

FAITH REASONING WITH GOD 1 John 5:13-15

We are looking at the topic of faith. In fact, the two messages that took place prior to Easter Sunday were messages on faith. “Receiving from God” and “Responding to God” – these messages laid a foundation on the subject of faith, on this topic. We are going to study faith from now on into the summer. I am believing that this is going to be a helpful study as we look at various aspects of what it means to trust in God.

We come today to a message that I have titled “Reasoning with God.” Let’s go to the scripture, 1 John 5:13-15:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Faith -- it is very difficult to overstate the importance of faith. Faith is how we know God. Faith is how we relate to God. Faith is the only way for us to relate to God. Faith in Jesus Christ is how we walk with God. Charles Bridges: “All of our failures may be ultimately traced to a defect of faith.” Our Lord himself, in Matthew 9:29: “According to your faith be it done unto you.” Again, Mark 9:23: “All things are possible for him who believes.” Faith. Trusting in God. Trusting in Jesus Christ.

How do I do that? In fact, if faith is so important, how do I get more of it? How do I increase my faith? Today I want to work to try to provide one answer to that question. It’s not intended to be comprehensive, but to be one specific answer. I hope it’s practical in terms of something you can actually do and live out to strengthen, to increase your trust in God.

We are kind of like the disciples sometimes, who came to Jesus. Jesus had been admonishing them to be strong in their faith. When he was doing supernatural works, he was telling everyone he was encountering that it was happening according to their faith. So the disciples came and said, “Jesus, increase our faith! Give us more faith!”

We are going to try to answer that question today: **How do I increase my faith?** And with it, we are going to answer two questions that will really support that first one. We are also going to try to answer: “**What is faith?**” and “Why is faith so important?” **Why faith?** Why did God determine that this is how we relate to him? And why is living by faith so attractive?

So, let’s jump in to #1:

I. **How do I increase my faith?”**

I want to give the answer that’s identified in the title: “Reasoning with God.” In short, if we want to get right to the bottom line, here is something you can do to increase your faith: **You can argue with God.** Argue with God?

Well, I mean by that, present an argument to give God reasons for granting your request. **Come before God and present your case to him.** For example, if you are asking God for a brand new, top of the line Cadillac, make your case to God. That may be difficult to do, depending on your theology.

Our goal today is to see how this step leads to an increase in faith. We may come to God and say, “God, I am asking you for this child to know you and serve you.” When I make an argument in support of that, when I present a case in support of that, I’m not telling God anything he doesn’t know. I’m not somehow persuading God to do something he’s unwilling to do. But when I do that, when I begin to lay out before God the reasons why God should grant this, all of a sudden I find that my faith begins to rise. My faith begins to increase.

So as I’m saying, “God, I’m praying for this child to serve you with all of his heart, or all of her heart,” I’m praying, “Lord, it won’t honor you if this child goes off and takes part in all kinds of self-destructive behavior. If this child goes off denouncing you and not believing in you and doing things that dishonor you, God, this will not glorify your name. It will not honor you.” As we begin to say to the Lord, “Lord, I don’t believe that you gave these children to me to be a heartache or to be a burden, but your word tells me that they are a blessing,” faith begins to increase in our own hearts.

Listen to Stephen Charnock. He’s an old Puritan. Let’s look at this quote. He writes: “Our praying should consist of arguments, reasoned cases, explanations, arguments for God’s glory and our happiness.” That’s the content. He is saying if you want to know how to present an argument to

God, tell God why, “My joy is found in his glory and how the answer to this request is going to result in glory for your name and my joy in you.”

Going forward, Charnock continues. “Not that arguments move God to do that which he is not willing of himself to do for us, as though the infinitely wise God needed information, or the infinitely loving God needed persuasion, but it is for strengthening our faith in him.” **We reason with God so that our faith increases.**

That’s what we have here in 1 John chapter 5, the verses that we just read, particularly in verses 14 and 15. John lays out in verse 13 his entire theme for the book of 1 John. He says, “I have written these things to you because I want you to know, I want everyone who believes in Jesus to know that they have eternal life.

He is telling us the purpose of all five chapters of 1 John. This is what he has done in 1 John. He has given you some tests to examine yourself by. In fact, I’ll summarize those tests in three ways: the truth test, the obedience test, and the love test.

1) The Truth Test

This is what John has taught us in these verses. He said, “Listen, when God comes into your life, when divine life, when eternal life enters into you and you are cleansed of everything that separates you from God and God is living in you, you are a child of God. You begin to live and act a certain way. **You begin to grow in your knowledge of who God is and in the truth.**

If I could just linger here for a minute, it’s not uncommon to talk to people who give you all kinds of crazy ideas about God. You know, “This group believes this, and this group believes that. And I think a little bit of this and I think a little bit about that.” I understand that it seems narrow to us, but may I just tell you: **You cannot recreate Jesus according to your whims and wishes. If you know him, you follow the truth! You follow what he said about himself.**

The respect that we desire to show for people in a diverse world is a respect where we say, “Listen, we respect you as made in the image of God and we want healthy, real conversations about what you believe and what we believe.” It isn’t respect to say, “I’ll stop believing what I know to be true in order to live in a diverse world.” It’s okay that we don’t all agree. We can still respect and love one another. Yes? Amen?

Imagine – the living God – like we are going to remake and recreate who he is according to popular opinion. It's unthinkable. When God comes in you, there's this conviction that God is *awesome* and you don't tamper with the character of God! You don't go to God's word that says this and say, "Well, I don't really like that." God doesn't care! He's God!

Joshua was getting ready to go into the Promised Land and this mighty angel of the Lord shows up. Joshua says, "Are you for us?" The commander of God's army says, "For you? That's not the question. The question is: Are you for me?" Alright?

We used to have these bumper stickers: "God is my copilot." God isn't co-anything! Right? It's the truth test. We are growing. We are patient. We get it wrong. I'm not pushing on you this kind of narrow view where we just go around with our Bibles and we slap people.

We're in three tests, I'm sorry. The first test is the truth test. The second test is obedience.

2) The Obedience Test

When God enters into our hearts, we are not okay with sin anymore. We still struggle and battle it, but we desire to obey God. We are grieved over the fact that we struggle to do that. John is saying if you reject the clear, simple truth...if you are just okay negotiating with God and saying, "Okay, God, you want me to do this, and this, and this. I like this. I'll do this. But those, I'm really not..." then something is missing inside in terms of your experience with God. He is not saying, "Do these things and God will accept you." Nope. That's not it. It's not that we work our way into it. It is: **When God comes in he creates a change. And from then on out, though we are growing in it, we are grieved over sin in our lives.**

The third test is the love test.

3) The Love Test

That is, we genuinely love other people. Now, church, it's pretty important not to pass the truth test and fail the love test. All of these flow from the life of God within us. John says, "I'm writing these things to you, those of you who believe in Jesus, so that you'll have assurance. You'll look at your life and you'll say, "Okay, I haven't arrived in these areas, but I see God's life coming out of me and that could only be happening because God is in me. And I belong to God. I'm a child of God." That, in and of itself, brings an increase in faith.

Then, he immediately moves into the subject of prayer, of relationship. You know God, you are walking with God, and he says this: You confidently come before God and if you know that you ask according to his will, you know that he hears you and you know that you've received what you've asked for.

He goes through this progression and you want to ask: "Why? Why doesn't he just say if you ask in faith you'll receive?" Or why doesn't he just say, "If you ask according to the will of God then you'll receive?" He deliberately takes you through an experience which is internal, which is in you. You are understanding the context of 1 John. **You are examining your life. You are seeing evidence that you belong to God, that God's life is in you, producing change. You are still very flawed. You are still needing to grow, but there is divine life in you.**

You are coming before God and you are reasoning with God. You are laying out: "God, bless and strengthen my marriage. An unhappy marriage will not honor you." "Lord, keep this business from going under because business failure will dishonor you. And I belong to you! I see evidence in my life that I'm yours! I have an assurance that this is not just a religious game that I'm playing, but I belong to you! Your name is on me. I'm in covenant relationship with you. My life is to represent you." Yeah, then this really is the will of God, right? God is hearing me! And God is granting to me what I request.

Now, if I could just say this (and forgive me, but I'm kind of preaching the whole message here in the first point), if I could just say that I believe that John is describing for us an actual experience where we know God is hearing us. By the Spirit of God, we apprehend the will of God. **We believe God's promises to be true and we become aware of his presence. We become aware that God is hearing us.** This really is the will of God. And I'm here before God in the name of Jesus. I'm his. He actually cares more about this than I do, and I'm experiencing the living God in the act of prayer. So all of the promises, that if we lay our requests before God we'll leave with the peace of God, I think are intended to have an element of experience for us.

I was making a point. "How do I increase my faith?" Well, one very tangible way is to learn to make an argument with God. We learn to lay out a case, not to convince God, but that faith will grow within us that this is the will of God. If you look at biblical prayers, you frequently find the great men and women of God in scripture doing this very thing.

You go to Daniel in chapter 9. Daniel is a young man, carried off into captivity. He's in exile. All the children of Israel are carried off. And there he is – an old man. He has lived his entire life in exile. He kind of stumbles (I don't know if he stumbled or if he was studying, but I'm going to say stumbled) over a promise that he finds in Jeremiah. In the prophet Jeremiah he finds that exile will not be forever, that this is the discipline of God, and that there is a 70 year period that the children of Israel will be in exile.

So they are carried off to Babylon. We sometimes think of Daniel in the lion's den and in the fiery furnace, if we know those biblical accounts. Well, Daniel survives all that and he gets to be an old man. He reads Jeremiah and he sees this promise. Now, here's what's fascinating to me. There he is, reading the promise of God. He doesn't step away and just say, "Wow, here I am – 85 – and the 70 years is almost over. Everyone is going to go back. I'm too old to go back. I've spent my whole life here! Well, God's going to do what God's going to do." And he just steps back in this kind of passive way.

No, that's not what he does. Do you know what he does? He makes an argument before God in prayer. He comes before God and this is what he does. You can read about it in Daniel chapter 9. He says, "God, our sin is great, but your mercy is greater. We have sinned against you, but you are so abundant in kindness and mercy. We are your covenant people. We carry your name. Jerusalem lies in ruins. This doesn't honor you. God, restore your people. Restore your people for the glory of your name and for our joy in you."

He takes this chapter to lay out his argument before God. He doesn't just say, "No, no, no. God will do what God's going to do." No. God works through faith. God works through his people. God works through prayer. So he lays it all out before the Lord. He says, "Look God, there's this promise in your prophet Jeremiah. Your word is not like man's word. Your word is always kept. Your word is true. I'm bringing your promise before you in prayer. You find this pattern over and over and over again, where we learn, as the people of God, to say, "This is what God has promised and that's the basis of our argument, our reason before God."

So, how do I increase my faith? One way I do it is learn to reason with God. Let's go on to #2 and answer the question:

II. What is faith?

I want to give you four words here. I'm taking the ideas right from the text. Let's look at the text for these four ideas. Belief, assurance, confidence, and conviction.

1) Belief

Let's go to verse 13. He says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God..." If you are here today and you are unsure about where you are in your relationship with God, the scripture teaches very specific things about who Jesus is and about our relationship with God. Basically, in 20 seconds this is the message. **We all have a broken relationship with God. We all are guilty before God of sin and of rejecting him and being the God of our own lives. That has brought death and destruction into creation, and that carries over into eternity. Yet God, in his amazing love, sent his Son to save us from that death and destruction, to give us eternal life, to forgive us. He paid the penalty of our sin and all who believe in Jesus will receive the gift of eternal life. There is an element there where that means agreement with who Jesus is and what he has done and our need for his salvation.** Belief.

2) Assurance

But then he says, "I write these things to those of you who believe." He is writing generally to Christians, so "that you may know that you have eternal life." That's where we get this idea of **assurance**. God wants us to be sure of what we don't yet see. He wants us to be sure of the eternal life that is ours. He wants us to live this life in light of the fact that our eternity is secure in God. **It's transforming when we are sure that God has saved us.**

I'm giving you these four ideas to say that I see this as a continuum, as an expansion of the whole idea of what it means to trust in God. I want to give you some synonyms, if you will, to expand your understanding of faith. Because if you only think, "Well, faith is mental agreement with certain truth," that falls short of trusting in God. Assurance.

3) Confidence

Verse 14: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." That last element is this conviction. *We know*. We know that God is hearing us. We know that we have received from the Lord.

We are not to, as James describes in chapter 1, come before God and make a request: “God, give me wisdom.” Then we leave and are just moaning and groaning. “What are we going to do? I’ll never understand.” He says, “No, no, no. The double minded person should never think that they’re going to receive from God. When we are double minded, when we are not believing God to answer us, we are blown about and tossed about as on the waves of the sea.

4) Conviction

He is describing for us a conviction. It’s really amazing when you think about it. Again, when you go back to the biblical examples and you see, for example, the Apostle Paul. He is in prison. He has been stoned, with rocks -- not anything else. They have tried to kill him multiple times. He has been shipwrecked. He has gone through all kinds of persecution. He is in prison and he writes Philippians, the letter of joy. That’s conviction.

I get a cold -- I think I’m dying. I get a backache -- it must be a tumor. This is conviction that says, “I am not enslaved to the circumstances of my life, but I know who God is and I know that I belong to him. That’s a robust faith that we want to grow into. Right?”

So, what is faith? You know, in Romans 1:17 Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4. He says, “The just shall live by faith.” Other translations have: “Those who belong to God live from faith to faith.” If you’re here and you consider yourself to be a Christian, then there probably was a moment in your life where you initially expressed your faith to Jesus, maybe in a prayer. You got on your knees, or in your heart you got on your knees and you prayed to God. You said, “Lord, forgive me of my sin. I believe I’ve sinned and I’m trusting in Jesus. He has paid the penalty of my sin and freed me.” You expressed faith in Christ in that moment.

Listen very carefully. For too many Christians, that’s the entire understanding of faithfulness, like it’s something that happened in the past. **But God wants you to /live by faith. He wants you to live by the power of trusting. You move from faith to faith to faith to faith. You grow in your faith. There’s an increasing assurance, an increasing confidence in God, an increasing conviction.**

Now, some of what we’re going to talk about in this series is what that looks like and what we can do -- various things, like reasoning with God, and other things that we can do for that to happen. But let me just say this about conviction. Conviction comes in part by the Spirit of God and in part by experience. When John writes in verse 14: “And this is the confidence that we have toward him...” the literal translation there is “in his presence.” I want to emphasize that because I think what’s

happening is, as we're bringing God's truth and God's word and God's will back to the Lord in prayer and we are laying it out for God, we are reasoning with God, we become more aware of who God is and more aware that we are in the presence of God, and conviction increases.

I would just say this. This is why the enemy does everything he can to keep you from praying. This is why if you are a husband and wife, one of the most important things you can do is pray together. Elders of the church need to pray together. Because what happens is, you come before the Lord in the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit unites your hearts. I want to tell you, I find it amazing how little even church leaders pray together. We can talk about all kinds of methods and strategies, none of which I'm against. Let's do this as smart as we can. But something happens when we gather together and call on the name of the Lord. We are before God! It is more difficult for you to argue with me and me to argue with you when we know we're in the presence of the Lord.

So, conviction comes in part by the work of the Spirit of God bringing home truth to our hearts, and then experience. When we get enough faith to start to step out and we start to live out God's word, we find the fruit to bring an increase of conviction.

You know, we can talk about prayer or what you do with your money or all kinds of things. It's very scary when you come over and you look at the scripture and you see "God tells me to do this." We develop all kinds of arguments that defend us against this. But when we go to God's word and we call out to God and the Spirit of God begins to quicken these truths in our hearts, then we step out and begin to do them and we see the fruit of it, then conviction increases.

I've mentioned this before. When I was a little boy I used to cut lawns in Miami. I remember from the very beginning my Dad pulled me in. He said, "Listen, son, we want to give. We want to honor God with the first fruits of what God blesses us with. Son, I want you to understand that everything that we have comes from God and we want to trust him. Then God will always provide. So we give a tenth." This tells you how long ago it was: I was getting \$5 a yard, on a big yard, \$7. \$5 - I've got to give 50 cents? That's so much! It became a lifestyle at 11 years old.

Now, I've seen God provide for me and my family and all 16 children in supernatural ways. You can talk to me until you're blue in the face: "Well, you shouldn't tithe. Tithing isn't biblical. You shouldn't give." I just don't even care, because I have conviction that when you give the first fruits of your time and your money to God, he does better with it than you do yourself. If you just said, "Amen," you're tithing.

Can I just say this to everyone here who would say, “I don’t normally go to church,” I get it. A lot of sin has taken place about pastors chasing money and teaching bad, horrible things about money.” I understand that there’s been a lot of bad teaching and a lot of abuse. I don’t want to obscure the beauty of who God is by you thinking, “See, I knew it. They just want my money.” I want to tell you: God doesn’t need your money. Honestly, I know this may offend you: If God wants it, he’ll just take it. He gave it to you. I’m not denying your hard work to get where you are. God’s big enough to do all of that.

I’m out of time, so this is what I want to do. I want to move to the last point.

III. Why faith?

Let’s look at this quickly. **Experience God, know God, transformation, momentum.** Here’s what happens. If you will just turn to the first verse of 1 John, here’s what John writes. Here’s how he starts his letter. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life —“ that’s concerning Jesus. Notice his emphasis. We have seen. We have heard. We have touched. “The life was made manifest...” This is eternal life that came into this world and was manifest. “...and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life...” We are telling you, the apostles are telling you about something, not just some idea. **We have experienced Christ.** Verse 3: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

Here is what John is saying. He saying, “You know what? We experienced Jesus. We experienced eternal life. We experienced God himself in the flesh. And we are testifying this to you, because if you will receive it by faith, you will enter in to that experience. You will fellowship with us and with the Father and with the Son. Do you know why I am telling you this? Because it increases my joy. It’s so big in me; it’s so wonderful in me. It’s impossible for anything to be more joyous, but I get more joy by sharing it with you.”

That connects back to chapter 5, verses 13-15. John is saying, “I want you to be sure of these things so that your fellowship with God will overflow.” When we live by faith, we experience God more. The

more our confidence grows in God, the more we experience him. And we know God. We learn to make arguments. We reason based on who God is.

You know what unbelief is? It's an unawareness of who God is. It's being more aware of yourself than God. It's being more aware of your circumstances than God. It's being more aware of your problems than God. That's part of what learning to reason with God does. We are focusing on him, and the Spirit of God is drawing us into this rich fellowship. Our awareness, our knowledge of God increases. It brings transformation. It brings change. God is about so much more than just giving you what you are asking for. He wants you to experience him. He wants you to know him. He wants you to be changed. And it comes by faith as we trust in him.

The result is a certain momentum. This is a tough concept and I'm going to give it to you in about 20 seconds. Jesus says, "Those who have, to them more will be given." That's the way faith works. When you place your confidence and trust in God, there is an increase that takes place where you begin to experience a momentum in the life of God and the presence of God.