

Studies in Practical Christian Living

Faith

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Authored by: Mark Watson

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Background

In our series of studies on the Holy Spirit we briefly look at the Gifts of the Spirit. In this study on faith, which may be a gift of the Spirit, we want to take a look at the faith that comes through knowing Jesus and reflect on how it affects our relationship with God and with one another, Christians and non Christians.

The Greek word for 'Faith' is 'Pistis' (πίστις). This has a sense of confidence, certainty, reliance and trust. Faith is acknowledging the relation into which God has entered with us.

Faith is a response from the heart to God, a trustful acceptance of God's gift in Christ, a reliance on Christ, Christ alone, for all that salvation means. We have to remember that faith is alive, dynamic and life changing. There is nothing passive about faith. It is an attribute of the Living God.

The following three quotes are fundamental to our understanding of faith:

*"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*¹

Implicit in our understanding of faith then is hope...through faith our hope in Jesus Christ is realised and our hearts and minds are convicted. As Christians we are called to be an 'eschatological' people living between the 'now and the not yet' – and so much of scripture alludes to how our hope is being realised.

*"...so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God."*²

Whilst some people may initially come to faith through quite an intellectual route, what ultimately sustains that faith is not human wisdom. Human wisdom alone is simply not capable of capturing the enormity of God, the love of God and the grace of God.

*"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues."*³

Whilst as Christians, we all profess a measure of faith; a really profound and deep faith may be a gift of the Spirit.

¹ Hebrews 11:1

² 1 Corinthians 2:5

³ 1 Corinthians 12:9

The Message

God can give special revelations of faith, i.e. mustard seed size for miracles to happen. (Matthew 17:20). So often as adults we are scared to really trust, but God requires that we have the child-like trust of children, laying aside all our doubts and fears and saying 'Your will be done'.

We can be encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:12). That is one of the many reasons why it is so good to listen to somebody's testimony, because we can see how God has been at work in their lives. It is also why it is so encouraging to share.

By God's saving grace, faith also sets us free from the law that condemns us:

"...yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law."⁴

This was such a reality to Paul that he actually said that we are cursed if we try to live by the law because *"For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for "The one who is righteous will live by faith."⁵*

It is important to remember that God has made the first move. Faith is our response to God, and in responding our hearts are cleansed and purified. Acts 15:9 demonstrates that when our hearts are purified through faith the Holy Spirit can witness to God's presence in our lives. Faith and fruit so often go hand in hand. Faith produces peace (Romans 5:1). Faith also produces joy and hope in believing (Romans 15:13). Having responded to God and having been made clean we become holy and are to evidence a 'separateness' from the world which separates us as people of God. We are set apart or made holy by faith (Acts 26:18). That initial response of faith that led to us into becoming holy results in our salvation. Justification is also intrinsically linked to faith (Mark 16:16, John 1:12, John 3:16, John 3:36, John 6:40, John 6:47, Acts 16:31, Galatians 3:11, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 11:6, 1 Peter 1:9, 1 John 5:10).

By reading the Bible we can see God's salvation landscape unfolding before our very eyes. We can read of His great love for His people, how His plans and purposes are being fulfilled in our very lives, and how one day there will be a new Heaven and a new earth. The vision unfolds in all its splendour as we read:

*"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."*

⁴ Galatians 2:16

⁵ Galatians 3:10-11

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."⁶

We must keep hold of these truths as we learn of the goal towards which God is working. We are called to be partners in His project. Jesus said *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."⁷* Faith then is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is taking hold of truth, and speaking it into our lives time and time again until we believe it with all our hearts.

Faithfulness is living in the fullness and completeness of faith.

Questions

1. Can you think of an occasion when you can truly say that God let you down?
2. What is it about God's character that encourages us to have faith in Him?
3. Over the next week think of special ways in which you can respond to God in the fullness of faith?
4. Discover ways in which your relationship with God becomes enriched as you grow in faith. Try and write down incidents that happen during the week where you have to completely rely on God. Try and ring somebody when God answers your prayers so you can double God's blessing to you.
5. Do you think that society today makes it difficult for us to be a people of faith? How can we respond to this?

⁶ Revelation 21:3b-5a

⁷ Matthew 28:18-20