

TWO KINDS of FAITH

Christians Everywhere Recognize the Absolute Necessity of Having TRUE and Demonstrable Faith. Faith can find Expression in a Number of Ways. But, What Kind of Faith Must We Have in order to be Acceptable Before God?

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Though we are given the fundamental definition of faith, in places such as Hebrews 11:1, we're all too often too casual as to what kind of faith we have and where that faith originated. Religious people nearly always see themselves as having faith but without having explored its true definition and without realizing that there's more than one kind of faith. A potent recipe for miscalculation!

We ALL Have faith!

People of every persuasion have faith in something. The evolutionist has faith that chance and the natural selection processes are able to explain interdependent and highly complex life on Earth as we find it. The atheist also believes firmly that his view using rational sciences to explain apparent realities for them dispenses with any need for a belief in a Divine Existence. Each of these has a faith of a sort. Religious viewpoints aside, we each have certain faith in the natural world as we see it and the reliability of the laws of nature to continually produce predictable results. We are certain what'll happen if we jump off a cliff. We aren't careless with fire and we handle explosives or poisons with care because we know there are natural laws that impose predictable consequences. And, what person doesn't have faith that we all will die some day?

Each of us has beliefs, some perfectly valid, some not. We tend to believe what we're taught from childhood and what we come to understand from personal life experiences. Some believe in the existence of a God while others don't. But, is belief the same thing as faith? I think we can see from the above that the answer is, no, not entirely. But what about belief **in** God? Is belief **in** God the same thing as faith? Is that belief alone sufficient to establish the fact that we have faith? Is belief alone sufficient to 'save' us as the Bible speaks of?

A prominent religious luminary of the late renaissance era professed belief that "we are saved by faith and **faith alone**", despite the only place in the Bible where the word faith is coupled to the word alone (*only*) it is prefaced by the words "not by"! James 2:24 has: "*You see then how that by works a man is justified, and **not by faith only***". That theologian regarded the book of James as "an epistle of straw!" Faith played a major part in his theology organized around protest, but was it the kind of Faith the Bible stresses? Did the KIND of faith he envisioned satisfy the requirement for the Faith that the Bible calls for? The Apostle James' conclusion as seen above should raise serious question. He exposes the fact that real and living Faith is a Faith that produces a certain kind of response: that referred to by him as "works"! There is an inter-relationship between Faith and works. It is that relationship, what could be called the appropriate response that provides evidence of a person having true Faith according to James.

The WORKS Trap

Now, it could be interpreted that James was advocating a "works only" formula, where he is not. James saw and explained at length the fallacy of a "faith only" orientation. One quite common in today's religious world. James saw a Faith that was exhibited by works (of a certain kind, not just any set of deeds) not just faith of and by itself. He realized true Faith produces a response and ultimately is demonstrated by how we live our lives.

The essential question has to be, what is the ultimate **source** of faith? What is the relationship between faith and works? Do works produce faith? Are our works in any way required to bring us into a state of faith or does it work the other way around? Does James give us any indication?

Though the word faith is used only 16 times in the book of James, mostly in chapter 2, nevertheless it is a subliminal theme in much of what he writes.

In chapter 1 we find that we should appreciate the impact on our faith that various trials impress. We can see from this that faith is something that needs to develop into a more perfected state. 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3: Knowing this, that the trying of **your faith** works patience. 4: But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. 6: But let him **ask in faith**, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7: For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8: A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”*

First, James refers to ‘our faith’ and that common trials develop patience which has a perfecting effect. He also wraps wisdom into the equation, in that we need a good sense of the process of faith-being-perfected. We see in his exhortation a faith that is not a foregone conclusion from the start. Faith also must become refined with experience, particularly through wisdom in dealing with trials.

But what is also insightful is his mention in verse 6 that the ultimate source of the perfecting process is from a source other than ourselves alone. Catching the sense of what he is saying, we see we are to **have** faith, but that it is to be re-processed into a more perfect state by external provision!

Faith, Repentance, Baptism

It is well known that the process toward conversion involves three key steps: faith, then repentance, followed by baptism. Feat accomplished!? Well, not quite! The interesting thing is to notice that we first must have faith, sufficient faith to truly believe. That belief then produces the confidence to submit and commit to God’s Will for our lives, to begin to **change** our deepest motivations, rejecting all that we ever did or were that violates God’s Righteous standards. But what we should take note of is the fact of having faith that precedes baptism and the subsequent receipt of God’s Spirit through the laying on of hands. There must be a degree of unrefined faith already in place before we can enter into the Faith-building process.

By Grace through Faith

Ephesians 2 adds to our understanding in its well-known verses 8 & 9: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that **not of** yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* Now, does this contradict James? Some people say yes! We’ll consider that further along.

But first, let’s consider what is being stated here. We’re saved by grace, but it is through the efficacy of faith. But then it further clarifies that it is a faith particularly “not of ourselves”! There is a faith that is **not** OF ourselves, it does not originate within ourselves, though it must be within ourselves. But what about that faith which we must have first in order to believe and to desire to genuinely repent? That faith has to be in place before we receive God’s Spirit, which is key to any further development spiritually. The point here is that there IS a first faith that, to a large degree, IS OF ourselves! It is also true that there is a Faith that is **not** of ourselves. That Faith is developed (perfected) over time, and is what James points us toward.

Paul doesn’t leave the thought in Ephesians 2 without clarifying the matter of how works factor in. He isn’t contradicting James, but he is bringing works into the picture in their proper relationship to faith.

Continuing in verse 10, what most preachers deliberately leave off the sentence: *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto **good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* We see in this key part of Paul’s sentence that salvation produces works, not the other way around! Good works: those pre-ordained at some point in the past. Good works as defined by the (before ordained) Laws and Righteousness of God! We might also say, Good works as demonstrated by His Living Example! Effectively, works are the appropriate **result** of conversion, not the means of attaining it, as stated both by James and by Paul.

Religious people everywhere, it seems, are locked into the idea that the **only reason** a person would do good works is to earn salvation purely by their own efforts. They, in their anti-law bias, are locked into this limited conceptualization. What they miss by taking that position is that there are **other** reasons for performing works than just the quest to earn salvation. It’s also the correct and appropriate response to having been ‘justified’ and having received the Gift of Salvation.

Dead Faith?

Now, that thought in mind, going back to James’ point in his chapter 2, where does it leave those ‘people of faith’ (and especially of the ‘faith *alone*’ persuasion) who don’t, won’t or can’t exhibit their faith through demonstrable works? James says of them, their faith is in effect **dead!** (verse 2:20) Of what value is that?

“From faith TO Faith”

A passage that injects some clarification into this subject is found in Romans chapter 1. Verse 17 has: *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”* A number of important questions are addressed in this potent sentence. It affirms that God’s Righteousness is expressed through faith, but also that faith is a development process. There is a preliminary kind of faith that must by practice develop into another kind of Faith, and that the exercise of that perfected Faith is essential to the justification process. We move from one kind of faith (that which **is** of ourselves) into another kind of Faith, that which **is NOT** of ourselves, but is the expressed Faith OF Christ. We are to move from a faith IN Christ into the Faith OF Christ. There are two KINDS of Faith! (Not to diminish the importance of the first faith, it also is necessary initially.) And, it’s the Faith **of** Christ that we must live by, not just by our maintaining a belief in Him! A threshold many have not fully crossed in their religious life’s quest. (This was where the Old Testament worshippers fell short!)

How DO We Tell?

But how do we know what **quality** of faith we’re in possession of? And, is our faith level sufficient for a successful Christian life?

The Apostle Paul saw that there’s a faith barometer in operation even in his own life in this regard. In Romans chapter 7 he puts forth a most astounding self-admission. Starting in verse 5: *“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.* In other words, our natural conduct leaves us guilty of sin and worthy of death. 6: *“But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.* A much mis-interpreted statement. We by grace are released from a consignment to death, but are then by that obligated to adhere to (serve) God’s righteous standards as defined by His Commandments. 7: *“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* Paul is asking, is the law of and by itself our mortal enemy? He then discourages that we think such a thing. (We have people today who advocate that it is actually wrong for us to try and keep the law.) 8: *“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.* It is the law that creates in us the awareness of the true definition of what sin is! *“For without the law sin was dead.*

Ah, the bliss of ignorance. 9: *“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.* Becoming aware of the law created the awareness in him of his true spiritual condition. 10: *“And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.* Here, an institution intended to reveal the way of life, by his natural violation of it, exposed the fact of his justly deserved death sentence! 11: *” For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.* 12: *Wherefore **the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*** 13: *Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.* 14: *For we know that **the law is spiritual:** but I am carnal, sold under sin.”* Referring to his, and our, natural condition apart from grace!

OUR Internal Conflict

It is at this point in his narrative that Paul reveals his innermost struggles with his personal nature. And, it has everything to do with the matter of operational faith. 15: *“For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.* 16: *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.* 17: *Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.* 18: *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but **how** to perform that which is good I find not.* We see a desperate struggle between his mental commitment and his natural pulls. Who can't relate to that? 19: *“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.* 20: *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.* 21: *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.* 22: *For I delight in **the law of God** after the inward man:* 23: *But I see **another law** in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* (That law referred to in Romans 8:7) 24: *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”* The question is, what is **our** primary motivational force? Which dominates our conduct? The answer is found in the degree of the Faith of God we are given and that we apply.

Paul in another place addresses this matter further. In Galatians 2:17 he writes: *“But if, while we **seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.** 18: For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.* 19: *For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* 20: *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.”*** The key to resolve this conflict is found in the Faith OF God. Where people lose to such internal struggles in life is when relying only upon that faith which is of ourselves, not moving on, maturing into the aura of Faith which can be supplied from Christ.

Perhaps in that we find the truest answer. Upon what kind of faith is our Christian life based? As Paul so well explained, we're naturally predisposed to a sinful state. Upholding the standards of righteousness in our lives is extremely difficult. Our life struggles are directly related to the kind of faith we are living by. We have personal desires that can overwhelm our mental commitment to conform to God's standards. That faith which is *of ourselves* can at times provide us with a degree of compliance, but usually with great personal effort. To the degree we have the faith OF Christ, those carnal desires diminish, and exhibiting His true Righteousness becomes easier. With this we can see why James 1:3-6 exhorts us to *“ask in faith”* for the perfecting efficacy of the Faith OF Christ and why Paul ultimately committed himself to living by the Faith **of** the Son of God. That is what works!

Though we must initially possess and maintain a faith that is largely self generated, we need to ask for and develop it into the Faith of Christ, which creates in us His sinless (law compliant) Nature.

Giving us more on the faith versus works issue, Paul presents this in Galatians 3: *“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. 22: But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that **the promise by faith of Jesus Christ** might be given to them that believe. 23: But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. 24: Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be **justified by faith.***

There was a ceremonial structure in place to keep worshippers in a right orientation with God, but without absolving their sins at that time. They remained guilty (as Romans 3:19 defines it: ‘under the law’). 25: *“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”* Ritual ceremony and the important spiritual lessons contained within them was no longer necessary once faith became available, which says something important regarding the ultimate source of faith: it not being of ourselves, otherwise *they* too could have generated it! 26: *“For ye are all the **children of God by faith** in Christ Jesus.”* We can also see from this that the incorporation of the Faith of God engenders us into His Family.

When we understand the dynamics of True Faith, we realize that it’s a collaborative effort. We should be *“Looking unto Jesus the **author and finisher** of our faith;..”* (Heb 12:2). Our faith needs to become enhanced through the perfecting process of doing battle with life as it comes to us, but that battle being waged with the supply of Faith provided through Christ. Ω