

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

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Romans 12:2

The Foundation of Faith

Introduction – By Faith Series – Hebrews 11

Which do you think comes first in our lives- faith or obedience?

When we begin to think about it, it becomes apparent that faith and obedience are very closely related. We often must have faith in order to be obedient, yet even the very act of having faith is an act of being obedient.

Hebrews 11 tells of many people who demonstrated faith and obedience, and one thing that does seem to come first in all of these people’s lives is a proper perspective and focus. All of them seem to have a right view of God, His nature, and His character, as well as a right view of themselves and right priorities.

This right perspective is a good starting place for us, as well, for **faith is founded on a right perspective of God.**

How do we get this right focus and perspective of God?

Personal study of the Bible, memorizing scripture, prayer, and exposing ourselves to biblical teaching, all of which work to renew our minds (Romans 12:2), are a few of the ways that we can work to develop and maintain this right perspective.

Our society today tends to be filled with skepticism. We have lost faith in others, often because they have not lived up to their word or our expectations. We guard ourselves from trusting because we are accustomed to being scammed. Telemarketers, spam e-mail, television commercials- we face a barrage of false input everyday and develop a cynical attitude toward everyone and everything, often with good reason.

What have you lost faith in?

The biggest problem comes when we have this same attitude of distrust towards God. Although it is wise to be cautious in deciding whom we will believe, we are foolish to hold back from trusting the one Person who is completely trustworthy. **Faith is founded on Who God is.**

When we really understand God’s character, we realize how foolish it would be to doubt Him. An examination of God’s character will reveal that He is ultimately wise, reliable, and loving. Our obedience is the only response to Him that makes sense.

We are told in this chapter that these Old Testament saints gained God’s approval (Hebrews 11:2). Was it actually their works that saved these

“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ ”
Romans 7:7

“For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”
Hosea 6:6

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, by itself.”
James 2:17

“For by {faith} the men of old gained approval.”
Hebrews 11:2

people? No, because God’s standard then was the same as it is now. Perfection. While God does not require the same animal sacrifices and such that He did during Old Testament times, His standards are no lower now than they were then. He actually requires a higher level of obedience, as now the inner thoughts and motivations are put on trial rather than the outward actions only. For example, the commandment against murdering (Deuteronomy 5:17) is replaced by Jesus’ teaching that we will be held accountable for being angry with our brother or calling him an unkind name (Matthew 5:21-22), and adultery now includes lust (Matthew 5:27-28).

It’s incredible how much we fail to measure up to God’s standards, isn’t it?

This was the point of the extensive laws of the Old Testament (Romans 7:7); they were intended to point out our sinfulness and inability to meet God’s holiness. We all miss perfection, whether in our inability to follow every last detail of the law of the Old Testament or in our failure to live in complete purity and love. In fact, the words used in both the Old and New Testaments for sin come from root words defined as “missing the mark.” This is a much more strict definition than what we often think of as sin (doing evil), and makes it much more obvious that we are all sinful. Even if you struggle to think of yourself as a “bad person,” it is not nearly so hard to admit that you are not perfect, is it? Either way, we are infinitely far from God’s holiness.

God’s desire of loyalty rather than sacrifice, even in the Old Testament (Hosea 6:6), demonstrates the level of importance that He places on the heart condition and faith versus sacrifice and offerings.

Which do you find easier to align with God’s standards- your outward actions or your inner heart condition?

The thing that qualified or disqualified the men and women listed in Hebrews 11 was not their good works or sins. You will see as you explore the stories of these individuals that all of these people sinned; none of them were perfect. The thing that was accredited to them was not their actual good deeds. It was their faith (Hebrews 11:2). The obedience of these saints stemmed from their faith, and was not just an outward action, but was a demonstration of the kind of faith that they had, which was real, relevant, and active. This is the kind of faith spoken of in James chapter 2, and is an example to us as we seek to live lives that are pleasing God.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
