What is Faith?

Faith and a Difficult Marriage

by Ernest O'Neill ` Program 87

What difference does faith in God make to your attitude to a difficult marriage which you may be experiencing? Well, what we have been saying this past week is, it makes all the difference in the world. If you don't have faith in God, and you don't believe there's anybody who was responsible for putting you on this earth, then if you find yourself in the middle of a difficult marriage, your aim is just to get out of it as soon as you possibly can, because you really are the god of your own life. You run your life just to suit yourself and to please you. And anybody who doesn't please you, you just get rid of them.

But if you believe there's a God, and you believe He is the Father of Jesus, and that He does, know you and He knows your name and knows all the details of your life and has a plan mapped out for your life, then your attitude is entirely different, because you know that He does work all things according to the counsel of His will. You know that He says clearly to us that we should not separate from our husband or separate from our wife. We should not divorce. He says that very plainly in His own Bible in I Corinthians 7:10. So you know that it's His will for you to continue married. In fact, it is His will to make it what He wants it to be.

So, your whole attitude to your difficult marriage changes. First of all, you begin to realize that He is working with you in this situation. You stop taking the whole thing into your own hands. That's often how many of us make a bad marriage worse. We decide, as we joke about taking a girl to the altar, we'll "alter her". Or, we take him to the altar and we say, "we'll alter him". We

dedicate our lives to changing this husband or this wife to make them what we want them to be. Instead of that improving the marriage, it makes it worse, because they begin to realize that we're out to change them. They begin to realize we're out to dominate them, and we're out to influence them in different ways. Either we're trying to bring them to church and convert them, or we're trying to take them to bars and deconvert them. Or, we're trying to make them the same as our mother was or the same as our father was, or we're trying to make them the same as ourselves. They realize that, and they buck that. Of course, they reject that and they rebel against it. So, a bad marriage becomes worse whenever you start trying to fix it yourself.

That's, of course, what many of us do. We say, "All right, all right! Well, I see we've got to stay together, so I'd better get to work and use my brilliant insights and my brilliant ability and personality to make this marriage what it should be." Of course, the other person realizes that immediately and realizes they're just going to be manipulated and they're just going to be dominated by you. They rebel against you and won't listen to a thing you say.

Whereas, if you believe there is a God, then you know that He is sending all kinds of thoughts and all kinds of good spirit from His own heart into your partner, and you can have faith that that is so. You can actually believe that this God who brought you together and who wants you to stay together is presumably doing something to forward that plan of His and that purpose.

You've only to read how He dealt with other men and women to see that He puts thoughts into people's minds. He can't actually dominate their wills. He can't force them to accept those thoughts, but He can insert thoughts into people's minds. He can insert a certain spirit, a certain attitude, into their hearts. He can't

make them retain that or maintain that, but He can send it into their hearts. You can be sure that your God is doing that.

Indeed, He goes even further in the things He says to us. He says it will be unto you according to your faith. If you have faith that I am working in your wife's mind, if you have faith that I am working in your husband's heart, then actually you enable Me to continue that work. I do it, but I am unable to continue it unless you have faith in that and believe that I am doing it. But if you have faith that I am doing that, I actually am able to continue that. I am doing far better work in wooing them round to my way of thinking than you are with all your subtle presents, or your subtle hints, or your subtle comments.

So, if you have faith in God, it makes an absolute difference to the way you tackle the whole business of trying to improve your marriage. Instead of all those hints that you think are so subtle, instead of all those arrangements that you think are so clever and that the other person sees through immediately, you stop all that trying to influence them. You stay back and you just love them and you just concentrate on being a good husband or being a good wife, and keeping your mouth closed, and leaving all your brilliant ideas for their conversion or their change to God.

You begin to instead to pray for them and to pray in faith. Of course, faith is believing that God is a certain kind of person and believing that He is doing a certain kind of thing, and then acting in accordance with that. So that's what you do. You start acting in accordance with your belief that God is working in that person's heart and life, and does not need too much of your help.
In fact, most times God is saying, "Don't help me! Don't help me. I don't need your help. Every time you help, you mess the thing up. Don't help Me. Just leave Me to it, and you just love your partner that I've given you. That's all you've got to do. Trust Me and have faith in Me."

So, it does make a difference to the way you begin to tackle a difficult marriage. "You not only settle you're to stay together for life, whatever is the result of that, but you begin to have faith that God is working.

Another thing, of course, it does is that it stops you being disappointed and cast down every time you see signs in the person that they're not changing. A lot of us get into that position where we say, "Well, if I can change the person, or if God can change them, or if they can change themselves, I'll stay with them." Well, they mightn't ever change. They mightn't ever change! Who knows? Maybe God has arranged that person to be the best instrument in your life to make you like Himself. He might have done that! I mean, you did promise for better or for worse, and it's some of the worse stuff that comes from them that enables you to trust God more and more, because you have nobody else to trust. So really, you need to take the position, "Lord God, this person may change, but they may never change, and you accepted me as I was. When I said to you, "Just as I am without one plea", then you took me as I was. It's up to me to love them in the same, unconditional way.

So, you begin to take the attitude to them, "I love you, even if you remain like this forever. You begin to have faith for them, of course, as they are in Jesus. You stop this business of thinking, "Well, you mean this is the only thing I have to deal with, their own intractable, unchangeable natures?" No! You have to see that God has already put them into His Son, and the moment they believe that, that moment they will be changed and will experience all the wonder of that. So, you see them in His Son. You have faith for them as they are in Jesus, as they are in God. That's what Paul, you remember, said when He said, "From now on I know no man after the flesh", or, "I know no one from a human point of view. I see everyone as somebody in whom God is already working, as somebody who has already has been put

into God's Son, Jesus, and has been changed. I have faith for them in Jesus. I have faith for them in God.

Love is always eager to believe the best. I see the very best for them. I look at them as they are, perfectly in God. I don't look at them with all their imperfections and all their wants and all their unlikable expressions. I look at them as they are in God, and I have faith for them that way." Of course, it changes your whole attitude to your marriage partner, changes your whole attitude to your marriage, and you begin to find that your marriage is changing and becoming what you have faith for it to become. So, of course, if you believe in God, if you have faith in God, it changes completely and utterly your attitude to your marriage. You entirely see the possibility that God is able to change it and work it according to the counsel of His will. So you refuse to divorce.