

WHAT IS FAITH?

"Faith", as the word is generally used, deals with the fact that human beings *believe* and also with the *way* in which they believe, but more importantly, it deals with **WHAT** people believe, and also **WHY** we believe. To say, "I believe", implies various aspects of faith:

FAITH AS BELIEF:

Human beings live and function by faith as opposed to animals that live and function by instinct. A simple example of human faith in operation would be the act of getting into one's motor car to drive somewhere. Unless one knows that there is something wrong with the car, a person does not question or even doubt whether he or she will arrive at their destination. We usually just get into the car and later expect to arrive at our chosen destination. No one usually questions *whether* they will arrive - we just normally *assume* that we will arrive in due course. Many things could occur which would prevent us from arriving, e.g. a breakdown, an accident, a puncture, running out of petrol, etc. but most people just don't even think about such possibilities when they get into their cars. Indeed, life would be unbearable if we had to stop and think about every eventuality that might occur. So human beings are designed to live by faith! This implies that we have a simple belief system by which we normally function and that does not leave room for doubt. The only time we might stop and think about our belief system is if it is challenged in some way. For example, if we knew that our car was mechanically unsound, or if we knew that there was very little petrol in the tank. Under such circumstances we might doubt whether we would arrive safely at our destination.

Religions are faith systems. Most people do not doubt the religion they were born into. They simply accept it as part of their lives. Only when it is challenged in a meaningful way do they stop and think about it. God has given to every man and woman the ability to believe, so belief is not difficult. Very often it is easier to believe what everyone else around us believes as, in this way, we avoid challenges to our faith. But when we encounter Jesus Christ, inevitably our belief system faces its greatest challenge, because Jesus always calls us to faith in Himself (Jhn.14: 6). His challenge is always to, "*Have faith in God*" (Mk.11: 22), in spite of our belief systems. He points this out very clearly in the next verse (verse 23). Placing our faith in Jesus Christ then, is the beginning of the kind of living, growing, dynamic, powerful faith that the Bible speaks of as being "pleasing to God" (Heb.11: 5-6).

FAITH AS TRUST:

This is the true beginning of active faith. It may be described as *the attitude whereby a man abandons all self-reliance, and in spite of all contradictory evidence or reasoning, holds implicitly to the promises and guidance of his Lord* (K.

Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 1966, SCM Press, London). A simple illustration will serve to show the basic difference between mere belief and dynamic trust:

A famous acrobat once announced that he would walk across Niagra Falls on a tightrope. On the chosen day huge crowds gathered on both sides of the Falls to watch the event. The acrobat duly crossed the Falls to the wild cheers of the crowds. He then asked them, "Do you believe that I can do it again - this time pushing a wheelbarrow?" They all shouted, "Yes! We believe you can do it again!" The acrobat once more walked across the Falls on his tightrope and pushing the wheelbarrow. When he reached the other side he once again asked the crowd, "Do you believe I can do it again?" to which they all shouted, "Yes! We've seen you do it twice now. We believe you can do it again!" The acrobat replied, "All right, then one of you get in the wheelbarrow!" No one moved! Out of all those people, nobody was prepared to trust the acrobat with their life. They believed in him, they had faith that he could do it, but they did not *trust* him!

When we *trust* God, we trust Him with our very lives.

FAITH AS KNOWLEDGE:

This is the development of faith. Faith is concerned with facts. Job's expression of faith is, "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth*" (Job 19:25). It may be described as *the illumination of the reason whereby knowledge of God takes place through experience in an unmistakable way and solely by God's revelation of Himself* (Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*).

When God sees that we trust Him, He is moved to reveal more of Himself to us and to teach us His ways so that we come to know Him better. This is why Paul could say, "*...because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*" (II Tim.1: 12). And in Phil.3: 10-11 he says, "*I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*"

FAITH AS CONFESSION:

This is the end result of faith. It may be described as *the public responsibility a believer has for his trust in, and his knowledge of, God*. This responsibility is not limited to the Church but must also be manifest in the world. It is not enough to believe in God, to trust and to know Him. Faith must also be *declared* – God must be confessed before men. Our trust in Him and our knowledge of Him, which by His grace He has enabled us to receive, makes us responsible to Him, and to men, for the proclamation of the message of faith. Because we know Him, we must tell others about Him so that they too may come to Him and share in His blessings.

The four aspects of faith outlined above are not to be thought of as four distinct steps taking place over a period of time, but rather as four simultaneous aspects, each linked inseparably to each other and operating together in the accomplishment of spiritual development. The true Christian believer never ceases to believe in God, he never ceases to trust God, he never ceases to know Him, and he never ceases to confess Him.

FAITH AND WORKS:

Much ado is often made about the relationship between faith and works. Some critics of the Bible mistakenly go so far as to say that there is a contradiction between faith and works. Some Christians teach that we are saved by faith alone while others teach that we are saved by works. When the Scriptures pertaining to faith and works are read in their proper context however, there is no contradiction between the two. The Scriptures also show us that salvation is a matter of both faith and works. The classic text that speaks of salvation by grace, Eph.2: 8-10, also says that the outcome of salvation is good works, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* Thus, while good works do not result in salvation, they are the result of salvation. This is explained in James 2: 14-26 where we see how both faith and works work together to build us up in our walk with God. If there are no good works in the life of a Christian then this indicates that there is no real faith in that life and probably no real salvation either. The Bible places a great deal of emphasis on good works in the life of a believer as can be seen in the following Scriptures: Matt.5: 16; Acts 9: 36; Eph.2: 10; I Tim.2: 10; I Tim.5: 10 & 25; I Tim.6: 18; II Tim.3: 17; Tit.2: 7 & 14; Tit.3: 8 & 14; Heb.10: 24; I Pet.2: 12. The Bible also tells us that the basis of our judgement before God will be according to our works (I Cor.3: 11-15 and Rev.20: 12-15). Thus, works are extremely important because they reflect our faith in God (or lack of it).

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
(PAPER 004)

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Questions:

- 1) Which chapter in the Bible is known as the "faith chapter" (Rom.4, Rom.10, I Cor.13, Gal.3, Heb.11 or Jas.2)?
- 2) Who, in the Bible, are held up as great examples of faith?
- 3) What was the greatest act of faith recorded in the Bible? (Clue - it is found in Genesis).
- 4) The word "faith" can be used in different ways and can mean different things. List some of the ways in which this word is used.