

Without Faith

By PAUL J. SCHARF

During my time as a student at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, I learned that there was an old youth pastors' joke, built on a misuse of Heb. 11:6. The verse states:

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The verse, taken out of context, was evidently used to prod unsuspecting students into attending “the oldest Bible college in the country not named Moody.” I don't doubt that more than one young person actually succumbed to that line of reasoning and made the trek to Ankeny, Iowa—where they would have nevertheless learned much better exegetical skills at Faith Baptist Bible College!

Faith was a most unlikely candidate to be one of the most impactful institutions on my entire life. I had barely heard of it through college, and even had to inquire whether they had a seminary the first time I called. (There was no internet access for fact-checking back then—at least not for us.) Also, Faith had a long history of fellowshiping with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, with which I had no ties at all.

Yet, purely by the providence of God, I can look back now and truly wonder where I would be *without Faith*.

My life has been lived most imperfectly. Given the ability to do them over, there would certainly be many things I would change. But going to seminary at Faith would not be one of those. It was the right place, at the right time, for me.

The education I received there was first-rate and life-changing. The faculty can never be assembled again on this Earth, and my notes could never be replaced. I studied under world-class scholars in a small and intimate academic environment.

It was at Faith that I found my mentors in ministry. One of those was Dr. Ralph Turk—a man of tremendous wisdom and courage. He encouraged me specifically at an incredibly difficult time in life and ministry.

Dr. John Hartog III gave me a love for Biblical languages—along with the confidence that I could master them if I wanted to, and an example of all that that would mean.

It was at Faith that I really learned how to study and teach the Bible. Two men principally impacted my thinking and theology forever—Dr. Myron J. Houghton and Dr. John C. Whitcomb.

It was the prospect of studying under Dr. Whitcomb—who was coming to do a module at Faith for the first time in the fall of 1994—that really drew me to attend the seminary. I ultimately had 10 classes there under him.

I never understood why Dr. Houghton was not world-famous. I wondered why he was not teaching at a much bigger school, or being interviewed regularly on national Christian media. The truth is that he was doing exactly what he loved, and he was in precisely the right place for me. One of his doctorates was from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Mo. When I began seminary, it had been less than a decade since I had left Lutheranism, so his expertise in this realm was an especially great help to me. He was able to phrase things in a way that really hit home, and I continue to incorporate them into my teaching today.

Among the things that Drs. Whitcomb and Houghton had in common is that each one could deliver captivating messages with no notes, except for the notes they had written in their study Bibles. This was their common practice, and I desired to emulate them—and so I have attempted to do. But I have an advantage over each of them, in that my Bible is now filled with their quotes and observations. I sometimes humorously call it the *John Whitcomb/Myron Houghton Study Bible*. There is only one copy in the world.

I recently listened to a lecture by Dr. Houghton. It reminded me once again how brilliant he was, and how blessed I was to spend countless hours learning from such men (see Luke 6:40).

On occasion, I have heard Christian leaders bemoan the time they wasted in seminary. I must confess that I have no category for relating to such testimonies—except to believe that they must have attended the wrong schools.

I do not know what my life would be like without the invaluable experiences I had in seminary. I do know the person who is largely responsible for my going, though—my wife Lynnette. For that she deserves my unending thanks and credit.

This week, I returned to Faith to be part of an exhibit for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, for the third year in a row, at the annual Refresh Conference.

My beloved professors and mentors are mostly in heaven now. There are no offices or classrooms to visit.

But in my heart and mind—and, I trust, through my ministry—their legacies live on.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

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