Faith, Obedience, Grace

Faith – πίστις - pistis

- 1) conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervour born of faith and joined with it
 - a) relating to God
 - (1) the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ
 - b) 1b) relating to Christ
 - (1) a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God
 - c) the religious beliefs of Christians
 - d) belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same
- 2) fidelity, faithfulness
 - a) the character of one who can be relied on

Psalm 14: 1

- Faith isn't just an option, it's an attitude of the heart.
- You can be religious and yet still be a practical atheist. (Do you live as though there's a God?)

Hebrews 11: 1-3

- Faith isn't just "believing in something you know isn't true anyway"!
- It's not just a leap into the dark. (It's a leap into the light!)
- It is spiritual certainty.

Hebrews 11: 6

- It is impossible to please God without faith.
- We can and must believe that God exists.
- He is there, and we will find him if we earnestly seek him.

James 2: 14 26

- Faith without actions is useless.
- Striving to be righteous: deal with sin. Striving to have a relationship with God: prayer, Bible study.
- Striving to help others: church, evangelism, caring for the needy.
- Faith is complete only when it is active faith.
- Abraham's faith and actions worked together. In Genesis 22, God knew Abraham had true faith only at the moment of obedience (22: 12).
- No one is justified by faith without deeds (James 2: 24).
- Note: Because of his belief in "justification by faith alone" and "once saved, always saved," Luther (1500s) rejected the entire book of James. He also rejected Hebrews, since this book repeatedly states that it's possible to lose our salvation. (Luther disagreed.)

Hebrews 11:4-10

- By faith Abel *offered* an acceptable sacrifice to God (**Hebrews 11:4**)
- By faith Noah *built* the ark to save his family after being warned by God (**Hebrews 11:7**)
- By faith Abraham *obeyed* and *went* to a foreign land because he understood that God was calling him to an even better home (i.e., heaven) (**Hebrews 11:8-10**)
- Faith in action is the righteous response to the living words of God

Faith in God's Promises (Faithful action is defined by fulfilling the conditions of God's promises)

- 1. God Desires to Bless Us
 - A. God's dealings with humankind has always been characterized by gracious offers of divine blessing with conditions of faith and obedience to his will—i.e., promises in the form of conditional statements (if... then...)
 - B. Abraham, known in the Bible as the 'father of those with faith,' left everything behind and followed God to the Promised Land—receiving the blessing was dependent on his obedience (**Genesis 12:1-4**)
 - a. These promises would later be described as God's covenant with Abraham
- 2. The Old and New Covenants
 - A. As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Bible is divided into two major divisions: The Old Testament and *The New Testament* describing the two different covenants found within them
 - B. In history, God has made covenants with two very specific groups of people: the first with the people of Israel called out of Egypt, and the second with Christians *called out of the world* (**Hebrews 8:6-13**)
 - C. Although the Old Covenant is most often thought of in terms of commandments, it is actually the promises behind those laws that are the foundation of the covenant (**Deuteronomy 7:12-15**)
 - a. Unfortunately, the Israelites lack of faithfulness voided their eligibility to receive God's blessings (**Isa** 1:2-7)
- 3. Some Examples of the Better Promises of the New Covenant
 - A. *If* we seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, then God will take care of all our physical needs (**Matthew 6:33**)

- B. *If* we come to Jesus, take his yoke and give our burdens to him, then we will find spiritual rest (**Matthew** 11:28-30)
- C. *If* we repent and are baptised, then we will receive the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of God's indwelling Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:36-39**)
- D. Perseverance in doing God's will assures us of God's blessing (**Hebrews 10:35-39**)
- 4. Obeying God's Teaching Leads to a Knowledge of the Truth
 - A. By faith Abraham obeyed and went to a foreign land because he understood that God was calling him to an even better home (i.e., heaven) (**Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16**)
 - B. By faith Abraham obeyed and offered Isaac because he believe that God could even raise the dead (**Hebrews 11:17-19**)
- 5. Our Lives Need To Be In Agreement With What We Believe (1 Timothy 4:16)
 - A. We must believe the right things and live the right way
 - a. Both receiving salvation and sharing the message effectively are connected to our life and doctrine
 - b. Spend time this week reflecting on what you believe and how well you are living out those beliefs

Obedience - ὑπακοή - hupakoē

- 1) obedience, compliance, submission
- 2) obedience rendered to anyone's counsels, an obedience shown in observing the requirements of Christianity

Obey - πακούω - hupakouō

- 1) to listen, to harken
 - a) of one who on the knock at the door comes to listen who it is, (the duty of a porter)
- 2) to harken to a command
 - a) to obey, be obedient to, submit to

Old Testament teaching—Let's examine three people under the old covenant.

Saul—1 Samuel 15 (selected)

- 15:1–3: Saul is asked to obey a specific command.
- 15:7–9: Saul only *partly* obeys the command.
- 15:12–31: He puts up quite a fight before admitting he has sinned. Rationalizations!
- · Conclusions:
- a. Partial obedience is disobedience!
- b. Selective obedience is disobedience!
- c. It's possible to be completely deceived about whether or not we have been obedient.

Uzzah—2 Samuel 6:1-7

- · God views disobeying his word as serious!
- Sincerity does not remove guilt (1 Corinthians 4:4).
- Does this sound unfair? David thought so too, until he learned what God's word said (see 1 Chronicles 15:12–15).

Naaman—2 Kings 5:1–15

- 5:10: God's word is plain and straightforward.
- 5:11: Beware an emotional reaction to God's word.
- 5:11: Surrender preconceived ideas.
- 5:12: No, there are not any alternatives to doing what God says.
- 5:13: We need help to be objective and reason things out.
- 5:14: God blesses obedience.
- 5:14: Approximate obedience is insufficient (five dips in Jordan, or seven dips in Pharpar).
- 5:15: We learn to appreciate and reverence God once we actually begin to obey him.

New Testament teaching: Let' see what Jesus and his followers taught about obedience.

Matthew 7:21-23

- These people were religious, active, and possibly sincere—but lost.
- Only those who obey God will make it to heaven.
- It's possible to believe that you have a saved relationship with God yet not be saved at all.

John 14:15, 23-24

- · Obedience isn't just part of the old law; Jesus and the New Testament discuss obedience again and again.
- Love and obedience are virtually equivalent.

1 John 2:3-6

- 2:3: You can be sure of your salvation if you're living as an obedient disciple of Jesus.
- 2:4: If you claim you know him but are disobedient, you are a liar.
- 2:6: We must follow Jesus' lifestyle! Obedience is a central part of Christianity.

Conclusion

As we see, obedience was not rendered optional by the cross. It has always been crucial for a true follower of God. What has been keeping you from obeying?

Grace – άρις - charis

- 1) grace
 - a) that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech
- 2) good will, loving-kindness, favour

- a) of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues
- 3) what is due to grace
 - a) the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace
 - b) the token or proof of grace, benefit
 - i) a gift of grace
 - ii) benefit, bounty
- 4) thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward

The Apostle Paul appreciated God's grace perhaps more than any other man of his day, and he tells us that's why he accomplished so much (1 Corinthians 15:10). Since it's essential for us to understand the concept of grace and to teach it clearly, we choose Paul for a balanced understanding of grace.

Ephesians 2:1-10

- We are dead to God in our sins. When we live the way the world wants us to, or follow our own desires, we become objects of wrath.
- Because of grace (God's love for us), we can be saved. We don't deserve it, but it's free for us as a gift if we accept it.
- It's through our faith in Christ that we're saved.
- · God's love motivates us to do good works.

Romans 5:6–11

- Definition of grace: God loving us enough to allow Christ to die for our sins when we were his enemies. Acronym: God's Riches at Christ's Expense.
- · We were lost sinners deserving only punishment, but he sent Christ to suffer in our place.
- Through Jesus' blood we are saved from God's wrath (blood must be shed for forgiveness [Hebrews 9:22, 28]).

Titus 2:11–14

- · Grace means salvation for us.
- God's love leads us to purify ourselves from sin; we won't take advantage of God's grace.
- Since grace overcomes passion, it isn't a license for sin (Jude 4). Grace isn't cheap—it cost Jesus his life.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

- The cross is God's powerful solution for sin.
- Without an understanding of God's love, the message of the cross will be foolishness to us.

2 Corinthians 5:14–21

- Christ's love demands a response! (See 1 Corinthians 15:9–10.)
- Jesus bore our sins to the extent that he became sin, or a sin offering.
- God's love motivates us to live for him, and to speak for him.

1 Corinthians 15:9–10

 Though it is not true that we are saved by working hard, it is true that those most affected by God's grace are God's hardest workers!

Proverbs 3:34

- · This verse talks about humility associated with Grace
- Quoted by Peter and James (1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6)

Famous examples of Faith, Obedience and Grace

1. Abraham:

- **Faith**: Abraham is known as the "father of faith" for his belief in God's promises. He left his homeland based on God's instruction, not knowing where he was going (Genesis 12:1-4).
- **Obedience**: His obedience is most famously shown when he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, trusting in God's plan (Genesis 22:1-18).
- **Grace**: Despite his faults, like doubting God's promise when he laughed about having a child at an old age (Genesis 17:17), God extended grace to him, fulfilling His covenant despite Abraham's human weaknesses (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3).

2. Noah:

- Faith: Noah believed God's warning about the flood when there was no sign of it coming (Hebrews 11:7).
- **Obedience**: He meticulously followed God's instructions to build the ark, a task that took many years amidst potential ridicule (Genesis 6:22).
- **Grace**: God showed grace by saving Noah and his family from the flood, establishing a covenant with him afterward (Genesis 6:8).

3. Moses:

- **Faith**: Moses had faith in God's power to deliver Israel from Egypt, even confronting Pharaoh with confidence in God's promise (Exodus 3:10-12).
- **Obedience**: He followed God's detailed instructions for leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Exodus 3-40).
- **Grace**: Despite his initial reluctance and later moments of disobedience (like striking the rock), God's grace was evident as Moses was chosen to lead despite his stuttering and was allowed to see the Promised Land before his death (Numbers 12:3, Deuteronomy 34:1-4).

4. Mary, the mother of Jesus:

- **Faith**: She believed the angel Gabriel's announcement that she would bear the Son of God, despite the social implications (Luke 1:38).
- **Obedience**: Her response to the angel was one of submission, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
- **Grace**: God's grace was upon her, as she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, a role that required immense faith and obedience (Luke 1:28-30).

5. David:

• **Faith**: David's faith was demonstrated in his confrontation with Goliath, trusting in God's deliverance (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

- **Obedience**: Despite his many failings, David sought to obey God by following His commands, notably when he refused to harm Saul, God's anointed (1 Samuel 24:6).
- **Grace**: David experienced God's grace repeatedly, especially in his repentance after his sin with Bathsheba, where he was forgiven and described as a man after God's own heart (Psalm 51, Acts 13:22).

Addendum: Building Your Spiritual House

Faith, obedience, and grace are the pillars of a spiritual house built for God's kingdom. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus teaches that faith is the rock-solid foundation, established by trusting and obeying God's word, ensuring resilience against life's storms. Obedience constructs the structure, as 1 Peter 2:5-8 describes believers as living stones in a spiritual house, aligned with Christ, the cornerstone. Disobedience, however, causes stumbling, misaligning the stones and weakening the house. Grace sustains this structure, uniting believers as God's household through Christ's redemptive work (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Foundation: Christ, Apostles, and Old Testament Prophets

The spiritual house rests on a foundation of Christ, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets (Ephesians 2:20). Each plays a distinct role in anchoring believers' faith and guiding obedience.

- **Christ, the Cornerstone**: Jesus is the cornerstone, aligning the entire structure (Ephesians 2:20; Isaiah 28:16). His life, teachings, and sacrifice are the basis for faith and obedience. As the divine Word (John 1:1), He underpins all scripture, though He did not write it Himself (2 Timothy 3:16). Every aspect of the spiritual house aligns with Him to remain true.
- **Apostles**: Chosen by Christ, apostles like Paul, Peter, and John laid the foundation through their inspired New Testament writings (e.g., Gospels, epistles) under the Holy Spirit's guidance (2 Peter 1:20-21). Their teachings instruct believers in righteous living and obedience to God's will (John 16:13-14).
- Old Testament Prophets: Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Moses, inspired by God, wrote scriptures fore-telling Christ's coming (e.g., Isaiah 53; Deuteronomy 18:15). Their writings, alongside apostolic teachings, form the foundation of faith (Ephesians 2:20). Obedience to their inspired message aligns believers with Christ, while rejecting it leads to stumbling (1 Peter 2:8).

Why Old Testament Prophets in Ephesians 2:20?

Ephesians 2:20 states that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone." The term "prophets" most likely refers to Old Testament prophets for the following reasons:

- 1. **Biblical Context**: In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church, built on a shared foundation (Ephesians 2:14-18). The Old Testament prophets, who foretold the Messiah and God's plan for all nations (e.g., Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), provide a scriptural foundation that complements the apostles' New Testament teachings. This aligns with the historical Jewish scriptures revered by early Christians.
- 2. **Scriptural Precedence**: The Old Testament is frequently cited as the foundation for Christian faith in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 1:2; Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus Himself affirmed that the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament) pointed to Him (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44). Including Old Testament prophets in Ephesians 2:20 reinforces this continuity.
- 3. **Role of Prophets**: Old Testament prophets primarily delivered God's inspired scriptures (2 Peter 1:21), which served as the authoritative foundation for the early church alongside apostolic writings. New Testament prophets, while gifted in revelation and encouragement (1 Corinthians 14:3), are not typically associated with laying a foundational scripture for the church.
- 4. **Grammatical Structure**: In Ephesians 2:20, "apostles and prophets" are grouped as a single foundation, suggesting a historical sequence where Old Testament prophets preceded and complemented the apostles' work.

- If New Testament prophets were intended, Paul might have distinguished them separately or used terms like "prophets in the church" (as in Ephesians 4:11).
- 5. **Theological Consistency**: The cornerstone (Christ) and foundation (apostles and Old Testament prophets) represent the unified revelation of God's plan across both covenants. Including New Testament prophets risks redundancy, as their role overlaps with apostles in the early church (e.g., Acts 11:27-28).

Alternative View: Old and New Testament Prophets

Some scholars argue that "prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 includes both Old and New Testament prophets, citing:

- **New Testament Prophecy**: Ephesians 4:11 mentions prophets as a gift to the church, suggesting a role in its foundation (e.g., Agabus in Acts 11:28).
- **Early Church Context**: New Testament prophets provided revelation before the canon was complete, potentially contributing to the church's foundation.

However, this view is less likely because:

- New Testament prophets primarily offered situational guidance (e.g., Acts 21:10-11), not authoritative scriptures like Old Testament prophets.
- The foundational role in Ephesians 2:20 emphasizes enduring scripture (Old Testament and apostolic writings), not temporary prophetic utterances.
- Paul's focus in Ephesians is on the unity of God's plan across history, best served by linking Old Testament prophets with apostles.

Thus, interpreting "prophets" as Old Testament prophets provides a clearer, more consistent foundation for the church's faith, rooted in the enduring scriptures that point to Christ.

Building Your House

To construct a strong spiritual house, integrate faith, obedience, and grace:

- **Strengthen Faith**: Study scripture daily (e.g., Psalm 119) to deepen trust in Christ's teachings as the cornerstone.
- **Obey the Foundation**: Follow the inspired teachings of apostles and Old Testament prophets (e.g., apply Matthew 7:24-27 by acting on Jesus' words). Align with Christ to avoid stumbling (1 Peter 2:8).
- **Rely on Grace**: Trust God's unmerited favor to sustain you as part of His household (Ephesians 2:8-9, 19-22). Share grace by encouraging others in faith.
- **Weekly Challenge**: Set one faith goal (e.g., read Psalm 119 to understand God's word), one obedient action (e.g., forgive someone as per Matthew 6:14-15), and one act of grace (e.g., serve a neighbor). Study 1 Peter 2:5-8 to align with Christ, the cornerstone.