

Faith

Part 4 – How Do You Get Faith?

A few years ago, a young guy in our church asked me if I'd like to go sky diving. I said no. He said, "Why not?" I said, "I'm just not interested." He said, "Is this a fear thing?" I said, "I'm just not interested." He said, "Come on. Where's your faith?"

Now apart from the fact that he was trying to manipulate me into doing what he wanted, it was obvious that he had some real misconceptions about faith.

A great deal of the confusion about faith arises because people don't really understand how faith works.

We've already seen what faith is.

We've seen that it's a gift from God.

We've seen what faith is for.

But how do we get faith in the first place?

Do we just sit around waiting for God to drop it into our hearts?

Is it just too bad if we haven't got any?

Or is there something we can do to cooperate in the process?

We'll understand the answers to these questions as we begin to understand the means which God uses to impart faith to us.

We'll also clear up some misunderstandings people have about faith, and learn why some Christians get themselves into trouble stepping out in what they think is faith.

Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

How does faith come? The Scripture tells us here very clearly how faith comes.

There are two components mentioned, and we're going to have a look at the second one first – the Word of God.

God sees His Word as being extremely important.

Psalms 138:2 (David says) I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

Do you revere the name of Jesus? If you do, that's good, but the Psalm tells us that God Himself has magnified His **word** even above His name.

One of the Ten Commandments tells us not to take the Lord's name in vain.

It's precious, holy, special – but His word is even more so.

And it's His Word that brings faith.

Interestingly, there are several words in New Testament Greek that can be translated into the English word "word".

The two most important ones used – *logos* and *rhema* .

And the distinction between the two is important.

Here is what the scholars are saying:

Whereas *logos* can often designate the Christian proclamation as a whole in the New Testament, *rhema* usually relates to individual words and utterances.¹

“The significance of (*rhema* as distinct from *logos*) is exemplified in the injunction to take ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rhema*) of God,’ Eph 6:17; here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture.” *logos* is reasoned speech, *rhema*, an utterance, *epos*, “the articulated expression of a thought”²

Rhema – sayings in particular as contrasted with sayings in their totality³ ... that which is spoken ... particularly a word as uttered by a living voice.⁴

If you didn’t get the gist of all that, this (Bible) is the *logos*, but when the Holy Spirit takes a part of that *logos* and applies it to your life, that’s a *rhema*.

Remember: “the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need”.

Jesus is the living *logos* – the Word in its entirety.

The Bible in its entirety is the *logos* whereas individual words, scriptures which the Holy Spirit brings to our attention are *rhemas*.

Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the **word** of God.

Which word is it that gives us faith – the *logos* or the *rhema*?

It’s *rhema*, a specific, spoken word.

Without a *rhema* from God there can be no real faith.

I can own a Bible – *logos* – but unless I open my heart for God to speak to me personally, it’s of no value to me.

While the Word remains black print on a white page it’s still a *logos*: when it gets into my heart, it becomes a *rhema*.

Because it’s alive.

Now I might get a bright idea, but it may or may not be God.

Unless it’s God’s spoken word, to act upon that idea is not faith, it’s presumption.

Presumption, according to Webster’s Dictionary is “blind confidence or self-assertion; to take upon oneself without permission.”

In other words, presumption is really just another way of saying disobedience.

Let me give you an example – here are two interesting stories.

Ex 17:1-7 The Israelites complain, Moses is told to strike the rock and water will come forth.

Numbers 20:1-13 The people complain again. This time Moses is told to speak to the rock for water to come forth. But Moses was angry with the people, so he struck it twice.

As a result of his presumption – striking the rock – Moses wasn’t allowed to enter the promised land.

I find two things interesting in this passage.

1. vs 12 – God made it clear that what Moses did was not an act of faith, but the exact opposite.
2. Even though Moses acted presumptuously, God still caused the water to come out of the rock.

This ought to tell us clearly that just because there are good results, it doesn’t always mean real faith is involved.

Or that we’re being obedient to God.

Over the years television has sometimes brought to our attention people who have been in ministry and blown it – big time.

And sometimes they refuse to be disciplined and they continue in ministry.

And the amazing thing is, God actually blesses them – and they point it out and say, “See, God doesn’t want me to do anything different.”

But the results don’t prove that the person is living in faith or that God approves of what they are doing.

All it proves is that God is a God of blessing and mercy.

Sometimes God blesses as an act of His mercy and for no other reason.

If you want proof, take a look at the life of Jonah, and see the results of his preaching even though he did it with a totally bad attitude.

Jesus said, (Mat 7:16) You will know them by their fruits...

We need to make certain we don’t get confused between a person’s works and their fruits – they are different.

So real faith must result from a genuine word (*rhema*) from God.

You cannot get an idea, and then expect that the Lord will have to do it.

You can’t just decide one day, “I’m going to trust the Lord to give me a Merc.”

If God hasn’t told you He’ll do it, you have no basis for trust.

Don’t let people pressure you into doing crazy things by saying, “Where’s your faith?”

You can’t just decide to believe God for a particular job, or car, or house.

Unless God has already spoken – without that word from God it’s not faith, it’s presumption.

We can believe what you like, but that doesn’t make it faith – if God hasn’t spoken, it’s deception.

If I believe I can fly and jump off a building, believing it doesn’t make it a reality.

What people forget is that faith is based on relationship, and so they reduce everything to a formula.

You can’t just say, “I’m believing God for \$10,000.

That’s like your child believing you for \$10,000.

They can believe whatever they like, but that doesn’t mean you’ll give it to them.

What is of primary importance in faith is the will of God.

First we find out what God wants, then we believe God.

So if having a *rhema* is so important an ingredient in having genuine faith, how can we get a *rhema*?

It can come in a variety of ways – the preaching of the Word, personal prophecy, a word spoken by God into your spirit (in other words the “still, small voice”), your conscience, or Scripture that stands out to you while your reading or comes back to you for a particular situation.

All of these can be a *rhema* from God.

But let’s take a look at the second thing we learn from Rom 10:17, that faith comes by hearing.

This is the other side of the coin – God speaks, we listen, we hear.

Now this isn’t just ordinary hearing.

Did you know that you can hear and not hear at the same time?

There are six separate occasions in Matthew, Mark and Luke where Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

In Revelation it says, (13:9) “If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”

And seven more times in Revelation it says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

He was talking to normal people, not a special race of beings with no ears.

So you’d think it would be pretty obvious that someone with ears would hear.

But it’s possible to hear God speak (with our ears) and not hear what He says (with our heart) – or not to understand.

It’s often amusing to watch people talk to their dogs. Some people seem to have quite in-depth conversations with them. But what do you think that dog is thinking?

For the most part, the dog is hearing, but not hearing.

Mark 4:3-9 This parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares (both about sowing the Word of God) are the only two parables where Jesus ends by saying, “He who has an ear, let him hear.”

I think that’s significant because the sowing of the Word of God is the very foundation of Christianity.

We’ve often heard this parable explained in the light of sharing the Gospel.

But it has just as much application to Christians as to non-Christians.

Hence vs 13: And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” This parable teaches us how the Word of God works.

Mark 4:14-20

If we want faith this parable shows us how to get it and what are the enemies of the Word and therefore of our faith.

Let’s take a look at the enemies first.

1. vs 15 – Satan himself comes and snatches the Word out of our hearts, if we let him.

Why does he do that?

Luke 8:12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, **lest they should believe** and be saved.

How does Satan prevent faith? By removing the Word from our hearts.

And it’s easy for him to do that by the wayside, because there’s no good soil there.

Let’s make sure *before* we listen to or read the Word of God that our hearts are good ground.

That means preparation, openness, a teachable spirit.

Just digressing a little, it amazes me how many Christians bring their friends to church and then become a distraction to them. I’ve seen people talk all the way through the message, write each other notes, nudge, laugh, joke.

If you do that, you become the means by which Satan snatches the word.

2. Stony ground – those who hear the Word, receive it gladly, but only endure for a while.

Why? They are unable to hold onto God’s Word when tribulation or persecution arise.

And so they lose their faith and fall away.

We don’t often come under persecution for our faith, but we do experience tribulation, trials because of the Word.

We’ve seen it happen many times. People come into the Church saying, “Glory to God, hallelujah, praise the Lord,” something happens to upset them, God allows a trial in their life as He does with us all, and they’re gone.

No strength, no stability.

Don't let the trials of life rob you of your faith in God.

If God has spoken to you, you will have trials to test the quality of your faith – I can guarantee it.

Count on it, be ready, and don't let the enemy rob you.

3. The thorns – what robs these people of their faith?

Here are the faith-killers:-

1. The cares of this world (1 Tim 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.)

2. The deceitfulness of riches

1 Tim 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

I'd like to take every Christian and brand this verse onto their hearts, because one thing the extreme faith doctrine does, is to feed people with the desire for more.

It fills Christians with discontent, and then covers it with a spiritual cloak.

3. The desire for other things: So many Christians forfeit the true call of God on their lives because of the desire for other things.

A career? A husband? Possessions?

If the desire for any of these things influences my decisions in life, that's what chokes the Word, and Jesus said it becomes unfruitful.

4. Luke adds "the pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14) Pleasure is one of the chief gods in our culture: Comfort, security, prosperity, relaxation.

Not that these things are wrong in themselves.

They are good things, but even good things can take over our hearts.

Now let's take a look at what happens when we hear.

Rom 10:17 – So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

If we are really to hear the Word of God so that we can have a strong, fruitful faith, let's see what we need.

Mark 4:20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, [Matthew adds "and understands it" (Matt 13:23) Luke adds and "keep it" (Luke 8:15)] and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.

The good ground are those who hear the Word of God with their heart, receive it, understand it and keep it.

Do you want a strong and vibrant faith?

It comes back to the condition of your heart.

What's your heart like?

Now that we have a bit more information, here are two more principles for growing our faith.

1. Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

As we've seen, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the Word of God.

It's a package deal.

When the Word of God comes into our hearts, it brings with it a parcel of faith.

It's like a seed being planted, and a seed isn't just a bunch of chemicals thrown together.

When you put that seed in the ground it will grow because it contains life.

Why does God's Word need to bring faith? Because without that faith, you could never put that word into practice.

But God's Word doesn't directly bring faith.

It says that faith comes from hearing.

Hearing God's Word is crucial to having faith.

So if I want my faith to grow, the first thing I've got to do is be in a place where I can hear the Word of God.

Where can I hear the Word of God?

There are many ways I can hear God's Word, but here are two important ones.

A. Read the Bible.

I put this one at the top of the list because it's the most important.

"Experience in itself is too subjective, too inner, too changeable, too fleeting, too tied to physiological factors to be a trustworthy guide for faith. To trust our experience is to put our faith at the mercy of our liver, or our endocrine glands, or the quality of our sleep on any given night, or the state of our digestion, or the state of mind of other members of the family, or the problems of our work. **Experience must always be subjected to the authority of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ set forth in the Bible.** What we need, then, is not the authority of experience, but the experience of authority."⁵

The written Word of God is our ultimate standard.

Let's not kid ourselves, people who don't have a high regard for the written Word of God, no matter how spiritual they think they are, have a low level of real faith.

Because faith comes from hearing the Word of God – nowhere else.

Our feelings are our least reliable source of truth.

We can't trust our feelings, but we can trust the Word of God.

So do you read God's Word every day?

Don't tell me you're too busy: If you're too busy for the Word of God, you're busier than God wants you to be.

And if you don't have time to read your Bible, you don't have time to watch TV, or read a book, or play sport, or a whole list of leisure activities.

Because the condition of your heart and the growth of your faith are far more important.

If you're reading your Bible, and something arrests your attention, and inside you your heart is saying, "Oh, yeah", God is probably speaking to you.

Don't just keep reading merely because you think you've got to read a chapter a day.

Stop right there, and start to think about it, because it's very likely that God is trying to speak to you. **Let Him!**

It may be something that encourages you, comforts you, teaches you, or in some other way builds you up, or challenges you.

But for this to happen, we have to have a listening, open heart.

We can study the Bible for years and not have any faith at all.

Because attitude is everything.

It's possible to read the Bible and not actually be listening to what God is saying.

We may be reading, but our mind is in a million other places.

We need to focus our minds on what He is saying to us when we read His word.

If you're finding it a real challenge, here are two things you can do to keep your mind on the job.

First, say the Word of God aloud.

Second, pray the Word of God.

B. The preaching of the Word of God.

One of the reasons God established the church, and wants us to fellowship together regularly, is so He can impart something to our spirits via the preaching of the Word of God.

This isn't my idea; it's God's idea.

Preaching the Word of God is the God-ordained method of edifying the church.

Don't miss out on what God wants to say to you; don't miss out on the faith God wants to impart to you by not being in church.

C. Godly counsel.

Pr 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Pr 15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

Pr 24:6 For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Whenever you're making decisions, particularly major ones, seek counsel.

Don't just make decisions on your own, ask for help.

Talk to people you respect in the Lord, and try to talk to a number of them.

Because God speaks through godly counsellors.

You should talk to someone who's qualified in whatever area it is you need advice.

For instance, a doctor, solicitor, financial adviser, builder.

2. The next step in a growing faith is obedience.

Revelation by the Word of God plus understanding by the Spirit of God equals responsibility in the kingdom of God.

James said, (2:20) "faith without works is dead."

How can faith grow if it's dead?

When the Word of God comes in with its little parcel of faith, if we don't act upon it, the faith dies.

Unless we actually act on that word from God, our faith is dead.

But when we obey, our faith continues to grow.

¹ Brown, Colin (Ed.) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol 3 p 1121

² Vine, W.E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* Vol IV p230

³ Zodhiates, Spiros *Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament* p926

⁴ Zodhiates, Spiros *Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament* p1262

⁵ Miller, Don *The Authority of the Bible*