

## **FAITH, WHAT DO THESE FIVE LETTERS MEAN?**

The just shall live by faith. Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38,  
Habakkuk 2:4

We drive cars, trust doctors, sit on chairs, and put our money in banks that are often called trust companies. We trust cars, doctors, chairs, and banks. This is called having faith. Faith, however, is only good if the thing or person being trusted is reliable. Some of us have been disappointed in certain makes of cars, we have been misdiagnosed by doctors, we have had our chairs let us down quite suddenly and we have watched as banks lose the livelihoods of their depositors. So we lose our faith because we lose confidence in the object or our faith.

However, the faith of Scripture is in the Lord Jesus Christ who not only has the power but the ability to do what He promises. His Word is sure and steadfast and He speaks Truth. He never lies and can be depended upon.

Faith is a key concept of Scripture. Without it we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6) We need to believe in the Lord or have faith in Him to have everlasting or eternal life (John 3:15). Sometimes faith is our confidence in the Lord and His Word. Sometimes faith is what we believe. I would like to share some thoughts with you about Biblical faith.

### **Faith, What is it?**

Faith is simply trusting someone or something. Biblically we talk about believers and unbelievers. Believers are those who trust in the Bible and in the Lord. Unbelievers are those who do not. But unbelievers are also believers. More often than not, their faith is in themselves and in what they think is right.

Faith can be great or small, but it is not great when we believe harder, it is great when we believe more of the promises that God has given us. When we are first saved, we have faith that Christ died for our sins. As we begin to walk with God we learn that He has given us other great and precious promises. As we rely more and more on more and more promises, our faith grows. Let's see what Scripture says about faith:

**First, faith is commanded.** In Mark 1:15 the Lord Himself says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Repenting and believing are commanded, however, we can't believe until we repent.

It is impossible to make a person believe just by telling them that they must. But it is possible to tell people that they must believe if they are going to please God. For example, we can tell people that they need to evacuate in the path of a hurricane. But if they don't believe the weather reports, likely they won't evacuate. So if they should say, "The sky is clear and the wind is calm. I don't

believe the weather report." We might then say, "A storm is coming, believe it." Hopefully, then they would check the weather reports for themselves and check the facts so that they would have their mind changed (that is they would repent) and believe that the storm is coming.

I have found through years of Gospel preaching that those who say that they cannot believe in the Lord have issues where they do not agree with God. We can tell them to believe, but they will never be able to trust the Lord until they deal with those issues. They may think that good works or baptism should save them. They may think that God is going to be merciful to all and so they don't need to worry. They may think that there is no real eternal punishment for sin. In some cases, they don't want to submit to the Lord and his moral standards. Whatever the problem is, until the person believes God with regard to that issue, they will not be able to believe that Christ died for their sins. That this is why the Lord says that we should repent and believe the Gospel.

**Second, faith is the permanent character of a person.** In John 3:16, the person who believes is really the believing one. Biblical faith is not something that we decide is right today and that we can change our minds about tomorrow. That may be true of our confidence in a car or a doctor. But that cannot be true of our confidence or trust in the Lord if it is truly Biblical faith.

We have to remember that our believing is not what makes the promises of God reliable. They are reliable whether we believe them or not. But when we believe the promises, they become effective in our lives. My believing that two and two makes four is a fact that I learned when I was young. All the believing in the world will not make two and two make five. Because I have perfect confidence in the fact that two and two make four, I use that truth when I balance my checkbook. I don't even think about whether it is true because it is now a part of my belief system. In like manner, I am convinced that Christ died for my sins and even though I hear a lot of arguments on the part of unbelievers to the contrary, I will never be convinced that Christ did not die for me. It is part of my permanent belief system. Because faith in the Lord is the permanent character of a believer, I am confident that once I am saved, I am saved forever. Not only is my salvation and faith based on what God has done for me and not on what I have done for God, but the truth of what God has done will never change.

**Third, faith is a work of God that he demands of us but it is not a work of righteousness.** In John 6:28-29, the Lord is asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" The Lord's answer is, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." However, salvation is not a "work of righteousness" (Titus 3:5). So there is nothing that we can do to deserve to be saved. No work that we do will make us righteous. But we can strive to enter in and we can search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

**Lastly, faith is a gift.** In Ephesians 2:8 the Lord says through Paul "For by

grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Some think that faith and only faith is the gift in this verse, but I would suggest that salvation by grace through faith is all included in the gift. In 1 Corinthians 13, the faith to move mountains is definitely a gift of grace that not everyone has. Even though this chapter is not dealing with saving faith, it is dealing with faith in the promises of God and here faith is a gift.

Faith then has many facets and our faith cannot be put in a box that limits the way God has worked in people's lives.

### **Faith, How is it obtained?**

Many people try to present faith as a formula or as a decision or as a prayer. The Biblical doctrine is that there is no formula other than the need to repent in order to believe.

Faith comes by listening to God and His Word according to John 5:24 and Romans 10:17. John wrote His Gospel so that we could have confidence in the Lord and believe (See John 20:31). Then he tells us in 1 John 5:13 that he has written his letter so that his hearers might KNOW that they have eternal life. This means that when we believe God about the way of salvation, we KNOW that we have eternal life. If we don't know we have eternal life then we haven't really trusted in Christ or believed in the name of the Son of God.

Observation, reason and logic are all involved. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring about a miracle that is called a new birth. The Spirit and the Word were working together in creation in Genesis. The Spirit and the Word work together in the new creation or new birth.

Faith involves a decision but it is not the decision itself. Faith may be expressed by a prayer but prayer isn't necessarily faith. The Roman centurion in Acts 10 had prayed and was likely a Jewish proselyte or convert. But he still needed faith in the Lord Jesus to be saved. Some people ask God to save them and forgive them but after the Lord died on the cross that was never done in the Acts of the Apostles or in the letters that the apostles and others wrote. It does not seem necessary to ask for a gift that is already being offered. A thank you for the gift might make more sense. Likewise, Christ has offered us forgiveness and reconciliation. We don't need to ask for it. We need to believe in it and trust Him that the work is done that saves.

Men like to tell people **how** to believe. But Biblically, we tell people **what or who** to believe and then we let the Holy Spirit use the Word of God to convict them of their sins and to turn them to the Lord so that they can trust Him. When I am working with a person who is struggling with this issue of faith, I often read a passage of Scripture with them and then ask them if the passage is true rather than asking them if they believe it. I have found that most of us have no trouble

believing what we are convinced is true.

### **Faith, How is it maintained and can it be lost?**

Saving faith cannot be lost since it is based on what God has done for us and not what we have done for God. Faith in people can be lost, they are undependable. Faith in practices that we find out are not Biblical can be lost because we may have depended on something that we found out was not true. Some of God's promises are conditional, and so faith that God will save us from situations that require obedience can be lost if we are not obedient. But faith in the finished work of Christ can not be lost.

In order to maintain our faith we need to stay occupied with the object of our faith. That object is the Lord Jesus Christ. We stay occupied with Him by reading His Word and meditating on it, by praying and by associating with others who like to talk about Him.

There are times when Satan will attack us. In Ephesians 6:13-18, that attack is called the evil day and his attack is called fiery darts. His fiery darts are the doubts that he puts in our minds. The solution is to take the shield of faith that protects all the other armor and is held in front of the soldier. The shield of faith is not the shield of believing but the shield of what we believe. We need to know the Bible well enough so that if Satan raises doubts in our minds, we can remind Him as well as ourselves of the promises that He has made.

Normally, Satan attacks us when we have done something that we know a Christian should not do. Satan will come along and say, "See you are not a Christian after all." That is when we as Christians need to confess our sins so He can be faithful and just in forgiving us (1 John 1:9). This will not save us again but will restore our joy and our fellowship with the Lord. John's first letter was written for the purpose of maintaining our fellowship with the Lord and with one another and for the purpose of giving us "full" joy. (John 1:3-4). If we are obedient to the Lord, if we make sure we confess or acknowledge our sins so we can be forgiven, if we occupy ourselves with the Lord and His promises and if we associate with other Christians who are walking with the Lord, our faith in the Lord should never waver.

### **Conclusion**

Faith in the Lord Jesus is available to all and is a must for all in order to be prepared for eternity. Faith is not based on feelings or emotions but it is based on the truth of Scripture. When we have faith in the Lord and His Word, we have our lives built on a Rock that cannot be destroyed by the storms of life or the doubts of Satan (See Matthew 7:24-25).