

## Faith

### Part 1 – What Is Faith?

Faith is a sorely abused subject.

One of the difficulties is the mixture of truth and error that some people hold to.

That's why I encourage you to read your Bible – don't take my word for anything.

But however it might have been distorted by certain groups or teachers, faith is still one of the major themes of the Bible

Faith is referred to 245 times in Bible (all but 2 in New Testament) not to mention the 178 times the word believe occurs.

Rom 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

For the Christian, faith is our life – it's not an add-on extra.

But what is faith? How does it work? Where does it come from? What is it for?

These are some of the questions we'll try to answer in our series on faith.

#### A. Faith is a gift

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

We learn a few things from this verse.

##### 1. God is the one who gives faith.

Faith is not just ordinary believing, hope, positive thinking, or logical reasoning.

Sometimes people say that we use faith all the time and they give the illustration of sitting on a chair that they expect will not break. ("I'll just sit on this chair and I believe that it's not going to break.")

But that's not real Bible faith: that's an expectation that's the result of reasoning and experience.

The chair looks stable enough and I've never had one collapse before.

But that's not real faith – real Bible faith is a gift of God – it is spiritual.

Nor is faith just a matter of getting a good idea and expecting God to bless it.

With faith, God is the initiator.

We may be able to stir up our faith but we cannot manufacture it – God gives it by an act of His grace.

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

Bible faith has a spiritual dimension because it comes as a direct result of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

##### 2. God has given each of His children a measure of faith.

You might feel that you don't have much to offer, but nevertheless God, as an act of His grace, has given you a measure of faith.

That doesn't mean that's all we can have.

Whatever measure of faith you have been given, your faith can be increased.

2 Cor 10:15 not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labours, but having hope, that as your **faith is increased**, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,

Paul wouldn't be saying that if it wasn't possible to increase our faith.

**3.** Since it is a gift, we have no right to be proud and think that we have more faith than someone else.

"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly"

1 Cor 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Your faith is a gift.

Being proud of the amount of faith you have is like being proud of your good looks.

You can't help being good looking, or tall, or intelligent, or talented, or anything else – that's just the way God made you.

**4.** In the context, Paul is specifically talking about faith for service – ministry.

And his point is that we are all equipped differently.

You can't do what I can do. Why? Because you weren't given the same measure of faith.

And I could never fill your shoes, because I wasn't given the measure of faith you were given.

You could only ever be a pathetic imitation of me.

And I could never be anything but a pathetic imitation of you.

That's why it's so foolish to want to be in pastoral ministry (or any other ministry) unless you're called to it – you're just heading for trouble.

**B. Faith is an inner knowing about unseen things.**

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The spiritual realm is invisible.

Unless God opens our spiritual eyes, we cannot see the spiritual realm.

For example, 2 Kings 6:8-18 – Elisha was surrounded by the armies of the king of Syria. Elisha's servant was unable to see the Lord's army till God opened his eyes.

Also, Numbers 22:22-31 – Balaam and the talking donkey. (Even the donkey had more faith than Balaam.) Balaam couldn't see the Angel of the Lord till the Lord opened his eyes.

That's why we need faith – so we can see into the spiritual realm and accept as true what our senses don't see.

These kinds of events, where God opens a person's eyes to see clearly into the spiritual realm, aren't common.

So it takes faith to accept that what we don't see is actually there – God, the angels, heaven, hell, the presence of God.

2 Cor 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Sometimes when a person is prayed for, they are tempted to think that nothing happened because they didn't see or feel something.

But that's where faith comes in.

"We walk by faith, not by sight."

Faith sees beyond the evidence of our five senses.

Some of the biggest miracles in my life have occurred when I've felt nothing – come to think of it, they've always occurred when I've felt nothing.

That doesn't mean we go into a state of denial.

Some people go to extremes and make the Word of God say what it never intended to say – and particularly in the area of healing and financial provision.

A person in a wheelchair is asked, "How are you?"

"Fine," they reply. "I'm healed by the blood of the Lamb."

No, they haven't been healed – they're trusting God to heal them.

This whole mentality came about by twisting the meaning of Mark 11:24: "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

"Believe that you receive them" is taken out of context and given a meaning it never had.

When Jesus said this, He wasn't meaning that we were to go about lying about our true condition and calling that faith.

That's not faith; it's what even those in the world see it to be – lying, self-deception.

How do I know Jesus didn't mean it to be taken that way? Two reasons.

First, Jesus did not say, "believe that you receive it, and you've got it."

If you've already got it, you don't need faith.

But faith is an inner witness that God has favourably heard your prayer.

That's why Jesus said, "believe that you receive them, and you **will have them.**"

Future tense.

Second, if you take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, you should not only say you are healed, but act like it.

Throw away your medicine, your wheelchair, your neck brace, the plaster your leg is in.

Most Christians intuitively know that this is not only wrong, but plain foolish.

Don't ever do anything like that unless God makes it very clear to you that He is telling you to.

However, despite the extremes that faith is sometimes taken to, faith sees beyond the evidence of our five senses.

Faith makes contact with God when nothing else does.

Your feelings are the **least** reliable indicator of God's working.

We are so in the habit of judging by externals.

For instance: Mark 5:25-34 Woman with a flow of blood for twelve years. When Jesus asked who touched Him, His disciples responded, "There are hundreds of people and You want to know who touched You?"

But Jesus, who always walked by faith, not by sight, knew He'd been touched in a special way.

Someone touched Him with their faith.

We judge by outward appearances.

We like to see spectacular things happen.

But we can't just whip it up, and if it doesn't happen the way we'd like, that's when we need faith.

People so often judge a church service by their feelings. They say, "There was no anointing in the service."

But what does that mean? No goose bumps? No warm and fuzzy feelings? Nobody has an infallible anointometer. You may feel His presence, but the fact that you don't means nothing – God is still there.

It's through faith that God imparts a revelation or understanding of spiritual truth.

For instance, I never believed in the Trinity (so I didn't believe in the divinity of Christ), hell, the devil, or salvation by faith. But when I discovered who Jesus really was – the Creator – all the other truths just fell into place.

That was a revelation I received, and I received it by faith.

It was like God opened the top of my head and dropped the whole lot in.

Faith gives you an inner witness to spiritual truth.

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Abel understood intuitively how to give an acceptable sacrifice – because he had faith.

How was Peter able to say, Matt 16:16 “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”?

Jesus tells us in the next verse: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’”

It was a revelation he received by faith.

Angels don't need faith to trust God.

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Mat 18:10 Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

They see clearly the things that we can't, so they must look on in amazement because of our faith.

Imagine two angels talking: “How do they do it? This guy's been walking God for 30 years and he's never even seen Him.” “I don't know, Mike. They're a bit slow getting it sometimes. But when they do, it seems to stay with them and grow. Must be the Holy Spirit. I've got a lady over here gave her heart to the Lord at 18. She's 86 now and still going strong.”

No wonder there's “rejoicing in heaven...” Faith must amaze the angels.

Did you know there's a special blessing for those who believe without seeing?

John 20:24-29 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” (26) And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” (27) Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” (28) And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (29) Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Picture it. Their faith must have taken a real beating. Things didn't turn out as expected. But Thomas in particular wouldn't believe, even when the other disciples said they'd seen the Lord. Then Jesus appeared, headed straight for Thomas and rebuked him for his unbelief.

But then Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who believe without seeing.

Let your faith rise.

God has given it to you as a gift.

Don't wait till you see the evidence before you put your trust in Him and in His word.