

Faith

by David E. Moss

Faith is the primary element of man's relationship with God. We know this from Hebrews 11:6 where it says, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him.*" This is true whether someone is approaching God for the very first time, or has been walking with God for a very long time.

Actually, man needs holiness and purity of heart to see God, but God has chosen to accept faith instead. Hebrews 12:14 says, "*Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" And Matthew 5:8 says, "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*" The problem is that "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23) making it impossible for any of us to enter into His presence. Even when we try our best, the only righteousness we can produce on our own is worth nothing more than "*filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6), leaving us unacceptable to God. It is for this reason that God decided to accept faith from man in place of the holiness or righteousness he needs but does not have within himself and cannot obtain on his own. This solves man's problem because when someone directs faith onto Jesus Christ and His work of redemption, God in turn transfers His own righteousness to the account of that believing human being, thus giving him exactly what he needs. Romans 3:21-22 says, "*But now the righteousness of God...is manifested...Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.*" Romans 4:9b says that "*faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness*" and Romans 4:11 says that Abraham is "*the father of all them that believe...that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.*"

This explains why Romans 14:23b says, "*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" We really have only two choices in life: follow faith or yield to sin. Earning our own way to heaven is not an option because all attempts to do so only adds to our debt instead of reducing it. As Romans 4:4 says, "*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*" It is only by faith that we can qualify to see God. Thus Romans 4:5 says, "*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*" But neither can the redeemed please God by human effort alone because faith is the governing principle by which believers are to live every day of their Christian lives. Habakkuk 2:4 (O.T.) and Romans 1:17 (N.T.) both say, "*The just shall live by faith.*" In other words, those who have already been justified are to be guided daily by the principle of faith. Galatians 2:20 makes this very clear: "*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*"

Seeing then that faith is so important to every human being, saved and unsaved alike, it is expedient that we understand what faith is. Faith involves at least two profound dynamics. First, faith involves believing God. Secondly, faith involves trusting God. The following paragraphs describe the various factors involved in these two aspects of faith.

I. Believing

The biblical concept of believing God involves being absolutely convinced, fully persuaded. Sometimes we use the word believe as a synonym for suppose, saying that we think or believe something is so but are not quite sure about it. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives as one definition for believe: "to hold as an opinion." However, in believing God there is no room for reservations or questions. Faith consists of being convinced beyond any shadow of doubt or hesitation.

A. To believe God, then, is to be fully persuaded that everything He says is right, true, and accurate. It is to believe that every single word which proceeds out of the mouth of God is

full of integrity and contains no errors, inaccuracies, mis-statements, or short comings in any way. Psalm 33:4 says, "*For the word of the LORD is right....*" Psalm 119 supports this with several statements:

- 75. "*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.*"
- 140. "*Thy word is very pure....*"
- 142. "*...thy law is the truth.*"
- 160. "*Thy word is true from the beginning....*"

At the same time, to believe God is to be convinced that it is utterly impossible for Him to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Faith understands that the divine nature consists of holiness, purity and righteousness. Therefore, God cannot sin; He can never make a mistake; and He cannot do or say anything wrong. Deception, guile, misleading statements, or every other form of corrupt speech are totally foreign to the mouth of God. When He speaks, the force of truth energizes His words with undeniable and irresistible power. They create things out of nothing, they sustain life, or they penetrate and judge the hearts of men. And because of these things, the words of God demand a response from all who hear them.

B. Therefore, if a person truly believes God, he must act on that belief, implicitly obeying God's commands. This is what James meant when he said "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2:20). If a man says he believes God but does not obey God's commands, those who hear his profession of faith must seriously doubt his sincerity. How can someone honestly believe that what God has said is absolutely right, true and accurate and not respond to it with the appropriate action? "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him?*" (James 2:14). Can a man's faith profit him when it consists of nothing but empty words? James says: "*Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works*" (James 2:17).

It is important to note, however, that James is not teaching that works has any part in saving a man. Acting because you believe what God says is not the same thing as working in order to obtain God's favor. By declaring that faith without works is dead, James teaches that a man must really believe God and not just say he does. If a man really believes God, he will do whatever God instructs him to do. It is the believing part that pleases God. The accompanying work or action merely demonstrates that the profession of faith is genuine. A man is justified in his profession, that is, shown to be genuine, by the evidence of his activity after he has believed.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, many believed what they heard and responded with the question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37). They understood that believing the message of the Gospel necessitated an appropriate response. So it is with all the words of God. If we really believe them, we will gladly submit to what they require.

C. Abraham is an excellent example of this dynamic of faith. "*Abraham believed God*" (Romans 4:3). The proof of this is that when God told Abraham to do something, he did it, regardless of whether or not it made sense to him.

One example of this is Abraham's response to God's promise that he and Sarah would have a son. The promise did not include a conception engineered by the Holy Spirit as in the case with Mary and Jesus. Abraham's child was to be born through the natural process of human conception. This meant that Abraham and Sarah had to have the appropriate physical relationship in order for conception to occur. Once Abraham really believed that what God said was true, "*he considered not his own body now dead...neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb*" (Romans 4:19) and knew his wife. Abraham believed God and followed that belief with

the appropriate action.

Another example concerns Abraham's actions regarding his son Isaac. God instructed Abraham to take his son Isaac to the top of a mountain and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering. (Genesis 22:1ff). He dutifully took Isaac to Mt. Moriah, demonstrating how thoroughly he believed what God said by tying up his son, laying him on an altar and raising the knife in his hands with the full intention of slaying him before the Lord.

D. The applications of this principle are very practical. When an unregenerate man believes the Gospel, he must act on that belief by confessing his sin and by calling upon the name of the Lord, receiving Christ (Romans 10:8-14; John 1:12). Confessing and calling are not works which he does in order to be saved; they are only the appropriate actions which result from genuine belief. Of course, if he does not confess and call, there must be serious questions about how genuinely he believes.

Likewise, a believer's response to the Word of God, will result in very specific behaviors. For example, a Christian reads Romans 12:11, "*Be...not slothful in business...*" Prior to this, he has had a typical worldly attitude on the job, showing up and doing just enough to be able to pick up his pay check each week. But because he has decided to believe God, upon reading this statement he consciously changes his attitude at work and becomes diligently productive every day. Similarly, when God's Word tells us to distribute to the necessity of the saints (Romans 12:13), we respond by giving money, or food, or clothing to the members of our local church who desperately need these things. When it tells us to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27), we go to their homes and help them in any way we can. When it tells us to be ready to answer anyone who asks about our hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15), we openly testify of our salvation and of our confidence in the Word of God.

E. One problem that comes from failing to believe God is inaction. This is the consequence that James discusses. A man says he has faith, but he never acts on that faith. His inaction, his failure to act on what he says he believes, demonstrates the emptiness of his profession. Illustrating this, James turns our attention to a man or woman who is insufficiently clothed and destitute of daily food. Inaction wishes them well but leaves them naked and hungry (James 2:15-16). "*Even so,*" he says, "*faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*" (James 2:17). A professed faith may be full of good wishes, but without being accompanied by the appropriate action, it is likely not real faith. And an empty faith always leaves an unsaved man in his lost estate, an immature Christian slothful in business, the fatherless and widows lonely, and the questions of seekers unanswered.

By contrast, genuine belief always results in an appropriate action. By faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice, Enoch walked with God, Noah prepared an ark, Abraham went out to a strange place, and Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Through faith, men "*subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword,*" and did many other remarkable things (Hebrews 11:33, 34). Those who stayed home and did nothing are not recorded in the Hall of Faith.

How many people in this world say they believe in God yet show no evidence in their lives of specific responses to the things God has said. James says that simply believing God exists is grossly insufficient. "*The devils also believe*" this, but look at the terrifying condition they are in (James 2:19). Merely accepting the existence of God is an entirely different thing from understanding our accountability to Him and submitting to that accountability by an implicit obedience to His commands.

The passivity that results from empty belief often leaves a vacuum in the human soul. If it is sustained for any length of time, all kinds of superstitions will rush in to fill the void. This

leads to another problem.

F. Another problem that comes from failing to believe God is wrong action. Many people not only chose to ignore God's plan of action for their lives but also choose to replace it with a plan they make up on their own or one that has been made up by someone else. This is, of course, the reason there are so many religions in the world today. As Paul describes the problem in his letter to the Romans, "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God...but **became vain in their imaginations**, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things*" (Romans 1:21-23). Instead of accepting God as He is, they made up their own gods and along with them also made up a whole set of commandments to follow which were contrary to the commandments of God.

Jesus indicated that this problem is not exclusive to those who make up false gods. The Scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels professed to believe in the true God. In spite of that, they transgressed the commandments of God by their own traditions. In confronting them about this, Jesus said, "*For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition*" (Matthew 15:4-6). The Scribes and Pharisees, in spite of their professed faith in God, did not really believe God because they failed to obey His words, choosing instead to pursue alternatives they had made up on their own.

Passivity regarding the Word of God is bad enough, but to go so far as to invent alternatives, or blindly follow the inventions of others, is a very serious offense. This is why Scripture admonishes us repeatedly concerning the danger of false teachers who pervert the right ways of God with damnable heresies. God will never accept alternatives to His Word. For example, Cain thought he could bring an offering of his own choosing and still be acceptable unto God. But he learned the hard way that man's alternatives to God's instruction are nothing more than the unacceptable result of unbelief. He either had to believe God and respond accordingly or He would be rejected, regardless of how nice his alternative plan appeared to be.

II. Trusting

Faith also includes the dynamic of trust. This means that we not only believe God to be accurate in what He says, but we also are convinced that He is trustworthy. There are several things involved in this dynamic of faith.

A. To trust God is to have absolute confidence that He can do whatever needs to be done. This is a crucial part of faith, because doubting God's ability contradicts the very nature of faith. God is able. If he is not able, He is not God. If He is not God, there is no reason to have faith in Him. But since He is God, He is able; and believing that makes it easy to trust God to deliver whatever is needed. Seekers can be assured of salvation because, "*He is able also to save them to the uttermost...*" (Hebrews 7:25). Seasoned believers can endure the most difficult of circumstances because His grace is sufficient even for infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake (II Corinthians 12:9-10).

This is the very thing that sustained Mary in the challenge of bearing a child as a virgin. When the angel appeared to Mary, she wondered how she could be with child when she had never known a man. Gabriel explained to her that "*with God, nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:37). Knowing that God was able to do this marvelous thing alleviated all her apprehensions and gave her the courage to gladly submit to the plan.

B. To trust God also means to have an unwavering confidence that He will keep His Word. Numbers 23:19 says, “*God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*” Isaiah 55:11 reinforces this by saying, “*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*” Faith convinces the heart that God is reliable, trustworthy, dependable, faithful, responsible, credible, and believable. Abraham, who believed God to be truthful, also trusted God to do whatever He said He would do. “*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform*” (Romans 4:20-21).

This aspect of trust is illustrated in James 1:5-7. God has promised to give wisdom to all men liberally. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*” So, if any of us are in need of wisdom, all we need to do is ask for it. But James says, “*Ask in faith, nothing wavering.*” If we question whether or not God will keep His promises, we likely will not receive what God desires to give. As James says, “*For let not that man (whose faith is wavering) think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*” Faith trusts God absolutely to deliver what He has promised. It acknowledges God to be full of integrity, true to His Word and absolutely trustworthy.

C. It follows then, that to trust God is to wait as long as it takes for God to deliver what He has promised. When we believe God, we act on that belief showing that we really do believe; but when we trust God, we do not act: we wait for God to act, showing that we really do trust in Him. This is where Hebrews 11:1 fits into the definition of faith. “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” If God has not yet acted to fulfill His promises, faith in God’s integrity sustains us while we wait. Faith is evidence enough to convince us that He can do whatever needs to be done and substantial enough to convince us that He will act when He deems it appropriate.

And thus, all those recorded in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews Chapter 11) were unhesitatingly loyal in spite of the fact they never received the promise in their life time on earth (Hebrews 11:39). They believed God, obeying Him faithfully and they trusted Him completely, never giving up the hope that is born out of real faith.

D. Another dimension to trusting God involves depending upon Him for things we need. Jesus makes this point in the Sermon on the Mount when He says, “*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:25,32-33). Faith assures the heart that God knows what we need and will provide accordingly.

E. But this aspect of trust also includes accepting God’s judgment in determining what we need. If we ask Him for something and wait patiently for Him to respond, faith assists us in graciously accepting whatever His response is. You have probably heard someone say jubilantly, “I received an answer to prayer.” But did you ever notice that people say that only when they get what they asked for? Does God sometimes say, “No,” when we ask for things? Would it not be just as appropriate, when it becomes obvious that God is not going to give us what we asked for, to say, “Hallelujah! I received an answer to my prayer. God said no!” Unfortunately, many of us are not satisfied until we get what we want. When we begin to suspect that He is not going to give us what we asked for, we often seek some other way to obtain it. This is not trusting God. Trusting does not only include depending on Him for what we need; it also includes accepting His judgement in determining whether or not we actually need it.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego provide an excellent example of this. Faced with the possibility of being thrown into the fiery furnace they said, *“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up”* (Daniel 3:17-18). They knew God **could** deliver them from the fire in the furnace; but they did not know if He **would**. It made no difference to them. They were willing to accept either deliverance or death as God’s solution to their dilemma. We face many situations in which we know what God can do but not what He will do. Faith trusts that what God ultimately decides to do is the very best decision, no matter what.

F. It follows then that to trust God means we do not judge God by what we experience.

Since God is always correct in the decisions He makes on our behalf, there is never a time that faith allows us to question His judgment. We never accuse Him of being wrong, unfair, uncaring, or insensitive to our needs. Instead, we always respect His decisions no matter how difficult or unpleasant our experience becomes. Faith assures our heart that He always knows what is best for us according to His will.

For example, two people, both of whom are walking with the Lord, find themselves financially destitute and about to lose their homes because they cannot pay their mortgage. Both pray identical prayers, asking God to provide the money they need. God provides for one of them who then says, *“Thank you Heavenly Father for being a wonderful provider.”* But God does not provide for the other one, who ends up losing his home. Does the second man criticize God for letting him down, or does he accept the loss of his house as part of God’s perfect will for his life? The trusting heart accepts God’s decision whatever it is and gives thanks in all things (Ephesians 5:20). This dynamic of faith assists the Christian in learning to be content in whatever state he finds himself. As Paul said, *“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Philippians 4:11-13).

G. One problem that arises from not trusting God is self-sufficiency. Consider the story of the rich man in Luke 12:16-21. He had so much that his barns could not hold it; so he built bigger barns and was sure he had need of nothing. His self-sufficient attitude was an act of unbelief, or faithlessness. He acknowledged no dependence upon God whatsoever and trusted solely in himself. His confidence went for naught, however, because he could not keep his soul alive (Psalm 22:29) and he died, leaving his full barns behind. A similar indictment is given against the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-17, *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods and have need of nothing....”* Surely, the participants in the church at Laodicea claimed to believe in God and even claimed to believe in Christ, else they would not have been in the church. But their faith was grossly deficient. In fact, it was so deficient that God was ready to spit them out of his mouth. Oh how wretched we become when we think we can provide for ourselves and have no reason to trust God.

H. Another problem that arises from not trusting God is worry. Worry is the exact opposite of faith. When we worry, our hearts fill up with anxiety, our emotions become frazzled and our soul is drenched with the fear that the worse possible thing that can happen will. Think how incompatible this is with the belief that God always keeps His word and He always does what is best. The song writer said, *“Why worry when you can pray!”* Indeed. Why worry when we have the privilege of making our requests known unto our Trustworthy Heavenly Father who will work all things after the counsel of His own will and who never forsakes His own. Philippians 4:6-7 says, *“Be careful for nothing (that is, do not let your heart be filled up with anxiety); but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds*

through Christ Jesus.”

Consider the little faith of the disciples that could not keep them from panicking. One day they were on the Sea of Galilee and a storm ferociously battered their boat. The disciples awoke Jesus from his sleep crying, “*Lord, save us: we perish*” (Matthew 8:25). One might argue that they were turning to Christ in faith, knowing He was the only one who could help them in a desperate situation. Jesus, however, confronted them for having too little faith. Their cry was laced with fear betraying their despair in which they were nearly convinced that all was about to be lost. But worry is about as useless as trying to make ourselves taller (Matthew 6:25-26,27,28-34). It is an act of faithlessness which will likely prevent us from receiving many of the blessings God is waiting to shower upon us.

The antidote for worry is faith. Trust Him! He can do whatever needs to be done. He will do everything He has promised to do. Depend on Him to know what is needed and to provide it at precisely the right time - not too soon and not too late.

Conclusion

The Bible presents two dynamics of faith. But please note: while we can examine each dynamic separately, we must learn to use them together. Believing God and trusting God are like the two sides of a coin. You cannot spend the heads side today and the tails side tomorrow. You must spend them together as a single coin. Similarly, believing and trusting are intricately bound together in the operation of faith.

For example, when Abraham believed that God’s promise of a son was true, he acted on that belief by knowing his wife. But at the same time, he fully trusted God to intervene and make it possible for Sarah to bear a child in spite of their aged bodies. These two things together make up the substance of Abraham’s faith in God.

Since faith is the primary element in man’s relationship with God, we cannot afford to get faith wrong. If we get faith wrong, we do not please God. And, the failure to please God can have eternal ramifications. Unfortunately, there are many well meaning people who are participating in the church who do not get it right. They say they believe God, but at the same time seek to please Him by following their own attempts to produce righteousness. They say they trust God, but the things they do themselves make them much more confident of heaven than the grace of God does.

In order to get faith right, we have to lay aside every weight that so easily besets us and look only unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We have to believe that He starts it and He finishes it and there is nothing for us to do in between those two things. We have to throw away everything that would cause us to boast that we had something personally to do with our pleasing God.

Faith pleases God and faith alone. By faith, I enter into a relationship with God, believing the Gospel and trusting Him alone to save me. By faith I walk in Christ daily, obeying His every word because it is right, and trusting Him for everything, being fully persuaded that what He says, He does. May your faith be real; and if it is, I am sure you too will always find God to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, even as He promised. 📖