

## SHARING FAITH – “FAITH 101”

Today we begin a new series about “**Sharing Faith.**” The very idea of doing so can “*strike fear*” into the hearts of men – especially those who have faulty concepts about what it actually means. Images may come to mind of knocking on the door of strangers who greet you with scowling faces, upset because their personal space has been invaded - or of standing on a soapbox in the park shouting a message of “*Turn or burn*”, retorted with boos and hisses rather than hearty “*amens*”. I have tried those methods and my efforts often solicited those very kinds of responses without much success. Now, if that’s what you feel called to do, have at it, but those are not the ways most of us are called to be “*sharing our faith.*”

So, in hopes of alleviating some of that anxiety, today’s message is “**Faith 101.**” Oddly enough, that wording (“*sharing faith*”) is found in only 1 verse in the Bible, and even then, in only a few translations. In his letter to **Philemon**, Paul writes: **<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup>because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. <sup>6</sup>I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. <sup>7</sup>Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.** The word translated “*sharing*” here is “*koinōnía*” which is usually identified as “*fellowship.*” Some versions of the Bible render this passage using the idea of “*communicating*” or “*demonstrating*” faith which can be done in any number of ways. But, before we pursue that further, perhaps we should ask ourselves a couple of questions.

First of all, “**WHAT IS FAITH**” anyway? The **Hebrew** writer defines it this way: **<sup>1</sup>Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** So, faith isn’t a “*think so*” or even a “*hope so*” – but a “*I know so.*” It’s a firm conviction that is an anchor for our soul and the mooring for our life. I personally like the **KJV** in this case, which says: **“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** Faith is not subjective. It’s not just that I feel something, but that the evidence influences my verdict. Contextually, we’re talking about faith in God - that He really exists, that He is the creator of all things, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek relationship with Him. Without it, we can’t possibly please Him (**11:6**). This kind of faith is intricately tied to belief in the Scripture as well; believing in God and that His word is true.

Which begs the next question: “**DO I HAVE SUCH FAITH?**” It’s a legitimate question. After all, in **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13:5** Paul urges: **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?”** So, do we have faith or not? You know *you can’t share what you don’t have.* But the more you have, the more you can share. We need to be real about this. If we’re just sharing our opinion amidst a host of others and folks don’t agree, so what?

But if my faith is rooted and unwavering, I know it's not just about having a conversation. It's more than voicing my particular view or engaging in meaningless dialogue. It's a matter of utmost importance. It could even be the difference between *"life and death."* Why do I say that? Because God tells us in His word there are severe consequences for those who ignore Him and refuse to heed His warning. In the very next chapter, after a brief history lesson about God's discipline as well as His mercy, speaking of Jesus, the Hebrew writer says: <sup>25</sup> **See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused (Moses) who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven?** <sup>26</sup> **At that time (God's) voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."** <sup>27</sup> **The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.** <sup>28</sup> **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,** <sup>29</sup> **for our "God is a consuming fire."** First century readers rightly understood that to refer to soon coming judgment – and the Holy Spirit's intent was to move them to take inventory of their standing with God, reminding them without the mercy extended in the sacrifice of Christ, they were far removed from Him. I believe the Spirit's intent for preserving these words is to move us to do the same.

**"WHERE DO I GET THIS FAITH?"** If you don't have it – or feel you have very little of it, I have to tell you it is not something you muster up on your own. There's no "store" you can go to buy it, not for love or money. Yet, there is a way you can *"get it for free."* I believe faith itself is a gift from God. Let me explain. If God did not reveal Himself to us in Creation we would not even know that He exists. That's what **Hebrews 11:1-3** says. If God did not give us further revelation in His word we could not know His nature for **Romans 10:17** assures us **"faith comes through hearing"** the message of Christ. If He did not send His Son Jesus, the fullest revelation of God ever, we could not know Him personally. **John 1:18** says He makes the Father **"known to us"** and **Hebrews 1:3** lets us know that Jesus is **"the express image of the invisible God."** And finally, if Jesus had not then sent the Holy Spirit to **"convict us of all truth"** as **John 16:5-15** says He would do, we would never be able to comprehend it let alone develop saving faith.

Yet, in **Romans 10:20-21** Paul records God saying, <sup>20</sup> **"I was found by those who didn't seek me; I revealed myself to those who didn't ask for me."** <sup>21</sup> **But concerning Israel He says, "All day long I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."** What's up with that? Let me illustrate with **"WhatsApp."** My sister's been *"off the grid"* while vacationing in Australia. Rather than use up their data, we've kept in touch with a free phone app that uses *"Wi-Fi"* whenever they have access. I downloaded the app for free, but then had to activate it by agreeing to the terms of service, committing not to use it for illegal/ immoral purposes.

Since I had no issue with that, I now have this means to connect that I would not otherwise have. In a similar vein, faith is freely available to “*download*” from God. It doesn’t come from any other source. Yet, to fully benefit from it, we must “*activate*” it. Now, ever since I first had it, I began telling family and friends about it. Why? Well, it’s what you do when you have something exciting and useful.

**“AM I SHARING MY FAITH?”** Are we actively conveying our belief in an Almighty God who loves us and sent His Son to prove it? We’ll consider “*methods*” in weeks to come, but for now, ***be praying*** for open doors – ***trusting God for the wisdom, the ways, and the words*** to “***communicate our convictions***” when those doors swing open. And believe me they will – providing we keep knocking, with a view of sharing the good news of Christ.