

Bite Size Bible Study

Faith and Faithfulness #105

By Pastor Lee

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
(Genesis 15:6)

This is one of the most quoted verses about Abraham.

This is a key verse that is used in the discussion about being saved by faith apart from works. This is the central point of the Protestant Reformation. It was Abram's "believing" that gave him righteousness in God's sight. Christians historically have emphasized the importance of believing God's promises, instead of working to try to earn our salvation.

It is important to understand that the key word, *emunah*, which is translated as "believe," has a different emphasis in Hebrew than we tend to hear. In English and in Greek (*pistis*), its primary meaning is to assent to a factual statement, to agree with the truth of certain ideas.

Indeed the word *emunah* does mean "to have faith," but it also has a broader meaning that has implications for what God calls us to, as people of faith. It also contains the idea of steadfastness or persistence. Exodus 17 tells us that Moses raised his hands all day long until the Israelites won a key battle. It says that his hands remained steady (*emunah*) until sunset. In this sense the word means "steadfast."

The word *emunah* is also used to describe God's faithfulness:

From this you can know that Adonai your God is indeed God, the faithful God, who keeps his covenant and extends grace to those who love him and observe his mitzvot (instructions), to a thousand generations.
(Deuteronomy 7:9 CJB)

Looking back at the verse about Abraham's *emunah*, it should tell us that Abraham believed God's promises and had a persistent commitment to God, which was displayed in his faithful life. He waited 25 years for a son. Then, was willing to offer him back to God when he was asked to do so.

This has huge implications about what it means to be a Christian. I used to wonder why God would save one person over another just because they decided to adopt one particular set of beliefs.

Belief is not enough. Continuous belief with the actions to prove it is the key. Anyone, even the most evil person, can feign belief for a while. But their actions eventually betray that belief.

But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions! You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too — the thought makes them shudder with fear!
(James 2:18-19 CJB)

Here James points out that Satan and the demons believe the truth about God and Jesus. But just knowing that doesn't redeem them! Their actions betray their faithfulness to those beliefs.

While Satan may have the right beliefs, he cannot say that he has *emunah* — a committed faithfulness to God. What God asks for, goes beyond an academic decision to believe that a certain set of facts are true. He wants *faith* in his promises that results in enduring *faithfulness* to Him.

Now I have to talk about myself, which I am always reluctant to do. As one of our past pastors, Jim Friddle, often said: "toot your own horn and blow your reward".

I have found in my life that faith is one thing and faithfulness is another. Faith can be just knowing something is true and letting that be the end of it. Faithfulness takes Faith to the next level by causing that faith to turn into actions.

When I was in my teens, I had faith in God. I had gone to Sunday school for most of my life (at that point) and could recite quite a number of scriptures. But that was the end of my faith. It didn't pour into the other areas of my life. I didn't really understand what I was able to quote and it didn't really cause me to wonder at that time what I was saying.

When I became older and really started to study the Bible these verses started to make more sense and I saw that there was a certain wisdom in following that teaching and allowing it to direct my actions.

**I think that it is the faithfulness that God wants to see in all of us,
Not just the Faith in the facts.**

Reference: "Listening to the Language of the Bible"
by Lois Tverberg and Bruce Okkema

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