

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Faith		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	6		Gary L.W. Johnson
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Little Faith

What does it mean to “believe”? Often we are merely using the word in a hope so fashion or as a way of affirming something that meets with our approval. We believe in that which we consider worthy of our confidence (i.e., “I believe in the Republican party” or “I believe the Chicago Bulls will win the NBA Championship”). But what about our beliefs? What about those things in which we put our trust? What is our belief based on? We often labor under the illusion that somehow our individual beliefs are created by sheer volition on our part. Do our beliefs correspond with reality? People believe all kinds of things with little or no evidence upon which to base their beliefs. Blind faith, in this sense, is all too common. Genuine faith, the kind of faith the Bible commends, is never blind. It may be weak, but it is never described as a leap in the dark. “We cannot”, observed Warfield, “be said to believe or to trust in a thing or person of which we have no knowledge—of course, we cannot be said to believe or to trust the thing or person to whose worthiness of our belief or trust assent has not been obtained. And equally we cannot be said to believe that which we distrust too much to commit ourselves to it.”¹ As we read our Bible, the importance of faith cannot be over stressed. We are told in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. In John 6:29 Jesus says that God requires faith and in 1 John 3:23 faith is something God commands of us.

Why do we believe that there is a God? Why do we serve God? I am afraid that we are too much inclined to value God only because He can satisfy all our pressing needs (and sometimes painfully so). “We value God”, wrote Machen, “because He can answer the petition *Give us this day our daily bread*. There is the need of companionship; we shrink from loneliness; we would be surrounded by those who love us and those whom we can love. And we value God as one who can satisfy that need by giving us family and friends. There is the need of inspiring labor; we would be delivered from an aimless life; we desire opportunities for noble and unselfish service of our fellowmen. And we value God as one who by His ordering of our lives can set before us an open door. These are lofty desires. But there is one desire that is loftier still. It is the desire for God Himself. That desire, too often, we forget. We value God solely for the things that He can do; we make of Him a mere means of an ulterior end. And God refuses to be treated so; such a religion always fails in the hour of need. If we have regarded religion merely as a means of getting things—even lofty and unselfish things—then when the things that have been gotten are destroyed, our faith will fail! God is not content to be an instrument in our hand or a servant at our beck and call. He is not content to minister to the worldly needs of those who care not a bit for Him.”²

Machen’s words need to be heeded, especially in our day and time. There is afoot today in our church (especially in charismatic circles) a particular heresy known as the “Positive Confession Movement” and the churches that promote this error are called Rhema churches³. Faith, according to the people, is a formula. They are constantly speaking of the law or steps and principles of faith—which will work for anyone be they Christians or not. Faith, in this scheme is impersonal, just like the law of gravity; it works regardless of the religious convictions of the person, who uses it. This understanding of faith is not Biblical and it is important that we keep this in mind as we examine our Lord’s words “O ye of little faith.”

THE CONTEXT: Matt 6:1-18 Jesus is dealing with the private life of the believer. In Matt 6:19-34 He is addressing the outward or public life of the believer. Choices are to be made. There are two treasures (v. 19-21) two conditions (v. 22-23) and two masters (v.24). What are we devoted to? Whatever we are giving our lives to is the clearest indication of our heart's treasure. But is that treasure durable? (v.21) This prohibition on storing up earthly treasure is not against possessions per se. It is not against investments or savings and it is certainly not against enjoyment of God's good gifts. The prohibition refers to the self-accumulation and preoccupation with earthly treasure. Three questions are forthcoming. What are the comparative benefits of your treasure? Note how conditions are changed by ambition (v.22-23). What is the comparative worth of your treasure? Note that we can only serve one master (v.24). Finally, what are we preoccupied with? This section deals with the folly of the wrong way (behaving like pagans) and the wisdom of the right way (trusting in our heavenly Father.)

I. THE CASE FOR LITTLE FAITH

Our Lord used this expression on at least four occasions. In Matt. 16:8 little faith is associated with a lack of understanding that stems from a failure to remember.

II. THE CAUSE OF LITTLE FAITH

The real issue here is ignorance. This stems from a failure to grasp the truth of Scripture in two particular areas.

A. Salvation. Lloyd Jones observed, "Little Faith' really means a failure to realize the implication of salvation, and the position resulting from salvation. That is clearly our Lord's argument and reasoning here. Half our trouble is due to the fact that we do not realize to the full the implications of the doctrine of salvation which we believe."⁴ The two most frequently used words for faith in the New Testament are the noun *Pistis* and the verb *Pisteuein*. *Pistis* is used in two different senses. First it is used subjectively of the act of believing (cf. Romans 3:28). This is captured by the Latin expression *fides qua creditur*, "the faith by which we believe." Second, *Pistis* is often used objectively of what is believed—it is descriptive of the contents of faith, *fides quae creditur*, "the faith which is believed," (cf. Jude 3 and Galatians 1:23). "The verb *Pisteuein*," writes Hoekema, "may mean (1) to think to be true (Matthew 24:23), or (2) to accept the message given by God's messengers (Acts 24:14). Most characteristically, however, it means (3) to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation (John 3:16). In this sense faith includes more than just believing a message to be true; it also involves trusting in Christ, resting on him, and leaning on him."⁵

B. God. Little faith also stems from a failure to understand the character of God. Notice how Jesus accented the omniscience of God (v.32) the omnipotence of God (v.30) and the love of God (v.26). "God," declared the old puritan divine William Bates, "may be considered absolutely in himself, or as revealing himself and his will to us. We have some knowledge of his being and divine attributes, wisdom, power, goodness in his works of creation and providence; but we believe in him, as declaring his mind and will to us in his word. We may know a person, and his excellent virtues intellectual and moral, but we cannot believe in him without some discovery of his thoughts and affections to us."⁶

III. THE CURE FOR LITTLE FAITH

Note the method Jesus uses to address little faith. He begins by asking His disciples a series of questions.

A. The Nature of Life (v.30)

This question forces us to consider the biblical truth that we are created in the image of God and are the objects of His redemptive love. Paul underscores the same point in Rom. 8:31-32.

B. The Contrast with Pagan Behavior

Lloyd-Jones says “if a man has a pagan view of life in this world, he will also have a pagan view of life in the next world. The pagan view of that life is that it is a realm of shadows. You will find that in Greek and other pagan mythologies. Everything is uncertain. If a man, therefore, has that view, this world is going to be everything to him and he is going to make the best of this life because it is the only life about which he has any knowledge. Furthermore, he is either trying to anticipate contingency, or else he is trying somehow to elude this fatalism that is gripping him. What he does is this. He says, Here I am at this moment; I am going to get the most out of this because I do not know what is going to happen next. Therefore his philosophy is ‘Let us eat, drink and be merry’: let us live for the hour. I have this hour, let me extract out of it everything that I can.”⁷

CONCLUSION: Every sincere Christian wants to be spiritually mature and effective. Worrying, fretting and being anxious will make any Christian ineffective. In I Peter 5:6-14 (a text we will examine next week) the Apostle (himself a one-time famous worrier!) exhorts his readers to “cast all your cares upon God, because He cares for you.” We do serve a God who cares about us. Let us do all that we can to know our glorious God. This is what Jesus prayed for (John 17:3). All of our worries stem from our lack of trust. When will this be over? May God grant us the grace to grow in knowledge of Christ and enable us to cast all our care to Him.

ENDNOTES

¹ B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, (rpt. Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), p.402.

² J.G. Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1979), p.73

³ *Faith Movement*, (Hendrickson, 1988)

⁴ D.M. Lloyd- Jones *Studies In the Sermon On The Mount II* (Eerdmann, 1960), p.131

⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Eerdmans, 1984),p.134

⁶ *The Complete Works of William Bates II* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990),p.365

⁷ Lloyd-Jones, op.cit,p.138