

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Content of Faith Part 4 (Abraham – Part 1) Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

What is faith? That has been the question we have addressed over the past several weeks as we study Hebrews 11. What is faith? We might confidently assert along with verse one that faith ***“is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*** Faith is something inward, internal – something that resides within us. It is an assurance, a perceived guarantee of those things that we have only as a promise from God. It is a conviction, a firm and unwavering belief in those things that we have not yet seen.

When we speak of things like assurance and conviction, we tend immediately to think in personal terms – “I have a personal assurance or a personal conviction.” Even though these things are currently intangible, seeming untouchable, they are yet very real possessions. Faith is a possession, something that belongs to the one who has it. Any definition of faith that we give will by necessity include this idea of possession. Remember that I have been defining true biblical saving faith as *“a firm trust and confidence in the person, promises and provision of God through Jesus Christ resulting in behavior consistent with the Word of God.”* Faith is this trust, this confidence that the believer has – he possesses.

Too often however, this idea of possessing faith gets pressed no further. Being a personal possession, many who have it or think they have it come to image that biblical saving faith originated in themselves; that faith is not only the responsibility of the believer [which it is], but many think that it was also produced by the believer. Too often our current Christian climate propagates the idea that of all that God does for the believer, the one thing that He does not do is initiate and grant faith or belief – that this is somehow purely of human origin. Additionally, some will even teach that this “purely of human origin” faith precedes all other things that God does, saying that faith comes before grace, that faith brings about the calling of God, that faith results in God’s favor rather than God’s favor being the cause of faith.

Nothing is more damaging to the sovereignty of God and to the greatness of salvation than attributing some element of salvation to the sole prowess of man – that some people, due to something in themselves, were smart enough, clever enough, open enough, or lucky enough to exercise something they possessed apart from God – that is faith – in order to secure the blessing of God – that is salvation.

Beloved, I submit to you that true saving faith; the faith of Able, of Enoch, of Noah, of Abraham and indeed of all who believe, is always and only the result of the grace of God granting to the sinner such a faith so that he might believe and obey the things of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. This is the teaching of Paul in Philippians 1:29 where we read –

For to you it has been granted [a word which means to be given something by way of a favor] for Christ’s sake, not only to believe [of have faith] in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

Faith is granted, it is given by God – it does not originate within man but is bestowed upon a sinner. But all this begs a question. If faith does not originate in man, but is first

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bestowed upon the sinner so that he may believe and follow Christ, what is the means by which this faith is bestowed? In other words, how is it that a person comes to receive this gift of faith? The answer to that question is addressed in Hebrews 11:8 in a most simple and yet profound of statements – look at it again –

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed, by going out to a place which he was to receive for and inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

I submit to you that the most profound statement of this text is found in that phrase, ***“when he was called...”*** – beloved, true saving faith is always preceded by the call of God. Before faith, God first makes the call to the sinner – exhorting him away from an old way of life, of a life lived according to the precepts and whims of this world and calling such a one to Himself. Such is the testimony of 1 Thessalonians 1:9 which says

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

Before a person can be granted faith, they must see that they need faith and this need is seen by the call of God. And it is this call of God on Abraham’s life that is expressed in our text this morning – and from this text I wish to offer you three considerations:

- I. True faith is preceded by the call of God
- II. True faith produces obedience to God
- III. True faith produces holiness to God

Let us begin by continuing in this first point, much of which I have already addressed –

I. True faith is preceded by the call of God

Again, our text says – ***“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed...”*** Before faith and before obedience we see that Abraham was called. But what was he called from. This is important. Abraham was called out of spiritual darkness, out of a pagan land, out of idolatry, out of the world and its way of thinking. Before Abraham could be saved, before he could receive faith, before he could obey God, he had to be called.

Beloved, the same has always been true for believers. Anyone who is saved is only saved because God first called him. It is the call of God that precedes and then produces saving faith. This reminds us of an important biblical truth, namely that God is the initiator of faith and man is the responder. It has been said that if a true seeker-sensitive worship service was held in a church, no one would show up except for God for all have gone astray, no one seeks after God – not even one according to Romans 3:10.

Beloved, apart from the call of God, without His seeking, without His pursuing, without His grace and mercy, not one would ever respond to Him in faith. The call of God, which really speaks of the work of the Spirit of God on the heart which draws us to Jesus Christ by means of the written Word of God, is at the core – it is the root. The call of God is the root and faith therefore the fruit of the work of God.

One question that arises is how many times must a person be called before faith is exercised? Does God only issue one call or does He call repeatedly? I say to you that the

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calling of God may be heard but once in one person's life and heard many times in another's. There is however, only one point of conversion, but until that conversion, the call of God may extend over time.

The case in point lies before us in Hebrews 11 and the faith of Abraham. It is fascinating to me that there are more verses related to Abraham's faith in Hebrews 11 than of any other character. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, Abraham is the picture of faith. If we want to learn about faith, Abraham is one to consider.

And when God called Abraham to faith, when He called him out of darkness, did Abraham immediately exercise "saving" faith? I say to you that he did not. In fact there are at least three calls of God to Abraham recorded in Genesis, first in Genesis 11:31 then a second time in Genesis 12:1-3 and then a third and decisive time in Genesis 15 culminating with these words in verse 6 that finally reveal Abraham's God-given faith saying,

Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

However many years transpired between Genesis 11 and 15, we do know that in this time God called before Abraham exercised faith. It took all this time and a 1500 mile journey from Ur to Canaan before Abraham's faith came to full fruition.

Why is this important? Why must we consider this? Let us remember the original readers of our text. Primarily these were Jews who had left the synagogue and much of Judaism but they had not yet come all the way to Jesus. Hebrews 11:8 is an exhortation to encourage such ones to embrace the fullness of Christ. It is a reminder that it is not enough to simply forsake old ways or abandon the world's thinking, one must come all the way to Christ. True faith leads not simply to a turning away from idols and the things of this world – many unsaved persons will give up things of this life they deem to be immoral or unprofitable – true faith brings a person to fully embrace the Savior, to follow after and live for Christ. This is the faith of Abraham. It took some time, but he did fully embrace the person, promises and provisions of God. He first heard the call and then by God's grace, was granted the ability to believe, to exercise faith, to follow after God.

Beloved, the faith of Abraham is not a special faith, in that it is to be somehow unique among the people of God. Abraham did not possess a higher faith, a special faith reserved for only a select few – rather I exhort you to remember that Abraham possessed a common faith, a faith that is true for all who are truly saved. In other words, the faith of Abraham is the same faith exercised by everyone who enters the kingdom of God. Our purpose for studying the faith of Abraham is not to make us feel guilty for not attaining to some higher plane of faith, but rather to show each of us who profess to have faith what that faith really looks like. My faith is to look like Abraham's faith – a faith that is the result of finally hearing aught the call of God.

So let me ask you – have you heard the call of God? Has God called you away from the world to turn to Him exclusively and wholly? Have you come all the way to Christ? Do you realize that no one is saved when he wants to be, but only at God's appointed time? And you cannot be saved until you have first clearly heard the call of God, a call that will result in the granting and exercising of faith.

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II. True faith produces obedience to God

As a result of hearing this call of God comes the prime result and evidence of Biblical saving faith – obedience. This is our second point, that true faith produces obedience to God. Look at our text again and see the evidence of Biblical saving faith – obedience. Look at our text again, ***“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out...”***

True faith that has come as a result of the call of God then results in obedience, an obedience described two ways in our text, first as a ***“going out”*** and then later on in the verse as ***“he went out”***. We are reminded that faith results in a changed lifestyle and a new pursuit after God. Abraham, after receiving his call could not be saved by remaining in sin, by continuing in his pagan lifestyle. He had to turn to God. God called him out of his polytheism – his worship of many false gods, out of his selfishness, out of his godlessness. Abraham was called to break with the world system and to take steps toward God. Beloved, the call of God is an exhortation, a command that we be ***“going out”*** from this world’s system, this world’s way of thinking, and this world’s way of acting in order to follow after and obey God.

Just how critical is this for us to understand? We must see this connection between the call of God, to faith and obedience as it is central to the New Testament. Let us take some time to see this connection. Turn first to Galatians 1 – we begin in verse 3 where we read,

Galatians 1:3-4

***3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father,***

God gave His Son so that we might be rescued, turned away from this present evil age. But just how does one come to be rescued. Look with me at verse 6,

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

This rescuing and being turned away from this world’s system is a result of being “called” by the grace of Christ. Turn with me to Ephesians 4 where we again see this connection between obedience, which is a product of faith and the call of God.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Here we see that the purpose and evidence of being called by God is walking or living ***“in a manner worthy”*** – in a way consistent with faith and the call of God. In other words, if you have been called, you will walk by faith, you will “go out” by faith, even as Abraham did. Have you been called out of this world and its ways? Look at Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 17 where again we see this connection between the call of God and the obedience of faith.

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Ephesians 4:17-21

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him [call of God] and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus...

In other words, if you have heard the call of God, there will be a separation from those things of the world that pit themselves against the knowledge of God. I would like you to see just how important of a theme this is throughout the NT as the Apostle Paul says the same thing he said to the church at Ephesus to the church of Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 2:12

so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

Beloved, the call of God is to live for Him, not for ourselves. When left to ourselves we will invariably subject ourselves to some standard of moral filth, some filthier than others, but all to sub-standard of God. By faith, as a result and in response to the call of God, we are to pursue holiness and this life worthy of such a calling. This kind of life can only be lived by faith, not by our abilities, but by a trust and confidence that God has called you out of ungodliness and worldly desires and has enabled you to do so. Such an idea is recorded in 1Thessalonians 5:23-24,

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

If you have been called by God, if you have been granted faith, you will live a sanctified, called out, set apart life. Such is the faith of Abraham. Such is the faith of everyone who has been truly saved. If God has called you out, then you will live by faith, which means you will live in obedience to God.

III. True Faith produces Holiness to God.

This calling of God and its resultant faith will also produce holiness, which is nothing more than a description of obedience. This is our third and final point, that true faith produces holiness to God. Holiness of life and obedience are intrinsically connected. Abraham, as a result of his being called, exercised faith, a faith that was seen or evidence in both obedience to God's Word, but also then in holiness or purity of life. Again, such a faith is not exclusive to

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Abraham. He is only the example of true faith so that we might know what to look for in our own lives. This God-call resulting in faithful holiness is also a key teaching of all the New Testament which I greatly desire to show you. Turn to 1 Peter 1:14-16

1 Peter 1:14-16

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

Again we learn that the calling of God is absolutely necessary before one is enabled to live a holy life unto God. Peter emphasizes this again in 1 Peter 2:9 which says,

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

God has first called us out of darkness, out of sin, out of this world, making us a “holy nation” – that is a holy people who live holy, set-apart lives by faith. In no uncertain terms are we taught then that the calling of God is the precedent to salvation, comes before the exercise of faith, precedes any obedience. But, once the call of God has been heard, the evidence of hearing comes only in or through obedience and holiness of life. Let me point you to a few more verses that drive home this point. I give these to you not to be redundant; not because I think I have not proved the point, but to honor the Word of God which is abundantly overflowing with exhortation after exhortation, and description after description of the necessity and reality of this truth. In 1 Peter 3:9 we read,

8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

The call of God is a call to live differently from the world. When we, by faith, live differently, our walk with God is elevated, we enjoy closer communion with the Lord and we become more and more disentangled with the affairs of this world. This is the idea behind 1 John 2:15-17 where we read,

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does [implies having heard and then obeying] the will of God lives forever.

This is not a call not to love the physical beauties of this world, the mountains, rivers, and the like, but rather not to love the system, the thinking, the desires of this world that are antithetical to God's truth. The world seeks to draw us in with baited hook, to allure us away from obedience and holiness, to dismantle faith and disregard the call of God. But the example of Abraham is this, that upon hearing the call of God, received faith from God, faith

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that caused him to obey, faith that caused him to pursue holiness by his “going out” from the world as it was in his day. Abraham was called by God to have faith in God – a faith that is evidenced by obedience and holiness. And such is true for believers today.

Let me turn you to Jude 1 where we see an interesting title given to believers. Here in Jude 1 we read,

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:

Did you catch how true believers are referred to here – “the called.” Interestingly enough the Greek word for “church” literally means – “the called out ones.”

So, let me ask you again, have you been called by God? Have you been called out of this world? How can you know if you have been called, if you are a part of “***the called***” as Jude put it? How can you know if you have and are exercising the faith of Abraham, a faith that is common to all who believe?

Have you heard the call of God – does His Word speak to you, convicting you of sin, comforting you with hope and challenging you to walk after Christ? Does your “faith” result in obedience? Are you walking in a manner worthy of your calling? Do you long to read the Word of God, communion with God in prayer, fellowship with His people. These are calls of God on the believer, the one who does not long for these things is disobedient and is not heeding the call of God? Does your faith drive you to holiness, to be more and more like Christ and less and less like the world. Are you more like Christ today than you were say 6 months ago or a year ago. Faith drives the believer to greater holiness, not stagnant or shrinking holiness. Beloved, let us see in our faith the faith of Abraham, a faith that is the result of the call of God, a faith that obeys God, and a faith that pursues holiness to the glory of God. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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