



INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 11:1-3

Faith is the means of realizing spiritual reality, of gaining God's approval, and of understanding the origin of all that is.

Before we look at these three aspects of faith, it may be helpful to explain something about the nature of faith with reference to relationships. What I am about to say will probably sound obvious (“Duh!”). But I often see people violate this principle in their personal relationships, causing much damage. The principle is this: *Trust is essential for close personal relationships*. If you do not trust someone, you will not allow yourself to get close to that person. You will not share personal information because you are afraid that the person will use it in a way that damages you. You will not believe the personal information that the person shares with you, because you think, “I don’t trust this guy!”

Here is a second principle for close relationships: *Truth is the basis for trust*. If someone lies to you or deceives you, you will not trust what he says or does. You will always be on guard. If you sense that the person is a hypocrite, conveying that he is something that he really is not, you will keep your distance. A lack of truth erodes trust and causes distance in relationships.

There is a third principle for close relationships: *Truth must be expressed in love*. By love, I mean, “seeking the highest good of the other person.” The highest good for every person is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. This motive of love must undergird all verbal expressions of truth (Eph. 4:15). To blast a person may be truthful, but it is not loving. You may say, “That’s just the way I feel,” and that’s true. But you have not said it to build the other person in Christ, and so it is not loving. On the other hand, to deceive someone under the guise of love is to deny truth. Ultimately, this will undermine the relationship, because it erodes trust.

How does all of this relate to Hebrews 11? These elements of relationships also apply to our relationship with God. Faith or trust in God is at the foundation of a relationship with Him. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (11:6). You are calling God a liar if you do not trust Him, and you cannot be close to a liar. Truth is the basis for trust. If you doubt the truth of God’s Word, including His promises for the future, you cannot trust Him and thus will be distant from Him.¹

Watch It  Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #17; Heb. 11:1-40 www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples

¹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-32-faith-hebrews-111-3>

Open it

1. Have you ever been in a fight? What started the fight? What ended the fight? Looking back on it today, is there anything you would have done differently?

Read it

Hebrews 11:1-3

Explore it

2. What is faith?
3. Who was commended for their faith?
4. What does faith enable us to understand?
5. How was the universe formed?
6. Is God visible?

Apply it

Some of the things that God says are not easy to accept. For example, God confronts our unbelief and sin. But He always relates to us in love. When He sends difficult trials into our lives, whether persecution, the loss of our health, or the loss of a loved one, we have to trust Him, believing that He is acting in love to form Christ in us. If the enemy can get us to doubt God's love in a time of trials, we will draw away from God and disobey His Word of truth. To draw near to God, we "must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (11:6).

Understanding these principles—trust is essential for close personal relationships; truth is the basis for trust; and, truth must be expressed in love, which means, "seeking the highest good of the other person"—shows why faith (trust) is at the heart of a relationship with God.²

**7. Rate these 10 Biblical topics according to how much faith you have in them to be true:
(1 - very little, 10 - very much)**

Creation by God (young earth, old earth)

World Wide Flood

Literal heaven

Literal Hell

Jonah swallowed by a fish

Elijah taking a chariot to heaven

Samson killing 1000 men in a fight

Goliath over 9 feet tall

Biblical Inerrancy

Resurrection of Christ

In Luke 17:5–6, the apostles plead with the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And Jesus says, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." In other words, the issue in our Christian life and ministry is not the strength or quantity of our faith, because that is not what uproots trees. God does. Therefore, the smallest faith that truly connects us with Christ will engage enough of his power for all you need.³

8. What circumstances and/or Christian doctrines or practices in life have really challenged your faith? How has experiencing doubts helped or hindered your faith?

² <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-32-faith-hebrews-111-3>

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-smallest-faith>

9. When does doubting become an issue of sin in your life? Describe the line between doubting that leads to sin and doubting that leads to greater faith.

10. How does a person who struggles with doubts get faith and grow strong in faith?

11. Read Habakkuk 2:4. What does the Lord think about shrinking faith?

Read this story from Mark 9: (Emphasis mine)

¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” ¹⁹ And he answered them, “O **faithless** generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. **But if you can do anything**, have compassion on us and help us.” ²³ And Jesus said to him, “**‘If you can!’** All things are possible for one who **believes**.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out...

Jesus called the people a faithless generation.

The man who was seeking Jesus’ help was not sure that Jesus had the power to help his son.

Jesus actually calls out the man for not believing more fully! But what is the outcome of this situation? Jesus healed the boy and answered the man’s prayer! God’s grace, love, and mercy are not dependent upon the size of our faith but on the character of God Himself.

12. How did the man’s answer to Jesus demonstrate that he did have faith in Jesus?

13. Are there some areas in your life where you are experiencing “shaky” faith? How does Jesus’ response to this man in Mark 9 encourage you?

14. Why is it important to affirm that faith is not a work that gains God's merit?

The question I am trying to answer is this: If faith is the *sine qua non* of being saved (Ephesians 2:8; Acts 16:31; Romans 5:1), then is it proper to speak of faith as meriting salvation? Does one earn salvation by believing in Jesus?

In other words, I am assuming that the attitude of the heart and mind which we call faith is just as necessary to the salvation of the individual as the death and resurrection of Christ are, because it is that without which we will not be saved. Does this insistence that our faith is as necessary as Christ's death for our salvation mean that our faith merits salvation?

How we answer this question depends on our use of the terms involved. The key terms are "merit" and "faith." As the term is normally used, "to merit" (or "to deserve") something good from somebody means to perform some act or manifest some quality which has enough value to another person that it morally obligates him to reward it.

Illustration 1 – The Guilty Convict

What faith involves and whether it "merits" salvation may be shown by two illustrations. First, picture yourself as a murderer condemned to death and awaiting execution. You are guilty and everyone knows it. You deserve to die. Then you get a letter from the President of the United States which says that he has, by his sovereign power, decided to remit your sentence and let you go free.

The reason he gives for this decision is not that any new evidence has turned up, but rather he simply wants to demonstrate to everyone his power in this declaration of mercy and to transform your disregard for his laws into humble adoration of his merciful sovereignty. He calls your attention to his seal on the letter and instructs you to simply show it to the warden, who will then let you go free—no questions asked.

So you call the guard, show him the letter and get a hearing with the warden. As you enter the warden's office, you smell the fresh air of life and liberty blowing in his window and you see the tops of trees and a kite flying beyond the wall. You hand him the letter and he reads it. Without a query he orders the guard to get your things. As you leave the gates you turn to look at the massive prison and the row of windows where you had been an hour before. Then you start running and jumping and shouting and laughing and telling everyone, "The President let me out! The President let me out!"

Illustration 2 – The Poor Laborer

In the second illustration, picture yourself as a poor unskilled laborer who barely can scrape enough together to feed your wife and three children. One day you get in the mail a letter from a famous wealthy philanthropist. The letter says that if you will bring it to his lawyer, the lawyer will pay you a hundred thousand dollars—no strings attached. The reason he gives is simply that he enjoys giving to the poor.

There is no indication why he sent the letter to you and not to another. You need only go pick up the money with the letter. So you follow his instructions and go. Entering the lawyer's office, you hand him the letter. He says he has been expecting you, writes the check and bids you farewell.

The question that these two stories raise is whether you, in either situation, could properly speak of "meriting" freedom or wealth? You did have to meet a condition: The *sine qua non* of freedom and wealth was to present the letters from the President and the philanthropist. But to use our definition of merit, was your presenting of the letters an act so valuable to the President or to the philanthropist that they were thus obligated to reward you?

Why Faith is not Meritorious

I think the answer is clearly *no*. Only one thing obligated the President and the philanthropist—their own honor. Insofar as they were committed to maintaining their own honor, it was morally impossible for them to refuse the favor they had promised. In other words, there was something so valuable to them that they were obligated to “reward” it, namely, their own good name.

Faith is symbolized by the response of the prisoner and the poor man. On what basis could they with any assurance lay claim to the promise of freedom and wealth? No use of the terms “merit” or “deserve” in our ordinary experience would justify the prisoner’s saying to the warden, “I deserve (or merit) freedom because I brought you this letter.” Nor could he properly say, “My act of bringing you this letter is an act so valuable to the President that he is therefore obligated to free me.” That statement completely contradicts the dynamics of this situation.

The prisoner may say one thing: “Our merciful President has sent me a letter of remittance and I believe that his faithfulness to his word and his commitment to his own honor is so great that in spite of my guilt he will certainly do what he has said.”

Faith is the one human act which morally obligates another person without calling attention to the other person’s honor. Faith in God’s promise obligates him to save the believer not because the quality of faith is meritorious, but because faith is the one human act which calls attention alone to God’s merit, honor and glory and his unswerving commitment to maintain that glory.⁴

15. How do these illustrations help shape your understanding of a life lived by faith?

16. Faith is a gift from God - take a moment right now to thank the Lord for your faith and ask Him to grow your faith. Do you have people that you are praying for? Take a minute to write down their names and ask the Lord to give them this precious gift.

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/is-faith-meritorious>

This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Steve Lombardo (Plano Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup