



Living a Life of Faith

An ABF Series on Hebrews 11

Noah: A Life That Stands against the Culture

Introduction – All the Cool Kids Are Doing It

“You’re not even half cool.” Those words still ring in my ears. As a junior playing tag I was informed that since there were only two of us left, and tag really required three, the other person left was going to leave. I would have been fine had it ended there, but then it got personal. “And besides, you’re not even half cool.” I have since recovered, but that little, carelessly said sentence made a big impact on me.

It’s amazing how deeply those words can cut to the heart of a lonely elementary student. It’s amazing the subtle sway that sentiment can hold over the life of an adult believer. The pressure to conform to the world around us is real, and surrounds us constantly. It is the soup many of us find ourselves within every day. How can a Christian hope to stand against the world in a culture where living for Christ is becoming less and less popular and is becoming increasingly costly?

What are some areas in which it is difficult to take a stand for what is right in the world today, even if “taking a stand” means little more than living out right values?

The author of Hebrews has been pleading with Jewish Christians not to go back to Judaism. He has argued that they must be strong in faith, believing who God is, what God says, and what God does even and especially when life doesn't make sense. In the first few verses he has described the effect of faith. Faith makes the unseen and hoped for things real for us in the present, so that we can grab onto and claim the promises of God. Faith is also necessary to live a life that pleases God, as was demonstrated by the lives of Abel and Enoch. The author then challenged his audience that if they do not show faith they cannot please God.

Now he will discuss the next great figure of the Old Testament: Noah. Noah lived in a time when living for God was tough. In fact, Noah was the only one left! Looking at how Noah was able to continue to do right when everyone around him did wrong should help us as we seek to live for God.

Noah Had a Reverent Fear of God

The little phrase translated as “reverent fear” (ESV) and “moved with fear” (KJV) can be a bit of a challenge to unpack. It is not the normal NT word for “fear” (*phobos*) and is pretty rare in the New Testament. The idea behind the word is a fear of God, but specifically a fear of God that shows up in the way you live.

Should believers be scared of God? What does a reverent fear look like? How is reverent fear different from normal fear? How is reverent like normal fear?

How does fear of God show up in the way people live?

Many today will say that we should have a respect or reverence for Him, but that fearing God in the normal sense of the word “fear” is not what the Bible has in mind. As we saw last week

with when examining the claim that we don't need to worry about "pleasing God," this may sound spiritual, but unfortunately it isn't very scriptural.

If believers need not worry about fearing God, why does God use the normal word for fear (*phobos*) when He says in certain passages "fear God" (2 Cor 7:1; 1 Peter 2:17)? And why is fear modified by trembling if it is not meant to mean "scared" as we would typically think of the word (Ezra 9:4, 10:3, Phil 2:12)? While our fear of God should be more than just terror or dread, there should be an actual, real fear. It would be very odd to say that

So what exactly does the fear of God look like? Fearing God involves a healthy, appropriate fear of His person and power, and of the consequences of sin that He will mete out if we disobey. It means that we tremble in the presence of the one who can send hurricanes with the snap of his finger

If we should fear God, what does 1 John 4:18 mean when it says "Perfect love casts out fear"?

Since Scripture never contradicts itself, when we come to passages that we have a hard time reconciling we must begin with the belief that these passages agree in some way. Fear can mean different things in different contexts. The 1 John passage is talking about a tormenting fear, that is, a fear that is debilitating because we are not living right and are afraid of the punishment. The more we love God, the less reason we will have to fear him. While there is a certain dread of God that is inappropriate, there is a fear of God that is not only appropriate but necessary.

Illustration: A proper fear of God is best illustrated by a child who loves a good, godly father. When they love him, they obey him and don't live in dread of him. But they still fear doing wrong because they don't want to displease him or be disciplined by him! So with our heavenly Father, there is a sense in which we need not fear him, and a sense in which we must fear him. Our fear of God must be reverent, but it must be fear!

If you want to take a stand in the world, it will need to be motivated by a fear of God that shows up in the way you live.

How does someone develop a fear of God if they realize that is missing in their life?

Noah Stood against the World

What does the Bible mean when it talks about the world?

Three NT passages give us a picture of what the pre-flood world in which Noah lived was like. These three combine to give us a good picture of "the world."

The first two we find in the gospels (Matthew 24:37-38; Luke 17:26-30). Here we are told that the people of Noah's generation ate, drank, got married, buying, selling, planting, and building. In these passages, Christ is showing how judgment came suddenly and unexpectedly upon people who were living their lives with no thought of God. While nothing in that list sounds all that wicked, the point is that they God's judgment was coming and they were unaware and didn't really care. They were too busy living their own lives to pay attention to God's warnings.

The third place Noah's generation is mentioned is 2 Peter 3:2-6. Although it doesn't mention that generation by name, the

comparison between them and those who laugh at God's promises of coming judgment shows implies that Noah's generation probably had the same attitude.

The world, then, is a way of living life that completely excludes God and His Word (especially warnings of judgment) from their everyday life. While it is true that Noah's culture was incredibly wicked (Genesis 6:5), this was the fruit, not the root. Their wickedness came because they simply didn't include God in their thinking. Life without God is the way the world lives, and when you take God out of the equation, things will fall apart eventually, even if they don't fall apart immediately.

In what ways is our culture like this? How do unbelievers around us respond to the warnings and commands of Scripture?

Believers if they are not careful can be guilty of **worldliness**: when a believer thinks like the world (Romans 12:2) or loves like the world (1 John 2:15-17). Too many Christians live as people in the world live: with little thought of God. They go through their routine, and yet never think about how God should play into their daily lives.

In what ways can Christians include God in their everyday life? What are some ways you have been able to live life with God at the center?

The passage goes on to say that Noah "by this [faith] he condemned the world." Some argue that this means he was preaching against people who were living in it, and Noah is the first person that Scripture calls a preacher (2 Peter 2:5). But this passage says that his faith is what condemned the world. Noah's

life proved that living for God, even in the midst of great corruption, was still possible.

Illustration: In many college classes, grades are curved based on how the class as a whole did with grades typically jumping anywhere from half a letter grade to a couple letter grades (a C might become a B- or in extreme cases, even an A). If everyone does poorly on the test, everyone gets a better grade. Unfortunately, sometimes one student does well enough that the teacher doesn't raise anyone's grades. That's called "throwing the curve." One person or a couple of students shows that the test wasn't unreasonably hard, that the teacher gave the students what they needed, and most of the class just didn't prepare well. Noah threw the curve.

But Noah also shows us that living for God, even when you are the last person left, is possible! Believers should be encouraged to have faith in God and be ready to stand against a tidal wave of evil and apathy because it is possible!

Noah Became an Heir of Righteousness

Hebrews talks a lot about heirs (people who inherit things). Jesus is said to be the heir of all things (1:2), and believers are heirs of salvation and God's promises (1:14; 6:12, 17; 9:15). In the following section, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are heirs of the promise of God (1:8-9). So how do we become heirs of the things God has promised? Through faith, and faith alone.

What kinds of promises have do we inherit through faith (what does God give us once we are saved)?

It may be a little surprising, but tucked away in the story of Noah and the flood is the gospel. Noah's faith became the basis on which he inherited righteousness. Noah didn't understand everything we do today about how salvation works, but God

gave Noah a command, and Noah responded in faith by obeying that command. God saw Noah's faith and responded by granting him righteousness as a reward. Noah is declared righteous in Genesis 6:8-9 (the word for "favor" in the ESV is the same Hebrew word as "grace").

This is not saying that Noah earned his salvation, but rather that Noah's faith in God was lived out by his obedience, and that obedience proved that Noah believed God. Before Christ what exactly Old Testament Saints knew about salvation is impossible to know. What we do know is that no one is saved without being given the righteousness of Christ, and no one gets that righteousness without faith.

What are the two extremes that can happen when it comes to faith and obedience? What happens if we overemphasize faith, and what happens if we overemphasize obedience?

Conclusion

We too live in wicked times. We are surrounded by a culture that has little room for God and is becoming worse. Many will pay lip service to God, or use him for political or personal ends, but they don't actually love him or live for him. Many want nothing to do with him and want him entirely out of the public square. We, like Noah, must be people of faith who stand against the culture, not in our power but in God's. This happens as we accept what He has said by faith, fearing Him and His Word more than what other people think about us, and allowing that faith to result in practical obedience to God's commands.

Can you think of any situations at work or in your community when you might be called on to take a stand against the world?

As you look at your life, is your obedience being motivated by faith, and is your faith resulting in obedience?