

Faith (Part 5)

Grace

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Last week the admonishment by Jesus to remember Lot's wife was central to the theme of that sermon, which was on faith, and faith is what separated the great heroes of the Bible from the rest of their contemporaries. Abraham and Moses were strong in faith, Lot seemed to be of the quality of what we would call today a nominal Christian, and Lot's wife appears, despite all of her privileges, to have not believed at all. We see in these examples a descending scale in terms of quality, but the overall lesson is what a person believes is a major driving force of his conduct, and therefore, affects the quality of his life, the quality of the life of his community—which may be just his family—the quality of his witness for God, and far more importantly, the outcome of his life.

Luke 17:32-33 Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Notice the context because this was a portion of Jesus' instruction regarding how to be prepared for the time of the end; how to be prepared for the time of His coming; how to be prepared for the tribulation. If we keep advancing the time a little bit toward the time that we live in, we can say generally that the instruction that Jesus was giving here was on how to be prepared for the time of the end. The major reason for giving the signs and the instructions Jesus gave here is so that His disciples would be motivated to spiritual preparation.

Undoubtedly the major lesson from Lot's wife is derived from her looking back as we saw in Genesis 19, and her looking back was interpreted by Jesus' statement that we read in verse 33. Everybody remembers that she looked back. Jesus says remember it and His interpretation is whoever seeks to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Jesus' interpretation was that what she did revealed a longing to preserve the life that she came from in Sodom, and it was her desire to save that rather than discard her way of life. She not only looked back, as we found, she also dawdled. She dawdled so much that she did not make it to the place of safety. Lot made it. The daughters made it, but she looked back from behind. It does not say that she merely looked back behind her, but it shows that she looked back from behind Lot.

In other words, she was trailing him, perhaps by a significant distance, and so God destroyed Sodom and the other cities of the plain. Apparently whenever Lot stepped into the city that was the signal, BAM! The fire and brimstone came down out of heaven and they made it inside the city, but Lot's wife, who was dawdling behind seeking to save her way of life, was incinerated, killed by the gases, or whatever, and turned into a pillar of salt. I think it is pretty plain that she did not make it to the place of safety. Zoar, in that case, was the place of safety, but her underlying action—and this is what we need to understand—was a severe lack of faith. She did not believe it when the angel told her to get out, to leave, to escape. God is going to destroy

this city. Destruction is imminent. Leave!

We need to move to the next chapter because Jesus' instruction did not end where men ended the chapter, but actually the instruction that He gave at this time continued right on through into chapter 18.

Luke 18:1, 8 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, . . . I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes [we are still on the instruction regarding the time of the end, the instruction from chapter 17 continued right on through], will He really find faith on the earth?

This parable directly relates to what He said just before it. I do not know whether you are aware, but it is a distinctive part of Luke's gospel that Luke put things in order. Apparently he put them in time sequence, where Matthew arranges things topically and does not pay so much attention to time, although that is also there. Luke pays a great deal of attention to time and less attention to arranging things topically. Luke has the very strong tendency to put things—or link things, subjects—together as they were given, in the order they were given. This instruction which ends with this question—in this parable anyway—"shall He really find faith on the earth?" is immediately followed his instruction regarding remember Lot's wife. Again the inference is quite strong that she did not have any faith.

The parable was also somewhat unusual because the point, the purpose, the reason why it was given, is right at the beginning, and it is those who are going to be living at the time of the end better be persevering in prayer. You better be preparing. Remember what it says in Matthew 24 about praying? Watch and pray always. Here we have Luke 17, a somewhat different time period, when compared to Matthew 24. Then again Jesus reminds us, admonishes us, that at the time of the end we better be praying, we better persevere in it, we better endure in it, we better keep it up, we better be praying consistently.

How does that relate to faith? Because it takes faith to pray, and it takes faith especially to persevere in prayer. If you remember, we began in this series in Hebrews 10 where it talks about enduring and not drawing back, and is the opening for what follows in chapter 11, the great chapter on faith. Faith is needed for endurance. Faith is needed for persevering. Faith is needed for even persevering in prayer. To me the implication is, from the context in which this appears, that at the time of the end iniquity is going to be so pervasive and so compelling a force that our only resource for enduring its influence is going to be our contact and relationship with God. Otherwise we are going to be sucked in.

Do you recall reading in Matthew 24 that because iniquity shall abound, Jesus said, the love of many shall wax cold? Here is the parallel statement by Jesus reinforcing that statement that iniquity is really going to be compelling at the end. It is going to be compelling in its attractiveness. It is going to be compelling in that we are surrounded by it. It is going to be compelling because our peers and our associates outside of the church are going to be involved in it and we are going to have a tendency to go along with them and say, "Everybody else is doing it, it must not be all that bad."

How can one have a relationship with one who is nothing more than a casual acquaintance? I

am thinking about God here mostly. Casual acquaintances are those that we say "hello" to, or "hi," or as they say down here in the south, "hey." We say to them, "have a nice day," or "isn't it a nice day," or "the weather is nice, isn't it," and that is about it. Our conversations are not much more extensive. Jesus is making it very clear that the persons who are going to be heard by God are the ones who do not give up praying. That is, making conversation with God, and they are doing it in order to develop the relationship and their faith, therefore, is essential to persevering in prayer.

If we are going to have a good prayer life, faith is going to be essential to it as well. Let us continue to develop the necessity for faith and its importance.

II Peter 1:5-8, 10 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

This series of verses is building upon the implication of grace—that is, gifts given in the previous verses—and later on in the sermon we are going to get back to those verses. What Peter is saying is that grace—that is the gifts of God—both enable or empower us and make demands upon us by putting us under obligation. Those of you who heard the sermons in the past on self-government, on responsibility, know that I stressed that very strongly. Titus 2:12 tells us that the grace of God teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and we should live righteously, and so on. Receiving the grace of God puts us under obligation to respond.

What Peter is saying here is the grace of God demands diligence, or effort would be another way of putting it. In verse 5 it says, "giving all diligence [or effort]." There is even a little bit more than that that is helpful to understand and that is that Peter is saying that we are to bring this diligence, this effort in alongside, in cooperation with, what God has already given. So God freely extends His grace, but grace puts us under obligation to respond, and we are then to do our part in cooperating with what God has given to us. And He said, do it diligently, speedily, with a great deal of effort.

We ministers are almost constantly speaking of growth. Did you notice the order that Peter listed these things we are to become fruitful through? He says "add to your faith," and that word "add" is also woefully mistranslated into the English. Yes it can mean "add," but it is much more expansive than that. "Generously supplement" would be more literally correct, and that brings it in harmony with the word *diligence*. Make great effort. Be speedy. Generously supplement your faith.

Faith is seen as the starting point for all of these other qualities or attributes. It does not mean or imply in any way that faith is elementary, but rather fundamental or foundational—that the other things will not exist, as aspects of godliness, without faith undergirding them. The way that it is written in the Greek, it is as though each one of these qualities flows out from the previous ones. Another way that we might be able to put it is that faith is like the central or dominant theme in a symphony and all these other qualities are amplifying or embellishing it.

Very much, then, of how much one accomplishes and what one accomplishes depends on where one begins, and so Peter is showing us here that there is a divine order, and the divine order for growth begins with faith. With that thought in mind, let us go back to that wonderful Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11:5-6 are going to be central to the beginning of this sermon as we continue to lay the foundation here.

Hebrews 11:5-6 By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, "and was not found because God had translated him"; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Here we are faced with a statement of profound importance. Faith is not everything in terms of Christianity, because as it is given by Paul in I Corinthians 13, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Faith is the starting point. Love is the finishing point, the culmination. But do you get the picture, that without godly faith, their will be no godly love?

Faith is fundamental to everything in Christianity. We cannot get away from its importance. It is fundamental to everything, and so though love is the greatest, faith is the foundation. Though hope is great, it is great because of the motivation that it gives to life and to the quality that it gives to life, but, again, faith is its foundation. We read in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance," the foundation—it undergirds—it is the foundation upon which all of Christianity rests. I am speaking here in terms of the attributes of God.

The reason for this is because everything in Christianity flows from a relationship. It is the relationship that we have with God, and again—a reminder—that it is so important that we understand what Jesus Christ did and how this is pictured in Hebrews—how that He opened the way into the Holy of Holies; how the veil between the two chambers of the sanctuary was rent in two, opening up the way to God. The reason it was opened up was so that we could have a relationship, because everything in Christianity flows from that relationship and that relationship is founded upon—based upon, has as its foundation—trust.

The relationship with God is a relationship of trust. But it is different from other relationships because it is a relationship with someone we cannot see. It is a relationship with someone who does not listen, speak, or interact with us in the normal manner of others with whom we have a relationship. The relationship with God is built upon mutual trust. God is trustworthy. He does not sin. He does not break laws. But man does sin and perhaps the single most devastating effect of sin other than death is that it destroys trust. And without trust the only relationship that we can have is an adversarial one. We will be fighting with one another.

Can children who break the 5th commandment and dishonor their parents be trusted? If a child, a young person, is told by his father or mother that, I want you to do such and such—let us say, go to such and such a store and follow such and such a route to get there, and you find out later on that the child took a different route to get there—is your relationship with the child improved because they went and did something different from what you said? You do not trust that kid the same way, do you? It is the same way with every aspect of the keeping of the 5th

commandment, and if there is going to be a good relationship between parents and children, the parents have to love their children, but the children also have to respond in obedience to their parents, or that trust is going to be broken and the relationship then becomes adversarial because, in many cases, the child begins to rebel.

We can go on to other commandments. If I would kill your mate, are you going to trust me? No. The breaking of the 6th commandment destroys trust. If someone commits adultery with your mate, are you going to trust that person, are you going to trust your mate? Fornicators do not trust one another either because there is always the idea in the back of their head that if that person will do this with me, they will probably do it with others as well. And that mistrust goes right on into the marriage. It does not end just because maybe the two people say, "I do." The breaking of commandments destroys trust.

Can you trust somebody who steals from you? Can you trust somebody who lies to you? Are you going to trust someone you know covets something that you have? Well, of course not, and neither is God going to trust someone who, through idolatry, gives their loyalty and devotion to another, or profanes His name, or breaks His Sabbath by failing to keep His appointment with Him, or by giving their attention to their business rather than to His.

Would you deliberately marry someone that you knew beforehand could not be trusted? Would you enter into a covenant with them? A lending agency, like a bank, delves into our economic background because they want to be sure that before they loan you the money that you can be trusted to repay it, or that you have the property that they can seize just in case you break trust with them. And if they are not satisfied, they are not pleased to loan you money.

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and was not found because God had translated him"; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

How? By his faith. He trusted God, did he not? And as a result, "God became a rewarder," is the correct translation of that verb in verse 6—it is part of the verb "to be." He became a rewarder as a result of the trust. These verses are showing a relationship. They are showing the ingredients that were a major part of that relationship, and they are also showing some of the fruit of that relationship. So God and Enoch had a relationship. The ingredient of that relationship was a mutual trust, and the fruit was that God rewarded him.

Genesis 5:24 adds that "Enoch walked with God." Everyone of us knows that "walk" is a symbol in the Bible of proceeding through life, meaning that Enoch lived his life with God as being a major part of his perspective. He walked by faith. Amos 3:3 adds, "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" God and Enoch agreed. They walked together, therefore we can very safely conclude that their relationship was not very adversarial, but instead there was mutual trust.

Now, because there was peace between them, Enoch could be taught the truths of God. This begins to get very interesting. Before we can really be taught the truths of God, there has to be peace. There cannot be an adversarial relationship. What I am saying is that there has to be repentance before there can be peace, a repentance that ends the adversarial relationship so that mutual trust can begin to be built.

God's response to that is very important. Remember these verses. In fact I will turn to one of them in John 15:13-15. In Jesus' discourse before He was crucified He says:

John 15:13-15 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends [Did Jesus lay down His life? These people were His friends.] if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Once we become friends with God—once there is peace, once we are walking together, once we are agreed—we are now in the frame of mind that God can tell us His truths, and He tells us because we are His friends. It is setting up the kind of environment in which God can begin to pass on the knowledge of God to you and me. God wants us to know and to understand, He wants to give us His truth, but He gives it to His friends.

We have been talking a lot about Sodom and Gomorrah. Can you remember from Genesis 18, which precedes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, how that Abraham felt close enough to God that He would actually, in a respectful and polite way, argue with God and make appeals to Him? Well if there are fifty, how about saving the city? If there are forty? How about thirty? How about twenty? How about ten? He was close enough to God to persevere in prayer that way, believing that God would continue to meet what Abraham was asking Him. I wonder if you understand what preceded that. The one Angel, who was God, said to the other angel, "Shall I tell Abraham what I am going to do?" And then He answered His own question: "I will make known to Abraham because I know him." See, He told His friend what He was about to do.

Picking up on this principle, let us go back to Enoch. We can, therefore, very safely conclude that Enoch was not going around sinning. I do not mean that he never sinned. I mean that it certainly was in no way the pattern of his life. God was pleased because here was somebody trustworthy, somebody that God felt comfortable associating with, being around, and sharing life's experiences with. God was not afraid that Enoch was going to do things that were going to endanger their relationship, and so when the time came that Enoch needed help that God could give him, He gave it. Enoch needed his life preserved because the times that he lived in were so bad he was about to be murdered, and God intervened and took him to a place of safety.

There is something hidden here in the translation from the Greek to the English that I think is worth mentioning so we will see perhaps a little more clearly the power of the relationship between God and Enoch. Every single verb in the entire chapter except for three are in the aorist tense, which is the equivalent of our English simple past tense. That is, that the event that all these verbs are used in or with have happened and they are done, or over with. They occurred and they are over with. That is it. They are done.

Those three that are not in the aorist tense are in the perfect tense. This denotes that the thing was done, but the effect of what was done continues all the way up to the present, to the time that the words are being read. You have read at times the statement in the Bible, "It is written." That is written in the perfect tense. It was written in the past, but what was written still applies and it is affecting us today. Unfortunately, this cannot be clearly seen in the modern translation into English.

One of those three times is in verse 5. The other two are in the episode involving Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and in Moses keeping the Passover. In verse 5 it appears in the very last phrase, "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." It is the verb that is translated "he had." For that to be properly translated into English, it would have to be amplified into "it has been and is still witnessed" that he well pleased God. What was it that was witnessed of and is still being witnessed of and affecting us today? The answer is supplied right in the two verses here, 5 and 6. It was that he walked by faith and not by sight, and knowing the tenor of the times that he lived in, he walked by faith and not by sight in the midst of a horribly violent, a religiously and socially degenerate, generation.

Here is where it is affecting you and me. Enoch lived in that period of time just before the flood, the time that the time of the end is most frequently compared to—"As in the days of Noah...." Enoch lived in that period of time, that same period of time that Noah did. What Enoch did is that he showed that a person can be obedient to God regardless of how bad society gets. Remember that when you think that you have it tough. Enoch is still witnessing to you that it can be done. When it got so bad that his very existence was threatened, God took him away. That is a witness to you (and me too).

I I Corinthians 5:7, 9 For we walk by faith, not by sight. . . .Therefore [as a result of this] we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Exactly the same words as Hebrews 11:5, "well pleasing." Enoch was well-pleasing to God, and he did it by faith, by walking by faith. Enoch, walking by faith and not by sight in the midst of one of the most perverse generations ever to live on the face of God's good green earth, did not judge according to what he saw. He was not deceived by outward appearance or by material prosperity. He was not deluded with all the schemes being aired as how to deal with all the social, economic, political evils for the improvement of that corrupt state of things that were going on around him. He did not seek to please men, and he undoubtedly did not please them because they sought to kill him. But he focused on the same things that we are to focus on, seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and when the time came to intervene, God took him to a place of safety.

Brethren, the link between Enoch and you and me is there. Do we get the point as to how he is still witnessing to us? So the effect remains. Thus we see that Enoch's trust of God was expressed in obedience and God's response to Enoch's trust were blessings that only God can give.

What kind of gifts is God going to give? They are almost invariably going to be spiritual because that is what is important to God's purpose. One of these gifts can be more faith. What does God do? Does He just magically just give us a transfusion of more faith? No, it does not work like that. Doing it like that would be similar to a child in school being given an "A" on his report card when he does not deserve it. That would simply do the child no good. It would be nothing more than a facade.

Brethren, we have to understand where faith comes from and what our responsibility is in relation to it.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

I used this verse a couple of sermons ago when I should not have. Fred McGovern pointed out to me afterward that Adam Clarke commented that the word *it* ("it is the gift of God") really more accurately should be translated *this*. But in that last phrase, "it" and "faith" are a different gender. So in the Greek language the gender of the pronoun in this case has to match the antecedent. The antecedent here cannot possibly be faith because it is neuter and faith is feminine. Therefore the "it" has to refer to another neuter word and what it is referring back to is the word "saved." Faith indeed is a gift of God, but it cannot be proved by this verse so do not use it the way I did.

Faith is produced by the grace of God that is given to us. It is the grace of God that empowers us to believe. We are going to follow this so that we understand very clearly where faith comes from and what our responsibility is in relation to it. The power to believe and the act of believing are two very different things. I should put it this way: without the power to believe, no one has ever believed with the kind of belief that is necessary for salvation, but with that power, once you have the power, once you are enabled, once the grace, the gift, has been given to us, then the act of faith is the man's own. Let us understand this.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. . .

We are going to focus on the word that is translated in the New King James as "right." If you have a King James Version it says, to them He gave the "power." This is *Strong's* # 1849. It is capable of a variety of usages. It can be used as power, authority, capability, ability, strength, entrusted, commissioned. It implies the liberty or power to do something. It is the word *exousia*. It has its roots in the word *exesti*. When the two of them are put together, *exesti* and *exousia*, they combine two different ideas, right and might. You are given the right to do something, and you are given the might to do it. So you have the right to do it and you have the might, or the power, to do it. What did God do here through Jesus Christ? As many as received Him, to them He gave the right, or the power. He gave the right and the power, to become children of God.

Let us continue to understand this more completely in the book of Romans and we will see direct application of this. Do not forget we are tracing out where faith comes from and our responsibility to it.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

The principle that we are chasing out here is expressed by Paul in relation to repentance. His statement here assumes the people to whom he is writing know better than they are doing and, therefore, they better repent. But whether in ignorance or in knowledge, it is God's goodness, a gift of God, the grace of God that leads to repentance. Whether it is done at the beginning of the conversion process, or whether we are brought to repentance after the conversion process begins over some specific thing that we need to repent of in order to keep on growing, God is on the job. He is leading. He is guiding. He is showing us where we need to change. He is probably even affecting our feelings regarding what we are doing so that there will be the

motivation, the empowerment and, therefore, the responsibility. The right and the power to repentance. And so God is the Great Educator and at the same time, He is a parent chastening His children, disciplining, training His children.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

There is a whole series of things that are coming from the grace of God given in that verse.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

Here we see that love is also given by the Holy Spirit, a gift of God. Love is a gift of God's grace.

Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength [powerless]. . .

When we had not been given the right, we had not been given the power, we were sick, weak, powerless, but now we are empowered by God's gift. That is the implication there. He then goes on to show how the grace of God, this time expressed in forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, enables us then to have life then through the Holy Spirit. Eternal life is a gift of God.

Let us continue to chase this and go to John 16.

John 16:7-8 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send it to you. And when it has come, it will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

What are we talking about here? We are talking about the Holy Spirit, which is a gift of God, which is going to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The implication is very strong that if God did not send the Holy Spirit, the world would not be able to relate to sin, relate to judgment, relate to righteousness. They cannot properly do it until the gift of God's Holy Spirit is given. The Spirit is given to empower people to understand sin, righteousness, and judgment. Are we beginning to see that all of these things have their roots in the gift of God? If God did not take action, we would never see these things in the right perspective, and because He does take action we can now see them from His point of view rather than from those points of view that are merely human.

John 16:13-15 However, when it, the Spirit of truth, has come, it will guide you into all truth; [that is biblical truth, spiritual truth, the truth of God] for it will not speak on its own authority, but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come. [That is events having to do with God's purpose.] It will glorify Me, for it will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. [We would not have it unless it did that.] All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that it will take of Mine and declare it to you.

John 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees it nor knows it; but you know it, [now look at this] for i