

The Life of Faith

Advance in Faith 1 – Unit 5

Week 2 The Object of Our Faith



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To identify God as the object and focal point of our faith*
- *To explore the essential nature of God's character and establish what makes God worthy of our complete trust*
- *To encourage believers to pursue the knowledge of God as the primary catalyst for building faith*

1. Faith in...?

Mark 11:22 – “And Jesus answered them and said, ‘Have faith in God’”.

Note that Jesus did not just say, “*Have faith*”. He qualified His statement by saying, “*Have faith in God*.” The purpose of our study is not to build growing confidence in “faith” but in the God toward whom our faith is directed.

Faith always has a subject and an object. Someone always directs faith toward someone or something else. We are the subjects (those who have faith in their hearts) and in the case of Christian faith, God is the object – the focal point of our faith.

It is important to understand this because, even though the subject of our study is ‘faith’, we are ultimately trying to point people to God. It isn't the power of faith that changes a situation or heals a body or brings deliverance – it's the power of God – His Spirit, His hand, His presence, His person.

Faith always has a focal point and for the believer that focal point is Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith”.

2. Faith and Knowing God

Knowing God and the trustworthiness of his character is essential to having faith in him. Incorrect or incomplete assumptions about who God is and how God works will undermine one's ability to trust Him.

“For some reason or other believers get into their heads such a wrong idea of God that it comes between them and God or between them and their trusting God. Since they do not recognise what they are doing, they blame God rather than their faulty picture, little realising that God is not like that at all. Unable to see God as he is, they cannot trust him as they should, and doubt is the result.”¹

There are four primary sources to draw from when pursuing the knowledge of God. These are:

- (a) Revelation
- (b) Traditions
- (c) Reason
- (d) Experience

(a) Revelation - this would include both the “general” revelation of God's existence and nature through Creation (Romans 1:20-21) as well as the “specific” written forms of divine revelation i.e. the writings of the Hebrew Old Testament and the writings of the early Christian apostles in the New Testament.

(b) Traditions - the beliefs held in common by the early church and the Reformers of the sixteenth century as expressed in the ecumenical creeds and faith confessions. These are conclusions reached as a result of many years of rigorous study and debate and held in common by the many.

(c) Reason - the simple rule of logic, especially the rule of non-contradiction that forbids the equal affirmation of opposite propositions. E.g. God cannot be both “perfect” and “wrong”. If he is one he cannot be the other.

(d) Experience - human experience in general and especially the religious experience of God's people in the community of faith. While personal, private experience of the individual is considered we generally mean the shared experience of many i.e. experiences held by the majority.

3. God's essential character

¹ O. Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1996), pp. 58-59.

Theologians often speak of God as being essentially two things:

1. God is Great (*Transcendent*)

This refers to who God is and what he does apart from us i.e. who he is in and of himself. E.g. God is “Sovereign”

2. God is Good (*Immanent*)

This refers to who God is and what he does in relation to us i.e. how we experience him in the context of our relationship with him. E.g. God is “Love”.

Perhaps the one statement in scripture closest to describing the essential character of God is “God is love” (**1 John 4:8**). However it is important that we consider this attribute in the light of all of God’s other revealed attributes.

Other manifestations of God’s “goodness” include:

(a) God is Holy

God’s holiness includes but extends beyond the notion of purity. He is flawless, incorruptible and undefiled. However to say that God is holy is to say that he is “different” to the point of being incomparable. There is none like him.

- **1 Peter 1:14-16**

“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

(b) God is Merciful

God’s mercy is revealed in his patience and kindness particularly to those who are underserving.

- **Deuteronomy 4:31**

“For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors”.

- **Nehemiah 9:17**

“But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and rich in unfailing love”.

- **Psalm 103:8**

“The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love”.

(c) God is Faithful

God is faithful in that he is consistent, truthful and reliable.

- **Deuteronomy 7:9**

“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments”.

- **1 John 1:9**

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”.

- **2 Thessalonians 3:3**

“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one”.

(d) God is Compassionate

God’s compassion is his emotive and active response to our vulnerability and suffering.

- **Psalm 116:5**

“The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion”.

- **Psalm 145:9**

“The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made”.

- **2 Corinthians 1:3**

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”.

(e) God is Just

God's justice refers to his even-handedness in dealing with us – he is fair and equitable and treats all human beings as equally. God's justice also means that he carries a particular concern for the oppressed, afflicted, marginalised and unfairly treated in the world.

- ***Romans 2:11***

“God shows no favouritism”.

- ***Psalms 111:7***

“The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy”.

- ***Psalms 140:12***

“I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy”.

(f) God is Eternal

By Eternal we mean both that God is without beginning and without end (everlasting) and that He possesses a quality of existence (eternal life) that is gifted to us through faith in Christ.

- ***Genesis 21:33***

“Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the Lord, the Eternal God”.

- ***Romans 16:26***

“But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him”.

Conclusion:

In summary we can say that faith, as a reasoning, relational trust, is grounded in the unchanging nature of God's character, that character being intrinsically both good and right. It is therefore, knowing God in an ever-deepening manner that serves as the catalyst for building strong faith. A people of faith are a people with a deeply held confidence in both the unchanging goodness and greatness of God.

Deuteronomy 32:4

“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he”.

Group Discussion:

1. What is your picture of God? How do you “see” him or think about him? What words would you use to describe him?
2. What influences / life experiences have shaped your understanding of who God is and how God works?
3. How does your current perception of God compare with his “self-disclosure” in scripture and in the person of Jesus? Do you think that you might have some thoughts about God that could be inaccurate? If so, what are they? Share them with the group and see what the rest say / think.
4. What practical steps can you take to get to know God better?

Memory verse:

Hebrews 12:2

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”.