

## Dead Church Podcast Notes

### Acts Initiative

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### **Ep. 4 – Faith Doesn’t Mean Belief**

As we’ve seen, repentance is essential for salvation. The first step in becoming a Christian is to repent – and *repenting* means changing the way you think and changing the way you live. It means your actions change.

Jesus said, “Not all those who say to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Jesus, it’s not enough to just believe in him and call him “Lord.” According to Jesus, we must be people who do the things God wants us to do. We must have works.

Paul summarized the message he preached by saying, “I began telling people that they should repent and do works to show they really had changed. I told this first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and all throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul’s summary of his own message was that he taught people to “repent and do works.”

So, before we can look at what those works should be, we need to understand how this message is compatible with the message of faith. After all, Paul also said, “You have been saved by grace through faith. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of works, so you cannot brag about it.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul also said, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law has been revealed, a way testified by the law and the prophets. This righteousness comes through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because there is no distinction. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard, and all need to be made right with God as a free gift by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. God appointed him as a sacrifice of atonement. We receive forgiveness through faith in his blood...”<sup>4</sup>

In these verses, Paul was saying we are saved by grace through faith, and it’s not a result of works. Most Christians are familiar with these verses. Most Christians have been taught these verses their whole lives. These verses are some of the foundational verses for the whole of Protestantism. The Protestant Reformation was built on the idea that we are saved entirely by faith, and that works are not required. These verses (and some others) are used to support this teaching.

The problem is that these verses don’t stand alone. The same man who wrote these verses also summarized his message by saying that he taught people to “repent and do works.” We can’t just ignore that. We need to know how the message of “faith, not works” is the same message as “repent and do works.”

The modern Protestant understanding of “faith, not works” is not compatible with the message of repentance as preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, and Paul. The Church tells us that our salvation is based entirely on whether we believe that Jesus is who he said he is. The Church tells us that the path to salvation is to confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and to believe in

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:21

<sup>2</sup> Acts 26:20

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23-25

our hearts that God raised him from the dead.

But Jesus said many will call him “Lord,” and they’ll spend their lives doing things that prove that they believe he was raised from the dead, yet he will still turn them away on judgment day. He said that he will turn them away because they didn’t do what God wants – they didn’t obey his commands. They didn’t have works.<sup>5</sup>

How do these two messages fit together? How could Paul clearly say, “you have been saved by grace through faith... it was not the result of works,”<sup>6</sup> and then summarize this same message by saying, “I began telling people that they should repent and do works...”<sup>7</sup>?

How could Jesus teach, “whoever believes in [me] may not perish, but have eternal life,”<sup>8</sup> and then say, “Not all those who say to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...”<sup>9</sup>?

These verses seem to contradict each other. These verses don’t seem compatible. It seems like Paul was clearly saying one thing at one time, but then the exact opposite at another time. It seems like Jesus clearly said that we’re saved by believing in him, but then turned around and said that maybe we’re not.

Are we saved by works, or are we saved by faith? Despite what many Protestant teachers might tell you, there’s a strong case to be made for *both* sides of the argument – not just their own side.

Why does the Bible seem to teach both *works* and *faith*? Why is it that two messages, both found in the New Testament, seem so incompatible? And how could Paul act like these two messages are the same message?

The reason these two messages seem so incompatible is because of our understanding of *faith*. Most Christians read the word *faith* in the Bible and just assume they know what it means. They’ve heard countless sermons on faith. They’ve read books about faith. They’ve talked about faith. They don’t even recognize that they’re reading Protestant theology into the text because they don’t realize that they’re using the modern, Protestant definition of the word *faith*.

In other words, they’re wearing those glasses again. They’re wearing red-colored glasses that distort everything they’re reading – and they don’t even realize it! They read the Bible, but they end up thinking it says the exact opposite of what it actually says because they brought their own ideas with them when they approached Scripture. They brought the sermons they’ve heard. They brought the books they’ve read. They brought the songs they’ve sung. They brought the things they’ve been taught.

They didn’t start with Scripture and Scripture alone. And they didn’t let Scripture define its own terms.

When reading the Bible, you’ll find that the word *faith* occurs repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Paul said we’re saved by faith, Jesus said we must have faith, and Jesus taught that we must have faith for our prayers to be answered.

Here is what the word *faith* means in English:

- 1) *Complete trust or confidence in someone or something.*
- 2) *Strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.*
- 3) *A system of religious belief; a strongly held belief or theory.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:13-27

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>7</sup> Acts 26:20

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:21

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/faith>, retrieved July, 2020

When we looked up *repentance* in the last video, we saw that the word in English means *remorse or regret*, but that's not necessarily how everyone uses it. People often mean different things because it's a word we're not familiar with. We don't use it outside of Christianity. However, the definition of the word *faith* really is how we use it! It's belief. It's trust. It's confidence.

But here's the thing: Your Bible was not originally written in English. Scripture was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Most of it was written in Hebrew and Greek. The New Testament, where it most directly teaches about faith, was written in Greek. In the New Testament, the word *faith* is the Greek word *πίστις* (*pístis*). Therefore, we must match our understanding of the word *faith* with the Ancient Greek understanding of the word *pístis*. If our idea of what it means to have *faith* is different than the Ancient Greek idea of what it means to have *pístis*, then we're going to think the Bible is saying something that it's not saying.

The word *pístis* does mean *faith*. It means *trust, confidence* and *belief*... but it means more than just *faith*. It means more than just *trusting*. It means more than just *having confidence*. It means more than just *believing*.

The literal definition of *pístis* is *persuasion*.

However, when it comes to language, it's not enough to just know the "dictionary definition" of a word. We need to know how that word was used in the culture.

When the Bible was written, the word *pístis* was a common word used in everyday conversation. It was a word with an entire concept behind it that everyone understood. We need to know how they would have understood the word *pístis*. When Paul wrote to people, telling them that they were saved by *pístis*, we need to know what they would have thought he meant – not what we think he meant when we read it in English. We need to understand how the original audience would have understood it.

The New Testament was written in the time of the Roman Empire. At that time, the word *pístis* was used to mean more than just *faith, trust, and belief*. It was also used to mean *faithfulness*. To be more exact, the word *pístis* wasn't a word that sometimes meant *faith*, and other times meant *faithfulness*. It wasn't a word in which the context would change whether it meant *faith* or *faithfulness*. No, it was a word that communicated a concept – a concept which always included both *faith* and *faithfulness* at the same time. It always communicated both *faith* and *faithfulness* together, at the same time, as the relationship that existed between two parties.

In fact, *pístis* was more than just a Greek word. *Pístis* described a concept that was so widely understood throughout the culture that it had its own character in Greek mythology. In Greek mythology, *Pístis* was a person – the personification of an idea – a concept. But, *Pístis* wasn't the personification of faith and belief, as the modern Church interprets it to mean. *Pístis* was the personification of good faith, trust, and reliability.

As is typical with mythology, Rome had their own equivalent of *Pístis*. In Roman mythology, *Pístis* went by the name of *Fidēs*. *Fidēs* was the goddess of trust and good faith. *Fidēs* was everything that was required for "honour and credibility, from fidelity in marriage, to contractual arrangements, and the obligation soldiers owed to Rome."<sup>11</sup> *Fidēs*, just like her Greek counterpart *Pístis*, meant reliability. It referred to a reliability that existed between two different parties. Furthermore, that reliability was always two-sided. Or in other words, both parties were reliable to one another. *Fidēs* was the Latin translation of the Greek word *pístis*, and it is the Latin root of our English word, *fidelity*.

So, *pístis* didn't mean you simply believe something. It didn't mean you merely trust someone. It didn't mean you're convinced that something is true. *Pístis* meant loyalty. It meant good faith. It meant fidelity. It meant reliability. It meant you both trust someone (faith), and you are also loyal to

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<sup>11</sup> Perley, Sara. "Fides Romana: Aspects of fides in Roman diplomatic relations during the conquest of Iberia" (PDF). University of Otago. Retrieved 15 May 2019

that person (faithfulness) at the same time. It never meant just faith, and it never meant just faithfulness. It always meant both at the same time.

As I mentioned earlier, *pístis* most literally means *persuasion*. However, in English, we think of *persuasion* as a matter of what we believe – what we think, and what we consider to be true. But in Greek, it meant more than that. The word *pístis* came from the root word, πείθω (*peíthō*), which meant, *to convince* or *to persuade*. However, *peíthō* was used to convey more than what a person believed. For example, the Greek word, πειθαρχέω (*peitharcheó*) was a combination of two words: *peíthō* and *archón* – *peíthō*, meaning *to persuade*, and *archón*, meaning *a ruler*. Therefore, *peitharcheó* meant, *to be persuaded by a ruler*. Translated, it meant *to obey* or *to submit*.

For example, Peter used the word *peitharcheó* when he said, “We must obey God, not people!”<sup>12</sup> The *persuasion* of *peíthō* was a persuasion to act – a persuasion to submit. *Peíthō* meant *to persuade someone to do something* – not just *to persuade someone to believe something*. Therefore, *pístis*, which also came from the word *peíthō*, did not mean *persuasion* as in *belief*. It meant *persuasion* as in *persuasion to act* or *persuasion to do something*. It meant that someone was persuaded to cooperate. They were persuaded to obey. They were persuaded to become faithful. It meant that a person was convinced of something, therefore they acted accordingly. It included both belief and action.

The reason it is translated as *faith* is because *faith* can technically mean the same thing... but no one thinks of it that way. For example, if I have a “good-faith” agreement with someone, what does it mean? It means we both trust each other and we will both be faithful to each other. Or, if you go to the bank, you will see a little sign that says your money is backed by the “full faith of the United States government.” What is it promising? Is it promising that your money is backed by the full *belief* of the United States government? No – it’s promising that your money is backed by the faithfulness and trustworthiness of the United States government. Both parties are persuaded to cooperate.

This is the kind of faith the Bible is talking about. It doesn’t mean just *belief*. It means *believing* and *obeying* at the same time. It means loyalty. It means fidelity. It means reliability. If you have full confidence, trust, and belief, but you yourself are not faithful, reliable, and obedient, then you don’t have *pístis* – you don’t have faith. You haven’t been persuaded to obey.

*Pístis* is a concept closely related to marriage. I both trust my wife that she will be faithful to me, and I am faithful to her, so she trusts me. We have fidelity to one another. We keep faith with one another. We have *pístis*.

Here are a few examples of how the word *pístis* was used outside of the New Testament:

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived at the same time as the apostles, used the word *pístis* in some of his writing. He said, “Now the multitude of the Galileans had that great kindness for me, and **fidelity** to me, that when their cities were taken by force, and their wives and children carried into slavery, they did not so deeply lament for their own calamities, as they were solicitous for my preservation.”<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the people from Galilee had fidelity (*pístis*) toward Josephus – to the point where they wanted him kept safe even in the midst of their own cities being attacked and their own families being carried away as prisoners. Their *pístis* toward Josephus wasn’t that they believed he existed or merely trusted him. Their *pístis* was shown in that they were faithful to him.

Josephus also said, “But when John was come to the city of Tiberias, he persuaded the men to revolt from their **fidelity** to me, and to adhere to him...”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 5:29

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 16.84, Josephus – The Complete Works, Translated by William Whiston, A.M., Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, p. 7, emphasis added

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 17.72, p. 7, emphasis added

“...I would forgive him what he had done already, if he would repent of it, and be *faithful* to me hereafter.”<sup>15</sup>

Here, we can see Josephus using the word *pístis* to clearly refer to a person’s loyalties – not to what that person believes or who that person trusts.

Here are some other examples:

“And now continue you still to keep *faith* with us, and we will recompense to you good things in return for your dealings with us, and will grant you many immunities, and give you gifts.”<sup>16</sup>

Here, in 1 Maccabees, the word *pístis* is translated *faith* – but it refers to *keeping faith*. In other words, it is also about loyalty and fidelity. The *pístis* being displayed is some form of action demonstrating faithfulness, loyalty, and reliability.

“...and the people saw the *faith* of Simon, and the glory which he thought to bring to his nation, and they made him their leader and high priest, because he had done all these things, and for the justice and the *faith* which he kept to his nation, and for that he sought by all means to exalt his people...”<sup>17</sup>

Again, we see that the *pístis* (or *faith*) demonstrated here is not a belief or trust. It is fidelity, loyalty and faithfulness. It’s reliability. It is shown through action – not merely believing. Simon kept faith toward his nation – not just faith toward God. He didn’t just believe his nation existed. He didn’t just trust his nation. He was loyal to his nation. He prioritized them. He took care of them and did what was best for them. His *pístis* was shown in action – it was his loyalty, fidelity, reliability, and faithfulness toward his people.

This is what *faith* means in the Bible. It’s not just *faith* – it’s *pístis*. We’re not supposed to merely believe – we’re supposed to believe and obey. We’re supposed to be faithful. We’re supposed to be reliable. This is why Jesus said when he returns, he will reward those who were “good and faithful” servants, but he would punish those who were unfaithful.<sup>18</sup> We’re supposed to be reliable! Jesus is our King, and we are supposed to stay loyal to him. Jesus is our bridegroom, and we are supposed to live in fidelity to him. We aren’t called to just believe. We’re called to be faithful. We’re called to be loyal. We’re called to be reliable.

Having faith in Jesus means we trust him, we believe in him, we have confidence in him, *and* we are faithful to him, loyal to him, and obey him. Having faith in Jesus means we keep faith with him. It means he considers us to be reliable. That means we don’t betray him. It means we’re not unfaithful to him.

Again, our *pístis* toward Jesus is like the fidelity seen between a husband and a wife. If you have a wife who is unfaithful or a husband who is unfaithful, it’s someone who is not loyal. They are cheating on you. They are committing adultery. The same is true in our relationship with Jesus.

Consider what James said: “You want things so you can use them for your own pleasures. You adulterers! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is the same as hating God? Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God’s enemy. Do you think the Scripture means nothing that says, ‘The Spirit that God made to live in us wants us for himself alone?’”<sup>19</sup>

James said if you want things for your own pleasure, you are unfaithful – you are an unfaithful spouse – you’re an adulterer. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the Bridegroom, and his people

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 22.110, p. 8, emphasis added

<sup>16</sup> 1 Maccabees 10:27-28, The Complete Apocrypha, Covenant Press, 2018, p. 95, emphasis added

<sup>17</sup> 1 Maccabees 14:35, Ibid, p. 103, emphasis added

<sup>18</sup> Ref. Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27

<sup>19</sup> James 4:3-5

are his Bride. But James said that if you love the world, you are unfaithful – you are an unfaithful Bride – you don't have faith because you don't have fidelity.

In other words, if you love the world, you're cheating on Jesus.

That is what Scripture is talking about when it says that we are saved by faith! When you see the word *faith*, it's not just belief. It is belief with faithfulness. It is faith and faithfulness. Belief and loyalty. Fidelity. Reliability.

Having faith means you're clinging to Jesus, and you're not looking anywhere else. You are not distracted by the world; you are not looking at false gods; you are not wanting things for your own pleasure; you are looking at Jesus and Jesus alone, and he is all you want. He's all you're living for. He is everything in your life. He's not just someone you go and sing to on Sunday; he's someone you make all your decisions around. You live your entire life in faithfulness to him.

That is what it means when you see the word *faith* in the Bible.

Similarly, when we see the word *believe* in the New Testament, it is almost always the Greek word πιστεύω (*pisteúō*). The word *pisteúō* is simply the verb-form of *pístis*. It simply means *to have pistis*. It is rooted in the word *pístis*, and also carries the concept of loyalty, faithfulness, reliability, and fidelity. In fact, the word *pisteúō* is often also translated as *obey*. It's interchangeable – because the concept doesn't mean merely believing – it means both believing and obeying at the same time. If you believe, but you don't obey, then you don't *pisteúō*, and you're not doing what the Bible teaches.

So, in the New Testament, when we're told to believe in Jesus, we're really being told to both believe and obey Jesus. When we're told to put our faith in Jesus, we're really being told to put our loyalty and fidelity in Jesus. It's more than just what we believe. It's how we live. If we say we believe in him, but we don't do what he wants, then we're not actually loyal to him. If we say we trust him, but we don't live the way he told us to live, then we prove we don't really trust what he said, and we prove that we're not faithful. If we say we have faith in him, but our lives don't match the kind of lifestyle taught by him and the apostles, then we prove we're really divided – we don't have fidelity.

This is how repentance and faith fit together. The first step in following Jesus is to repent – or, to change how we're living and become faithful and loyal to Jesus. Repentance means we stop doing what we used to do, and we start doing something else. That *something else* is faith – it's becoming loyal to Jesus, it's joining ourselves to him in fidelity and living for him and obeying him as our King and Bridegroom.

So, when Paul told us that we're saved by faith, not works, what he was really saying was that we're saved by loyalty and fidelity – not just by following a huge list of rules. He was saying it was about having a heart that *wants* to do what pleases God – not just doing what the Law says, even though we don't really want to. However, as Paul said, the way of faith still upholds the Law<sup>20</sup> – because faith is about loyalty to God, not just believing.

When God promised the New Covenant, he promised that he would write the Law on our hearts.<sup>21</sup> That didn't mean he was going to abolish the Law. That meant he would make us into people who *want* to do what is right. He would make us people who are faithful to him from the heart, and who live in fidelity to him because we want to – not just because we want to avoid going to Hell.

This is the kind of faith that saves us. It's loyalty to God. It's obeying him because we love him and want to obey him – not where we're just forcing ourselves to follow all the rules in the Law. God provided a way for us to become people who want to do what is right – a way for us to become loyal and faithful to him. Paul said, “[Jesus] gave himself for us so he might ransom us from all wickedness and to make us pure people who belong only to him – people who are always wanting to

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<sup>20</sup> Ref. Romans 3:31

<sup>21</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 31:33

do good deeds.”<sup>22</sup>

This is saving faith. It’s when we become people who want to do good deeds. It’s when we become people who want to live the way God says is right. When the Bible says we were ransomed from all wickedness, it is not just saying that we don’t have a penalty for sin. It is saying that we are ransomed from continuing to be wicked people. We’re ransomed from continuing to do wicked things. We become people who want to do good deeds. We become people who are faithful to God and obey him out of fidelity, loyalty, and love. We’re not merely ransomed from the penalty of wickedness – we’re ransomed from the wickedness itself. Paul also said, “Christ died for all so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised from the dead.”<sup>23</sup>

Our saving faith is that we no longer live for ourselves. Our saving faith is our faithfulness to God. Our saving faith is our fidelity – where we live for Jesus without distraction and without being divided.

Paul preached, “...you have been saved by grace through faith. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of works, so no one can brag about it.”<sup>24</sup> But then he turned around and summarized this same message by saying, “I began telling people that they should repent and do works to show they really had changed.”<sup>25</sup>

The reason these two messages are actually the same message is because *faith* doesn’t mean *belief*. When Paul taught, “repent and do works,” he was teaching, “repent and have *pístis*.” Faith means you have God’s Law written on your heart, so now you want to do what is right, you live for God, and you obey him because you naturally want to do good. So, when Paul said that we’re saved by faith, he was saying that we’re saved by being changed and doing works that prove we’ve changed – the exact same thing he told King Agrippa!

If you believe in Jesus, but you don’t live the kind of life he taught us to live, then you prove through your actions that you haven’t changed. And if you haven’t changed, then you don’t have faith – you don’t have loyalty, you don’t have fidelity. If you haven’t changed, then you’re still under the Law, because the Law was intended for sinners<sup>26</sup> – it was given to people who don’t naturally want to do good deeds. The Law was given as rules to teach people what is right.<sup>27</sup> But true life comes through fidelity to God, where we naturally do what the Law was teaching because of our love and faithfulness to God. Jesus came to make us people who want to do what is right. Our faith is that fidelity.

We’re not saved by belief. We’re saved by *pístis*. We’re saved by being transformed and becoming new people – people who always want to do what is right. This is why Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless you are born again, you cannot experience God’s kingdom.”<sup>28</sup>

Jesus didn’t say, “truly, truly I say to you, unless you really believe you cannot experience God’s kingdom.” He said, “unless you’re born again.” Because you have to be transformed. You have to receive the Law written on your heart. You have to stop being someone who is wicked – you have to be ransomed from that wickedness and become someone who always wants to do good deeds, someone who no longer lives for yourself, but you live for him who died for you and was raised from the dead.

Our actions prove our fidelity. If we say we have faith in Jesus, but we don’t have works, then we don’t have faith.

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<sup>22</sup> Titus 2:14

<sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:15

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>25</sup> Acts 26:20

<sup>26</sup> Ref. 1 Timothy 1:9-11

<sup>27</sup> Ref. Galatians 3:24-25

<sup>28</sup> John 3:3

## Ep. 4 – Faith Doesn’t Mean Belief

So, now that we see what the Greek word meant, let’s look at what Scripture teaches about faith. It’s one thing to see how a Greek word was used in the culture, but how do we know that that concept is really what was intended throughout the New Testament?

When we read the word *faith* in the New Testament, it’s easy to think it means *belief* even when we understand what the Greek word meant. It’s easy because we’ve been trained to think of it that way, and it’s hard to undo many years of teaching. So now let’s look at what the New Testament teaches about faith – because we will quickly find that the New Testament teaches the same concept of fidelity, loyalty, reliability, and faithfulness. The New Testament clearly teaches that faith is not merely belief. Faith is action.

Before I ever learned what the Greek word meant, I saw that Scripture said something about faith that didn’t match up with what I’d heard the Church teach. I didn’t know the Greek, and I hadn’t studied the Greek, but I saw inconsistencies in the English translations of the Bible. It became clear to me – using only the English translations – that something was wrong with my understanding of what it means to have faith. The Bible teaches what faith is – whether you know Greek or not.

If you’ve spent some time in the Church, and if you read your Bible a lot, and someone were to ask you, “What does *faith* mean?” Where would you turn in Scripture? What part of the Bible would you reference as you explain what *faith* is?

Almost every Christian would turn to the same exact verse:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>29</sup>

Here’s the problem:

When we turn to Hebrews 11:1 as the answer to our question, we treat it as a sort of “dictionary definition” of the term. We treat it as if the writer were Webster, and as if the verse reads:

Faith (n.)

1. The assurance of things hoped for
2. The conviction of things not seen

But that’s not what this verse means.

The first problem is that the word translated as *assurance* could be translated *guarantee*. And the word translated as *conviction* could be translated *proof* or *evidence*. Or in other words, “faith is the guarantee of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.”

The writer wasn’t defining *faith*. He was saying that we can know that we will receive what we hope for *if* we have faith. Faith isn’t some feeling of assurance we have... faith is the proof that gives us assurance. If we have faith – or, if we have that changed heart of fidelity – then, we know we will receive what we hope for. We have proof that we have been changed – proof that we’ve been born again.

This verse is not a definition. This verse is promising us that if we have faith, we can know we will receive our inheritance.

The second problem is that we’re only turning to one single verse. The entire New Testament teaches about faith from the beginning to the end, but we turn to one single verse to tell us what faith means. More than that, we pick this verse completely out of context! This verse doesn’t stand by itself – this verse has a context. And the context of this verse is explaining what it means to have faith.

Taking a verse out of context is something we should never do. But the writer of Hebrews even specifically said, “My brothers and sisters, I urge you to listen patiently to this message I have

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<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

written to encourage you, because it is not very long.”<sup>30</sup>

In other words, he was saying to listen to the whole thing – it’s not a long letter. Don’t break this letter down into little pieces or you’re going to miss the point. Read the whole thing.

Yet, instead of doing what the writer asked, we pick it apart and we read one chapter at a time (or sometimes even less). We don’t read Scripture the way we’re supposed to. Hebrews 11:1 was never meant to stand alone. The context tells us that faith is more than just having a confidence in your mind. If we back up just a few verses, we see that he was not just telling them, “You need to really trust God,” he was telling them, “You need to live the way you used to live when you first came to faith.”

He said, “Remember those early days of your faith when you first learned the truth. You persevered through a hard struggle with many sufferings. Sometimes you were hurt and attacked before crowds of people, and sometimes you shared with those who were being treated that way. You suffered with the prisoners. You even had joy when all that you owned was taken from you, because you knew you had something better and more lasting. So do not throw away your confident trust in God, which has a great reward. You must persevere, so you can do the will of God and receive what he has promised. For in a very short time, ‘The One who is coming will come and will not delay. Those who are right with me will live by faith. But if they turn back with fear, I will not be pleased with them.’ But we are not those who turn back and are destroyed. We are people who have faith and are saved.”<sup>31</sup>

Then comes Hebrews 11:1.

The writer of Hebrews was not suddenly defining faith as some dictionary definition. No, he was telling them they need to get back to this radical life they used to have in the early days. He was telling them to return to how they used to live when they persevered through suffering and shared with others who were being persecuted. He was telling them to go back to living a life where they suffered with those who were prisoners and responded with joy when everything they owned was taken from them.

He said, “so do not throw away your confident trust in God, which has a great reward. You must persevere...” That’s faith. It’s trust *and* perseverance. It’s trust *and* obedience. It’s trust *and* it’s living the radical lifestyle that the writer of Hebrews had just explained.

In other words, he was telling them to return to action. He was telling them to keep living a radical lifestyle *because* those who are right with God will live by faith. They needed to return to their radical lifestyle because that’s the only way to be right with God – that radical lifestyle is what it *means* to live by faith. But, if they were to shrink back or turn back, and not keep living that radical lifestyle, God would not be pleased with them. Why? Because those who are right with him will live by faith. If someone doesn’t live that radical lifestyle, God is not pleased with them because they don’t have faith.

That’s the context. It’s more than just belief. It’s a lifestyle. That’s what faith is.

If we continue through Hebrews 11, we can see that he gave example after example of people who lived by faith – and every single one of them demonstrated their faith through their actions. None of them had a faith that was merely belief. Every single person had a faith that transformed their entire life – a faith that proved they were loyal to God and served him with fidelity.

He wrote about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. Then he summarized the lives of all these other people who suffered – the prophets, and others who came and lived crazy lives, obeying God and suffering for him. The thing that stood out about each of them is what they did – not what they believed. Their faith was defined by action.

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<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 13:22

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 10:32-39

## Ep. 4 – Faith Doesn't Mean Belief

The point of Hebrews 11 is to show us that all these people lived with the same kind of fidelity and loyalty he was telling his audience to have at the end of chapter 10. He was saying, “This is what faith is! This is what faith looks like! Notice how none of these people gave up! None of them shrank back! Do what they did!”

Finally, after talking about this for an entire chapter, he said, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us run the race that is before us and never give up...”<sup>32</sup>

When he called these people a “great cloud of witnesses,” many Christians think he was saying that all these people are now up in Heaven, watching us – witnessing what we do.

But that's not what he was saying.

The word *witnesses* doesn't mean that they are in heaven watching us. No – it meant they are witnesses standing on a witness stand to testify. He was saying, “We are surrounded by all these stories of all these people whose lives testify to us what faith really means, and how God responds to it – so let's not give up.” Those people are witnesses. They show what real faith is, and they show how God responds to real faith. So, we should be like them – not just in what we believe, but in how we live our lives.

Hebrews 11 is all about people whose faith was demonstrated in action. It was faith and faithfulness; not just belief. They proved their loyalty and fidelity by living the kinds of lives that God wants – without giving up. Their faith was not merely that they believed and trusted God. Their faith was that they lived in obedience to God without wavering.

The clearest example of this kind of faith is Abraham. Abraham is repeatedly held up in the New Testament as the father of faith. We're supposed to have faith like Abraham. We can see this clearly in the book of Romans. Paul said, “So people receive God's promise by having faith. This happens so the promise can be a free gift. Then all of Abraham's descendants can be guaranteed that promise. It is not only for those who live under the Law of Moses but for anyone who lives with faith like that of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”<sup>33</sup>

If we have faith like that of Abraham, then we can be saved. This concept is something the Church talks about all the time. We know we're supposed to have faith, and we know that our faith is supposed to be like Abraham's faith. But what did Abraham's faith look like?

“Though there was no hope that Abraham would have children, Abraham believed God and continued hoping, and so he became the father of many nations. As God told him, ‘Your descendants also will be too many to count.’ Abraham was almost a hundred years old, much past the age for having children, and Sarah could not have children. Abraham acknowledged this, but his faith in God did not become weak. He never doubted or stopped believing that God would keep his promise. He grew stronger in his faith, and gave glory to God. Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. So, ‘God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God.’ Those words, ‘God accepted Abraham's faith,’ were written not only for Abraham but also for us. God will accept us also because we believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”<sup>34</sup>

In this passage, Paul was teaching that we are saved when we have faith like Abraham's faith. And he referenced the time when God promised Abraham that he would have descendants – so many descendants that they would be too many to count. Abraham believed God, and his faith was counted as righteousness.

But here's the thing: In this passage, Paul didn't go into detail about what that faith looked like. He didn't elaborate on it. If we take this passage by itself (which the Church does!), we would think that Abraham's faith was simply the fact that he believed. But that's not all it was. In Hebrews

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<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 12:1

<sup>33</sup> Romans 4:16

<sup>34</sup> Romans 4:18-24

11, Abraham's faith is explained in more detail.

When God told Abraham that he was going to give him many descendants – so many that it would be too many to count – he told him to leave his family, leave his homeland, and go to another land where he would give him those descendants...

“It was by faith Abraham obeyed God's call to go to another place God promised to give him. He left his own country, not knowing where he was to go. It was by faith that he lived like a foreigner in the country God promised to give him. He lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who had received that same promise from God. Abraham was waiting for the city that has real foundations – the city planned and built by God. He was too old to have children, and Sarah could not have children. It was by faith that Abraham was made able to become a father, because he considered God trustworthy to do what he had promised. This man was so old he was as good as dead, but from him came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. Like the sand on the seashore, they could not be counted.”<sup>35</sup>

Abraham's faith was not just that he believed God. God had told him, “I'm going to give you many descendants – so go live in this land.”

Abraham knew that he was old. As Paul said, Abraham acknowledged that he didn't have any kids, that he was old, and that his wife was barren. But that didn't stop him. He packed his bags and he moved.

That was the full picture of his faith. He didn't just believe that God would do what he said. He obeyed. He acted on it. His faith had action. His faith had loyalty. He trusted God *and* he obeyed God. He was reliable. If Abraham hadn't packed his bags and moved, leaving his family and everything he'd ever known behind, then he would not be an example of faith today. If he hadn't chosen to follow God and obey God, then no one would have commended him for his faith. His faith was that he trusted God *and* was faithful to God.

That's the full picture of Abraham's faith. That's the kind of faith Paul was talking about in Romans. It's not just *believing*. It's *doing*. Faith includes works.

Furthermore, Hebrews also mentioned Abraham's example of faith when God told him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice...

“It was by faith that Abraham, when God tested him, offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God made the promises to Abraham, but Abraham was ready to offer his own son as a sacrifice. God had said, “The descendants I promised you will be from Isaac.” Abraham reasoned that God had the power to raise the dead, and in a manner of speaking, it was as if Abraham received Isaac back from death.”<sup>36</sup>

When the Church talks about this story, they talk about how Abraham made a great sacrifice – he was willing to lose his only son. But that's not what the Bible says. According to Hebrews, Abraham wasn't ever expecting to lose his son. This test was a test of his faith – did his actions line up with his beliefs? God had promised him that he would have many descendants, and God had promised that those descendants would be through Isaac, and Isaac was still young and didn't have any kids. Abraham believed God would give him descendants through Isaac. But did he trust God enough to obey this command?

Imagine if Abraham had said, “I'm not going to sacrifice Isaac, because I believe God is going to give me descendants through Isaac!” He would have still believed the promise – but his actions would have proven that he didn't have faith. His actions would have shown that he wasn't loyal to God, that he wasn't willing to obey no matter the cost.

But that's not what Abraham did. Abraham thought, “I don't know what's going to happen, but God is going to come through for me because God gave me a promise. So, I'm going to do it.”

That was Abraham's faith. It was the combination of faith *and* faithfulness. It was his

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 11:8-12

<sup>36</sup> Hebrews 11:17-19

obedience *and* his trust. He stayed loyal to God despite everything else. His faith included his action.

That's the point of the story. Abraham's faith was not just that he believed God. His faith was that he was willing to do what God asked.

Remember – when Paul wrote that we are saved by having the same kind of faith as Abraham, he was referencing and quoting the Old Testament. Ok, but - what else does the Old Testament say about Abraham's faith? Right after God tested Abraham by telling him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and Abraham passed the test, God said to him:

*"Because you did not withhold your son, your only son, from me, I swear by myself: I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. They will be as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, and they will capture the cities of their enemies. Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed, because you obeyed me."*<sup>37</sup>

So, Paul quoted Genesis where it said that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness. But Genesis also said that it was because Abraham *obeyed* God. The Bible says both things – both *faith* and *obedience*! Why? Because they mean the same thing! You can't have faith without obedience! Abraham obeyed God out of faithfulness and fidelity to him. That is faith.

Later in Genesis, God said to Isaac, "...I will be with you and bless you. I will give you and your descendants all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath I made to Abraham your father. I will give you many descendants, as hard to count as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands. Through your descendants all the nations on the earth will be blessed. *I will do all this because your father Abraham obeyed me. He did what I said and obeyed my instructions, my commands, my teachings, and my rules.*"<sup>38</sup>

Abraham obeyed God's instructions, his commands, his teachings, and his rules. That is the full picture of Abraham's faith. Paul quoted Genesis 15:6, which said, "God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God."<sup>39</sup> But, Genesis also said that Abraham was right with God and received the promises because Abraham *obeyed* God – he obeyed all his instructions, commands, teachings, and rules. Genesis said both – faith and obedience. Abraham's saving faith was both belief and obedience. We are saved through the same kind of faith - *pístis*.

As Paul said in Romans 4, we are called to have faith like Abraham – *pístis* like Abraham. Like Abraham, we should be people who obey all of God's instructions, his commands, his teachings, and his rules. That is what it *means* to have faith like Abraham.

Our faith is the covenant relationship between us and Jesus. It's our fidelity in marriage to him. It's our loyalty to him as our King. We can't have faith in him and not obey him.

Jesus didn't teach that we're saved by belief. The apostles didn't teach that we're saved by belief. They taught that we are saved by both trusting and being faithful. They taught loyalty. They taught faithfulness. They taught fidelity. They taught reliability. We should be people who obey Jesus without looking any other direction. We should be people who remain faithful to our bridegroom without cheating on him. We are saved by keeping our eyes off the world, keeping our eyes off other gods, keeping our eyes off money, keeping our eyes off possessions, and anything else that would try to get in the way. We are saved by keeping our eyes on Jesus because he is all we want, all we live for, and all we care about.

Many Christians today are quick to say, "Well, that's trusting works."

No! That's faith. That is what the Bible means when it says *faith*. If you don't have that kind of loyalty to Jesus, you don't have faith! If you don't have works, then you don't have faith!

When James wrote about Abraham, he was very clear that Abraham's works were part of his faith:

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<sup>37</sup> Genesis 22:16-18, emphasis added

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 26:3-5, emphasis added

<sup>39</sup> Romans 4:22

“My brothers and sisters, if people claim they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? Suppose a brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. If you say to that person, ‘God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,’ but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. In the same way, faith by itself – that does nothing – is dead. But someone might say, ‘You have faith, but I have works.’ Prove your faith without doing anything, and I will prove my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear. You foolish person! Do you want evidence that faith without works is worth nothing? Abraham, our father, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. So you see that Abraham’s faith and his works worked together. His faith was made complete by his works. This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says: ‘Abraham believed God and God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.’ And Abraham was called God’s friend. So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only. Another example is Rahab, the prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road. Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!”<sup>40</sup>

You can’t get any clearer than that.

If you have faith and don’t have works, you don’t have *pístis*. You don’t have that covenant relationship with Jesus where you trust him and he trusts you because of your faithfulness.

Paul quoted the same passage James quoted: “Abraham believed God and God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.”<sup>41</sup> The Church takes what Paul said, and they turn it into this idea that we’re saved by belief – and belief alone! But right there in the New Testament, James clarified that the full meaning of this verse is shown in that Abraham *obeyed* God. His faith was not just belief. His faith was action. That’s the full meaning of this verse.

If you think you have faith, but you don’t have works, then you don’t have the same kind of faith Abraham had.

Our faith should be just like the faith of Abraham. We are not saved merely by believing in Jesus. We are saved by joining ourselves to him in fidelity. We are saved by entering into relationship with him out of love.

When the Church says that we are saved by belief alone, without doing anything, they’re essentially just saying that Jesus is our ticket into heaven. They treat the Son of God as a free pass for us to go to heaven without us having to live the way God wants us to live. That’s not a covenant relationship.

Jesus is not our ticket into heaven. He is the Bridegroom. He is the Son of God. He is a person. And he wants a relationship with his people. If you don’t live in that covenant relationship where you do what he wants you to do, then you don’t have saving faith.

Jesus came to establish the New Covenant. That covenant is a covenant of marriage where he is the bridegroom and we are the bride, and he will be faithful to his bride, and his bride needs to be faithful to him. It’s no longer law. It’s marriage. It’s love.

It’s not about getting into heaven someday. It’s about entering into covenant relationship with him right now. And that will continue for eternity. Our eternal life begins when we join ourselves to Jesus. Paul said we die with him and we rise with him.<sup>42</sup> Our eternal life begins right then. It’s not *someday we will be in heaven forever* – yes, that is part of it – but our eternal life starts right now when we join Jesus in covenant relationship and become one with him.

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<sup>40</sup> James 2:14-26

<sup>41</sup> Ref. Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 4:9, 4:22; Galatians 3:6

<sup>42</sup> Ref. Romans 6:4-8

## Ep. 4 – Faith Doesn't Mean Belief

Jesus said that many will call him “Lord,” but will fail to enter. He said many will try to enter through the narrow gate, but will fail to enter. He said only those who obey him will be allowed to enter.<sup>43</sup>

Why?

Because many will think they can enter simply because they believe in him. Many will think they can enter without repenting and changing their actions. Many will think they can enter without becoming faithful to him and loyal to him. Many will think they can enter without doing what he instructed.

We're not saved by faith.

We're saved by *pístis*.

“When we are in Christ Jesus, it is not important if we are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith – *the kind of faith that works through love.*”<sup>44</sup>

“Your faith makes you offer your lives as a sacrifice in serving God.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ref. Matthew 7:13-27; Luke 13:24-28

<sup>44</sup> Galatians 5:6, emphasis added

<sup>45</sup> Philippians 2:17