Laying the Foundation

Lesson 7

BECOMING FULLY PERSUADED

Catechism Two, Lesson 7

Reading: Hebrews 11

1. How Are Repentance And Faith Related?

The key words which give us understanding of this relationship are “from” and “to” or “toward.” Notice that it is repentance “from” dead works, and faith “toward” God. These are two sides to the same coin, namely of justification. Repentance is the negative or preparatory side of it; faith is the positive or receptive side of it. Both repentance and faith are gifts from God, initiated freely according to His grace. They are inseparable; one cannot exist without the other.

Theologians often argue about sequence. Which comes first, repentance or faith? Logically, turning from something precedes turning to something else. Experientially, repentance and faith work hand in hand. Scripture puts them in both orders, depending on the emphasis required by context. The same Holy Spirit who creates within us the response of repentance also creates within us the ability to believe.

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols [repented] to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:8, 9).

2. What Is Faith?

Faith is the ability to believe God: both to trust His character and to take His Word as true and reliable. Faith is our response to the persuading, convincing work of the Holy Spirit as He enables us to hear God’s Word. Such persuasion results in an unshakable conviction or confidence that God’s Word is true.

A. Faith is a persuasion.

Faith comes from the Greek word pistis (pis-tis) which means “firm persuasion; strong and welcome belief; conviction of the truth of anything.”

… for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

B. Faith is substance and reality.

Faith is not imagination, or the wishing of things into being. It is the conviction of truth by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, who only persuades us to believe what actually exists. If God gives us the faith for something, we can be sure that in the mind of God that thing really exists and is as good as ours.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen(Heb. 11:1).

C. Faith is a gift from God.

We cannot work ourselves up into believing. It is not the result of mental gymnastics. The Holy Spirit must place the ability to believe God within our hearts.

For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that [faith] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

D. Faith is the response to hearing.

God communicates His thoughts through His Word. When He enables us to hear what He is saying to us by the Spirit, this creates within us the response of believing, of being persuaded that what He is saying is indeed true and directed to us.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

3. Does Faith Believe The Person Or His Word?

Both. Unless we can depend upon the character of the one speaking, we cannot rely upon his word. God and His Word are inseparable. God says that He magnifies His Word even above His name (Psa. 138:2). Jesus Christ is the Word or expression of God. This means that He in no way misrepresents His Father’s character.

The Greek word for faith, pistis, includes both trusting God’s character and taking His Word at face value. Hebrew, however, uses four separate words to express the ideas wrapped up in the one Greek word for faith. These Hebrew words are usually translated “trust.” Each one emphasizes a different aspect of the work of faith.

A. Faith takes refuge within the person.

The Hebrew verb meaning “to take refuge within” brings out the emphasis of the safety of trust.

The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth 2:12).

B. Faith means relying upon someone who is completely trustworthy.

The Hebrew verb “to lean upon” refers to a personal reliance upon another. It adds the dimension of abandoning one’s self in committal to the care of another. We only lean upon that which we are persuaded is dependable.

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me (Psa. 56:3, 4).

C. Faith means letting go of our burdens into the hands of another.

We will only let another take over our concerns when we are convinced he can handle them better than we can ourselves. The Hebrew verb “to roll upon” extends the idea of committal, emphasizing even more our act of relinquishing our concerns to another. We allow God to take full responsibility for us.

He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him … (Psa. 22:8).

D. Faith frees us from our own efforts and enables us to stay put in God.

The Hebrew verb “to stay upon” brings out the aspect of rest from one’s own efforts and repose in the knowledge that someone trustworthy is caring for us.

… therefore trust thou in him (Job 35:14).

4. By What Means Does God Persuade Us To Believe?

God does not do everything from long distance, by simple decree. He uses means, very often other people and circumstances. The Holy Spirit is the active agent of redemption in the world today. He persuades us by His personal presence, but He uses a number of means to accomplish this.

A. He uses the preaching of the Word.

Through the preaching of God’s Word, we are persuaded to believe and turn to God.

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:21).

B. He directly works within us to convince us of truth.

The Holy Spirit works within us to convince us that God is true and that His Word is truth. Just as He turns us from sin in repentance, He turns us to God and His Word by giving us faith.

And when He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict and convince the world and bring demonstration to it about sin and about righteousness—uprightness of heart and right standing with God—and about judgment (John 16:8 Ampl.).

C. He makes the Scriptures alive to us.

We are persuaded through the reading of the Scriptures, for they are the inspired or God-breathed Word of God. The Old Testament prepares us for receiving the gospel message.

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:46, 47).

D. The Lord’s miracles are meant to help our faith.

The Lord’s miraculous works confirm the supernatural source of His Word, thereby persuading us to believe His claims. His claims to divine authority are more than authenticated through His signs.

If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him (John 10:37, 38).

5. Can We Become Persuaded By Anything Other Than Faith?

Yes. There are persuasions which do not originate with the Holy Spirit and God’s living Word. Some of these other seeming persuasions may even quote Scripture, but not as God’s living Word to us now. We are exposed to many voices or impressions. If we expose our minds, emotions, and will to these, we can become convinced of something that is not true. Truth, you recall, is objective. Something does not become true or factual simply because we believe it.

A. Presumption is not faith.

God warns us against presumption through the severe punishment He inflicted upon those who dared to presume upon Him. This word comes from the Latin praesumere which means “to anticipate, suppose, take in advance.” The English definition is much closer to the Bible usage; it means “to dare, to take too much upon one’s self.”

Presumption violates God’s holiness and sovereign authority. Presumption openly defies God’s right to choose people and places for His purposes. Those who presume take upon themselves authority that was not given to them. They overstep the limits of propriety and courtesy and intrude themselves into places where they have no business. This is not aggressive faith, but blatant rebellion.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Lev. 10:1, 2).

B. Assumption limits faith.

Very often we come to situations with our minds already made up. We are so full of our assumptions or preconceived ideas, that we are not really open to hear what God is saying to us now. We may miss what He is actually doing because we do not see what we expected to see. We may become too rigid in our expectations and limit God. Assumption means the act of taking something for granted or supposing that a thing is true without basis in fact.

Many of the Jews missed their Messiah because of their assumption that He would be a nationalistic, military king who would lead them in throwing off Roman rule. They were not prepared to accept a spiritual kingdom.

Home Study: Lesson 7

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What two prepositions distinguish repentance from faith?

2. What is the Greek word for faith?

3. What English word is the best synonym for faith?

4. What four aspects of faith are brought out by the Hebrew words for “trust”?

a.

b.

c.

d.

5. What is the difference between presumption and assumption?