

## 2. Faith in God

### Definition

Faith may be defined as the belief in, confidence in, or loyalty to a person, idea or thing. In Hebrews 11:1: we are given the definition of "*Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.*" Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is "*trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove.*" (Gotquestions.org). We are all called to live by faith. We are called to believe what the Bible says, and all the promises that have been given to us, and to live accordingly.

Faith is more than just intellectual acknowledgement of who Jesus is – even Satan knows who Jesus is, but such knowledge without personal commitment to Jesus is of no value to anyone. James 2:19 *You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.*

Faith is not a New Covenant concept or doctrine – it has always been a requirement for acceptance by God – see Hebrews 11:3-40, where reference is made to the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, etc. Hebrews 11:2 *Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation* (or were commended for).

### Faith as a decision

Our faith is based on the character of God, and on the truth of His word. Jesus, who is also called '*the Word*' (John 1:1-2) is called '*faithful and true*' (Revelation 19:11) and Jesus said '*..your word, which is truth.*' (John 17:17). Faith is something we need to make a conscious decision to put on each day; 1 Thessalonians 5:8 '*But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armour of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.*'

### Faith, sight and feelings

We all have a choice: to accept the word of God, or the evidence of our senses – what we can see and touch etc. Our senses deal with things that are material, temporary, and changeable. Faith deals with the truth of God and His word, who is eternal and unchanging. Paul said; '*For we live by believing and not by seeing*' (or '*by faith and not by sight*') 2 Corinthians 5:7. Abraham had this type of faith; Romans 4:20-21 *Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.*

Faith is also not based on feelings – e.g., whether we feel saved, loved or healed. We read of Thomas (who has been nicknamed 'the doubter') wanted to see Jesus and his wounds before he would believe that Jesus had been resurrected. *They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side"* (John 20:25).

Faith is not ignoring or pretending that circumstances or illnesses do not exist, but in believing that the spiritual power of God is more relevant and powerful. Hence Jesus replied to Thomas: John 20:29 *Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me"* and Paul said of Abraham's faith: Romans 4:17 *That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.*

### Faith and Salvation

As we saw in '1. Repentance from evil deeds', belief in Jesus is linked to faith in Him, and both are required for salvation. Romans 10:9-10 *If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart* (i.e. have faith) *that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.* This is echoed in John 16:1 *"I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith".*

Our salvation is now dependant on our faith in Jesus, instead of obedience to the laws given by

Moses under the Old Covenant: Romans 3:27 *Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith (in Jesus).* Galatians 2:16 *Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.*

### **Faith for Life**

Faith is not only necessary for salvation, but also for our lives – for direction, for provision, for protection, in short for all our needs. Habakkuk 2:4 *“Look at the proud! They trust in them-selves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.* This scripture is quoted in Romans 1:17 and in Hebrews 10:38. Romans 1:17 *This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”* Galatians 5:6 *For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.*

### **Growing in our Faith**

Faith for salvation is a gift of God, and Jesus helps us to grow in our faith in Him. We are all given a certain amount of faith. Our faith starts when we hear the good news about Christ.

God does not want any of us remain spiritually weak and immature, like babies we were when we were re-born (1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 5), but to help us to mature to greater levels of faith which are necessary in order to accomplish the new assignments He has for us.

‘Every new season God moves us into requires a new level of faith. As we progress in God, He will use life's challenges to stretch us. He is preparing us for greater responsibility and the faith He requires from us today will be greater than what He required from us yesterday. We must progress and go from faith to even stronger faith.’ (Dutch Sheets)

We can all increase our faith because it arises and increases as we ‘hear’ - read, study and believe - the Word. So the more time we spend in reading and studying the Word, the more our faith will increase to apply it. We need to have faith ‘like (Greek *hos*) a mustard seed’, (not ‘as small as’ a mustard seed). Mustard seeds grows into great big trees – so should our faith. (Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6).

Romans 10:17 *So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.*

Romans 1:17 *This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”*

1 Thessalonians 3:10 *Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.*

Our level of faith is our own responsibility.

Abraham is called the father of those who have faith (Romans 4:19-21). God commended Abraham because his faith grew, as he waited for the fulfilment of the promise God had given him (Romans 4:22-24). Paul commended the Thessalonians because their faith, love, and endurance and faithfulness were flourishing and growing.

Romans 4:19-21 *And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead - and so was Sarah's womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.*

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 *Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing. We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering.*

We need to safeguard our faith, by ensuring that we remain in Christ.

Hebrews 12:2 *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion (or ‘author’ or ‘founder’) who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honour beside God's throne.*

Colossians 2:7 *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*  
1 Timothy 1:19 *Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.*

Beware of 'negative' faith. Fear is a form of faith, so if we fear something we are setting in place the faith for it to come about. When we allow our thoughts to dwell on things that may not even happen, we are planting seeds of doubt that will eat away at our faith. If we fear something, we are setting in place the faith for it to come about. Job 3:25 *What I always feared has happened to me. What I dreaded has come true.*

### **Faith for Protection**

Faith in God, and with this in His Word and in His promises to us, enables us to defeat the demonic attacks on our minds and spirits, which seek to bring us into doubt, unbelief, false-doctrines, and sin. Ephesians 6:16 *In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.* 1 Thessalonians 5:8 *But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armour of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.* 1 Timothy 6:12 *Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses.* 1 Peter 5:8-9 *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith...*

### **Faith and Deeds**

Faith is not just a belief or a feeling; it is a dynamic power given by God to enable us to do His will. James 2:14 *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?* James 2:17 *So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.* James 2:18 *Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."* James 2:24 *So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.* James 2:26 *Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.*

### **Faith for Healing**

Faith has been called the currency of heaven. In this sense we need to approach God in faith – with a confident expectation that God both hears us and is responsive to our prayers. Matthew 9:22 *Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, "daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed at that moment.* Acts 14:9 *and listening as Paul preached. Looking straight at him, Paul realized he had faith to be healed.* 1 Peter 2:24 *'He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed' i.e. our healing has already been provided for.* James 1:6 *But when you ask Him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.*

### **Faith for the miraculous**

We often do think, or to assume, that performing miracles is only for a select few, and that great faith is first required. This is not what the Bible teaches us. Matthew 17:20 *"You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."* Mark 16:17 *These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe (have faith in, or trust in): They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed."* Note the preconditions to receiving to receiving in Mark 11:22-25 of "...but you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart.", "...if you believe that you have (already) received it", and "... but when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against."

## **Great faith as a spiritual gift**

Though we are all given a measure – a certain amount of faith - some are given a much greater amount. 1 Corinthians 12:9 *The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing.*

## **False Faith**

Salvation for everyone, Jew and Gentiles (all of the rest of us) alike, is now by faith in Jesus alone, and not by obedience to the laws of Moses. There will always be those with a counterfeit faith, that is a faith based on false or incorrect teachings, such as requiring obedience to one or more of the laws of Moses. 2 Timothy 3:8 *These teachers oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. They have depraved minds and a counterfeit faith.* Titus 1:10-11 *For there are many rebellious people who engage in useless talk and deceive others. This is especially true of those who insist on circumcision for salvation. They must be silenced, because they are turning whole families away from the truth by their false teaching. And they do it only for money.* Titus 1:13-14 *This is true. So reprimand them sternly to make them strong in the faith. They must stop listening to Jewish myths and the commands of people who have turned away from the truth.*

## **Our faith will be tested**

There are several examples in the Bible of the faith of people being tested – e.g. Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22). Going through a tough time does not mean that God has abandoned you! Always know that God loves you, and you can trust Him.

1 Peter 1:7 *These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold - though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.* Hebrews 10:38 *And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.* James 1:2-4 *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.* Revelations 3:19 *I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.*

'Many of you, My people, have not had your prayers answered because your faith wavered. You believe when you pray, but when you do not see immediate results, you falter and allow doubt to creep in. You must stand firm in your position of receiving and refuse to be moved by outward circumstances. Be resolute. James 1:6-8 *But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.'* Marsha Burns

## **Priority of Love**

We should never forget that our first priority in life is to love God, and next to this to love all mankind (Matthew 22:36-40). Christians are primarily to be identified by their love for one another (see John 13-35). 1 Corinthians 13:13 *Three things will last forever - faith, hope, and love - and the greatest of these is love.* 1 Corinthians 13:2 *If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.* 1 Timothy 1:5 *The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.* 2 Thessalonians 1:3 *Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing.*

## **Faith and Rewards**

We receive salvation by faith, but we will receive crowns for our faithfulness. Some of us will receive more crowns than others. Jesus asks us all very directly: Luke 18:8 *But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"*

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