1 Peter 1:8.

God’s response to our lack of faith:

- Anger as our unbelief is putting God to the test and dishonours His holy name.
- Judgment because unbelief is a sin in His sight – a disobedience to His commands – see Heb.3:12

The fundamental issues of faith

Faith's foundations:

- God's person/character = His faithfulness and righteousness
- God's Word
- God's power to fulfil His promises
- God's sovereign rule

Faith's action:

- To obey God's command to believe God and His Word. God summons man to believe the Gospel. God calls us to trust in Him; see Prov.3:5,6.
- To step out on the basis on what "light" or understanding/revelation has been given. It is firstly an intellectual understanding of certain truths or facts, or agreeing with a set of Christian beliefs (a statement of faith). Rather taking action based on what one knows or has been revealed by God's Spirit, with only God's Word of promise to stand upon.
- To take risks, to step out into the unknown without a clear picture of what lies ahead. Just the assurance of God's presence and help. See Ex.33:14,15.

Faith's rewards:

- Peace and quietness – see Is.26:3,4; 30:15.
- Spiritual riches and blessings – see Jer.17:7,8.

Verses from Galatians about “faith”,
“believe”:

(Gal 1:23 NIV) They only heard the report:
"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

(Gal 2:16 NIV) know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

(Gal 2:20 NIV) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(Gal 3:2 NIV) I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

(Gal 3:5 NIV) Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

(Gal 3:6 NIV) Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

(Gal 3:7 NIV) Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

(Gal 3:8 NIV) The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

(Gal 3:9 NIV) So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

(Gal 3:11 NIV) Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

(Gal 3:12 NIV) The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

(Gal 3:14 NIV) He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

(Gal 3:22 NIV) But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

(Gal 3:23 NIV) Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

(Gal 3:24 NIV) So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

(Gal 3:25 NIV) Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

(Gal 3:26 NIV) You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

(Gal 5:5 NIV) But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

(Gal 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.

Some verses with Abraham from the New Testament (NIV):

(Rom 4:1 NIV) What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?

(Rom 4:2 NIV) If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God.

(Rom 4:3 NIV) What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

(Rom 4:9 NIV) Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

(Rom 4:12 NIV) And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

(Rom 4:13 NIV) It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

(Rom 4:16 NIV) Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

(Rom 4:18 NIV) Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

(Rom 9:7 NIV) Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

(Rom 9:8 NIV) In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

(Gal 3:6 NIV) Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

(Gal 3:7 NIV) Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

(Gal 3:8 NIV) The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

(Gal 3:9 NIV) So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

(Gal 3:14 NIV) He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

(Gal 3:16 NIV) The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

(Gal 3:18 NIV) For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

(Gal 3:29 NIV) If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(Gal 4:22 NIV) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.

(Heb 6:15 NIV) And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

(Heb 11:8 NIV) By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

(Heb 11:11 NIV) By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father

because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

(Heb 11:17 NIV) By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

(Heb 11:19 NIV) Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

(James 2:21 NIV) Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

(James 2:23 NIV) And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

Verses using “faith” and “believe”

from Luke’s Gospel:

(Luke 1:20 NIV) And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

(Luke 1:45 NIV) Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

(Luke 5:20 NIV) When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

(Luke 7:9 NIV) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."

(Luke 7:50 NIV) Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

(Luke 8:12 NIV) Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

(Luke 8:13 NIV) Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

(Luke 8:25 NIV) "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

(Luke 8:48 NIV) Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

(Luke 8:50 NIV) Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

(Luke 12:28 NIV) If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

(Luke 17:5 NIV) The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

(Luke 17:6 NIV) He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

(Luke 17:19 NIV) Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

(Luke 18:8 NIV) I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

(Luke 18:42 NIV) Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."

(Luke 20:5 NIV) They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?'"

(Luke 22:32 NIV) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when

you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

(Luke 22:67 NIV) "If you are the Christ, " they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me,

(Luke 24:11 NIV) But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

(Luke 24:25 NIV) He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

(Luke 24:41 NIV) And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

Bible study on “faith” in Hebrews 11.

Introduction: Here is God’s hall of fame of those who placed their trust in Him. Some were well-known people like Abraham, while the names of others aren’t even mentioned. But their FAITH is the central theme of their lives and their relationship with God. Faith was the dominant characteristic of their lives.

This chapter was written to some first century Christians from a Jewish cultural and religious background so that they would keep the faith against the threat of persecution and the pressure to retreat to their former ways and beliefs.

Use the following steps:

1. Speed-read through the whole chapter to see the big picture, i.e. the overall theme.
2. Re-read the whole chapter slowly to have a closer look at some of the details. If you can, read the chapter again in a different language, or in a different version/translation.
3. Write down the main themes that act like “threads” uniting the whole chapter, i.e. the main emphases made by the author. Note the verses that support these major themes/ideas.
4. Give a creative title to your study.
5. Write down a simple, clear definition of “biblical faith” based on what you have read and studied from this chapter. Keep your attention focused only on what this particular chapter highlights about faith.
6. Focus on one major point for personal application. Write down the message that God’s Spirit has spoken to you personally about your own personal faith.
7. Write down several action steps that you can take in living out this truth. Then pray committing yourself to follow this walk of faith.