

FAITH FACTS

INTRODUCTION

Who here wants to please God?

How? What is he looking for? What pleases him? [film scene "I love you so much, I'll do anything to prove it, just tell me what you want me to do..."]

Get people to suggest what would please God.

But what does the Bible say? Hebrews 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God" – the essential non-negotiable vital factor.

Other reasons faith is important :

- Who wants to avoid sin? Romans 14:23 "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin"
- Who needs to be made right with God? Romans 3:28 "we conclude that a person is justified by faith"

An absolutely vital element in our Christian life – as individuals and also as a church. How are we doing? Are we "people of faith" individually and together? If not, are we pleasing God???

DEFINITION

So what is faith?

Common phrases "Blind faith", "Leap of faith" ...

Faith is trying to believe what you know isn't true.

Faith is an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable. (H Mencken)

Collins dictionary :

1. strong or unshakeable belief in something, especially without proof or evidence
2. conviction of the truth of certain doctrines of religion, especially when not based on reason

i.e. characterised by lack of proof, evidence, or reason

But what does the Bible say? Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"

i.e. characterised by being sure and convinced

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Ephesians 2:8 "By grace you have been saved through faith – and **this** is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" – what is "this"? = grace? Or being saved? Or faith?

I Corinthians 12:9 – faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit

Can't work it up, earn it, mature into it, develop it – only ask for it, seek it and receive it

The best way to get faith is to listen to God

- Romans 10:17 "Faith comes from what is heard, and this comes by the preaching of Christ"

Faith is based on what we know of God – his character and his word

- We can have faith in God – trusting him to be true to his character
- We can also have faith in what he has said – trusting him to keep his word

This is why it is not "blind faith" or irrational – it is based on a revelation of God's nature and word. "He said it, I believe it, that settles it"

For example, why is it that when we pray for people they are not always healed?

- James 5:14-15 "the prayer of faith will save the sick" – no if/but/maybe
- If God has said it, we can be confident that it will happen, so we can pray in faith.
- If God has not said it, we are praying in hope or wishful thinking, not faith, so it is unlikely to happen (though not impossible!)

So we need to know God – who he is, and what he wants, and what he is saying

Faith is then responding to that :

"Faith isn't believing in spite of the evidence;
Faith is obeying in spite of the consequence."

Faith is belief in action

- James 2:17 "Faith without works is dead" – you have to do something!!
- If we've heard God say something we have to respond by acting, otherwise we are in disobedience
- Romans 14:23 "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin", i.e. doing something when we haven't heard God say it, or not doing something when we have heard him.
- Jesus only did what he saw or heard his Father doing – John 5:19, 5:30, 6:38, 8:28, 12:49, 14:10

My definition : Faith is acting on something you believe without having seen it.

Might help to understand what faith is not – its opposites (there are three) :

1. doubt = lack of belief
2. unbelief = active belief in the opposite direction, against what God says
3. wrong belief = distraction or deception, some other direction

PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION

Liz Gentry act of faith – abseiling. Can believe ropes will bear weight, system of pulleys will work, instructor knows what he’s doing – only head-knowledge. Faith means stepping off the edge – putting belief into action.

Why is this important?

Matthew 9:29 “According to your faith it will be to you.” Level of faith determines degree of results, releases God’s action.

How much do you need?

Matthew 17:20 “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you will say to this mountain Move from here to there, and it will move; nothing will be impossible to you” – just a little – quality not quantity.

- Don’t need great faith in God, just faith in a great God
- “Nothing” doesn’t mean we can do what we like – faith is only in response to what God is saying – so if he has said it and we are moving out on that, it will certainly happen, and nothing will be impossible.

Mark 9:23 “All things are possible to him who believes”

OUR RESPONSE??

Are we ready for this?

Do we need it?

Do we have enough faith in God? Individually or as a church?

Perhaps our response is the same as the man who heard Jesus say “All things are possible to him who believes” – the father of a boy who needed healing.

Look at next verse : Mark 9:24 “I believe – help my unbelief!”

We do believe to a degree, we have faith sometimes, or we hear bits of what God says, and we act on it inconsistently. We believe – but we need his help to grow in faith.

Our prayer : “I believe – help my unbelief”??

WHAT NEXT?

Listen to God

Get close enough to hear his heartbeat

Know his concerns, understand his will, wait for his instructions

Then JUST DO IT!