
“Faith Power or the Power of Faith?”

The Doctrine of Faith

Various Passages

Today's lesson is part of an ongoing series of doctrinal studies occurring between book series. Today's lesson on the Doctrine of Faith continues a discussion of the subject of conversion. This discussion began with the last lesson on repentance. And as with previous lessons it is simply an overview of a subject on which volumes have been written.

If you need the previous lesson, it is still available at www.cfdevotionals.org. Follow the Bible study link. As with the previous doctrinal studies, the material is drawn primarily from Through the Bible in One Year.¹

You would think the concept of faith would be fairly simple. But the doctrine of faith has been greatly abused by those claiming the name of Christ. They have come up with a faith that is unknown in scripture. If one doesn't understand what scripture means by faith, then how can one understand Paul when he stated:

“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21).

Hank Hanegraaff, in Christianity in Crisis, speaks in great detail about the abuse of the biblical call to faith.

“ (The) theme, buried in the message of Faith teaching, is that faith is a force.

Kenneth Copeland, considered a leading Faith authority, believes so strongly in this concept that he has made the phrase “force of faith” famous through constant repetition. He even wrote a book titled The Force of Faith to propagate this deadly error.

As Copeland puts it, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force.” He further says that in much the same way that the force of gravity makes the law of gravity work, “it is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function.”

According to Copeland, “This force originates from God, out of His unlimited heart.” In fact, he says, the world “was born out of the force of faith that was resident inside the being of God.”

Copland even claims that “God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith” because “faith is God's source of power.”

Just think of it—God **cannot** do anything for you apart from the force! Without the force of faith, God has no power at all toward you. Already one thing should be clear: Copland's God is no God at all. The true omnipotent God of Scripture is not the God of Copeland's teaching.”²

But this view of faith for the unbeliever moves him farther away from the God of scripture. And for the believer, it moves him farther from being able to live the life God desires for him.

¹ Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3, “Great Truths of the Bible,” Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulas, OK, p. 93-98.

² Hanegraaff, Hank, Christianity in Crisis, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1993, p. 65-66.

I Introduction
II The Object of Faith
III The Meaning of Faith
IV God is the source of faith
V The Degrees/Measure of Faith
VI The Life of Faith
VII Conclusion

I Introduction: In Acts 20:21 Paul, speaking to the Elders of the church at Ephesus, describes how he presented the message of the Gospel to both the Jew and Gentile. He spoke of two aspects of conversion, repentance and faith. Last time we considered repentance. This time we will examine faith.

First, since we've already seen how badly faith can be understood, I thought it might be a good idea to get a biblically sound definition of the word.

*“ πίστις pistis, pis'-tis; persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation ...”*³

Faith is not a force, it is reliance on someone who can be trusted. Biblical faith is reliance on God in general, and Christ specifically for salvation. Stringfellow puts it this way:

*“ Without faith in the Lord Jesus, repentance turns to remorse and the result seems fruitless. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that saves, “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Faith takes hold of the repentant heart and leads the person to God, the God of forgiveness. Conversion itself is two-fold: turning from the old life and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ. The “turning from” is repentance. The “turning to” is faith (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Repentance looks within—faith sees our Saviour.”*⁴

“ ... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God ...”

II The Object of Faith: Which is of course the real issue. True faith is not “faith in faith,” but faith in the One deserving of our faith — God! This is saving faith. As we've already seen in Acts 20, saving faith is a faith in Jesus Christ.

And it is this faith that is essential to salvation. Paul makes this clear in Romans 1:17 and 3:22.

“ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” ... “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

III The Meaning of Faith: We have seen the definition of faith from the Greek dictionary. But scripture defines faith for itself. Consider Hebrews 11:1.

“ Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”

³ Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament

⁴ Stringfellow, p. 117.

It is not faith to believe what is in front of you. ... Paul expressed it this way.

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

It is faith to believe because God said it, it must be true.

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14).

And God is pleased by our exercise of faith.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

What is sad though is we sometimes pray, knowing God can act, but we are surprised when He does. This may reflect a lack of faith, that is, a lack of understanding who God is.

On the other hand, the fact we don't get a “yes” answer to our prayers isn't, as some teach, because of a lack of faith on our part, but because God knows “no” is the best answer.

IV God is the source of faith: One of the most obvious problems with the “Faith” teachers is they require the believer to generate adequate faith to “force” God to respond. But the truth is we can't work up enough faith to be saved, much less live the Christian life. God, in all His Triune aspects is the source/provider of what faith we exercise.

1. The Father gifts us with faith:

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Romans 12:3)

2. The Son gifts us with faith:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, ...” (Hebrews 12:2).

3. The Holy Spirit gifts us with faith:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness ...” (Galatians 5:22).

V The Degrees/Measure of Faith: Stringfellow identifies four measures of faith: “Little, Weak, Vain, and Dead.”⁵

⁵ Ibid., p. 119-120.

1. *“Little faith.”* This is a problem seen even in the disciples. Here Jesus speaks to Peter when Peter walked on the water.

“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”” (Matthew 14:31).

2. *“Weak faith.”* Here Paul is concerned with how the more mature believer responds to immature believer.

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Romans 14:1).

3. *“Vain faith.”* This is a faith grounded in something other than the resurrection. It is a faith that doesn't save. It is the faith of the world's religions.

“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” ... “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians. 15:14, 17).

4. *“Dead faith.”* We'll talk more about living faith in a moment, but this is a faith that doesn't demonstrate the reality of God in our lives.

“Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:21-26).

VI The Life of Faith: Faith is demonstrated by how we respond to the reality of God's presence in our lives. This faith isn't intended to get God to do things our way, as postulated by the “Faith” movement. This faith is a reflection of our growing dependency on and maturing in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1. Remember faith is an act of trust, because God is deserving of our faith.

- a. We can trust God in all our circumstances.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

- b. We can trust God in our walk.

“We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

c. We can trust God for victory.

“... for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

d. We can trust God for good works in our life.

“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8).

e. We can trust God to help us live by faith.

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong” (Galatians 2:11).

2. The Christian life should be a life driven by faith. Quoting Stringfellow:

a. *“By faith, the Christian acts upon the Word of God when there is no evidence in sight that the action is correct.”*⁶

b. *“In Hebrews 11 we have the “Hall of Faith.” The faith of the Old Testament saints inspires us and teaches us:*

- *By faith Abel (verse 4)*
- *By faith Enoch (verse 5)*
- *By faith Noah (verse 7)*
- *By faith Abraham (verses 8-19)*
- *By faith Sarah (verse 11)”*⁷

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

- *“By faith Isaac (verses 17-19)*
- *By faith Jacob (verses 20-21)*
- *By faith Joseph (verse 22).*
- *By faith Moses (verses 23-29).*
- *By faith Joshua and Israel (verse 30).*
- *By faith Rahab (verse 31).*
- *The unnumbered heroes of faith (verse 32-40)*⁸

c. Just as today, these saints were saved by the cross. They were looking towards the cross. They were saved by a future work. We are saved by looking back on the

⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

cross. We are saved by a past event. We are all saved in the same way, by the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

VII Conclusion: Let me conclude by quoting Stringfellow one last time:

“ Faith is one threefold action:

- *In **understanding**—being convinced of redemption;*
- *In the **feelings**—resting in His saving love;*
- *In the **will**—devotion to the personal Saviour.*

*Faith is not the working up of the feelings, no tormenting of self, no dependence upon a person—except Jesus Christ—no covering up guilt; but it is a personal relationship with Christ. Faith experiences the present; **Christ here and now!** The “substance” and “evidence” are in the Word of God; therefore, we believe.”⁹*

“ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

*Encamped along the hills of light,
Ye Christian soldiers rise
And press the battle ere the night
Shall veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe in vales below
Let all our strength be hurled;
Faith is the victory, we know,
That overcomes the world.*

*On every hand the foe we find
Drawn up in dread array;
Let tents of ease be left behind
And onward to the fray.
Salvation’s helmet on each head,
With truth all girt about,
The earth shall tremble ‘neath our tread
And echo with our shout.*

*His banner over us is love,
Our sword the Word of God;
We tread the road the saints above
With shouts of triumph trod.
By faith they, like a whirlwind’s breath,
Swept on o’er every field;
The faith by which they conquered death
Is still our shining shield.*

*To him that overcomes the foe
White raiment shall be giv’n;
Before the angels he shall know
His name confessed in heav’n.
Then onward from the hills of light,
Our hearts with love aflame,
We’ll vanquish all the hosts of night
In Jesus’ conqu’ring name.*

*Faith is the victory!
Faith is the victory!
O glorious victory
That overcomes the world!¹⁰*

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Yates, John H., The Celebration Hymnal, “Faith Is the Victory,” Word/Integrity, Dallas, TX, 1997, #727.

“Faith Power or the Power of Faith?”

The Doctrine of Faith

Various Passages

- I Introduction**
 - II The Object of Faith**
 - III The Meaning of Faith**
 - IV God is the source of faith**
 - V The Degrees/Measure of Faith**
 - VI The Life of Faith**
 - VII Conclusion**
-

I Introduction

(Acts 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)

II The Object of Faith

(Romans 1:17, 3:22)

III The Meaning of Faith

(Hebrews 11:1; 2 Corinthians 4:18; 1 John 5:14; Hebrews 11:6)

IV God is the source of faith

1. The Father gifts us with faith

(Romans 12:3)

2. The Son gifts us with faith:

(Hebrews 12:2)

3. The Holy Spirit gifts us with faith:

(Galatians 5:22)

V The Degrees/Measure of Faith

1. *“Little faith”*
(*Matthew 14:31*)

2. *“Weak faith”*
(*Romans 14:1*)

3. *“Vain faith”*
(*1 Corinthians. 15:14, 17*).

4. *“Dead faith”*
(*James 2:21-26*).

VI The Life of Faith

1. Remember faith is an act of trust.

- a. We can trust God in all our _____.
(*Romans 8:28*)

- b. We can trust God in our _____.
(*2 Corinthians 5:7*)

- c. We can trust God for _____.
(*1 John 5:4*)

- d. We can trust God for _____ in our life.
(*Titus 3:8*)

- e. We can trust God to _____ by faith.
(*Galatians 2:11*)

2. The Christian life should be a life driven by faith.

- a. *“By faith, the Christian acts upon the Word of God when there is no evidence in sight that the action is correct.”*

- b. *“In Hebrews 11 we have the “Hall of Faith.” The faith of the Old Testament saints inspires us and teaches us:*

- *By faith Abel (verse 4)*
- *By faith Enoch (verse 5)*
- *By faith Noah (verse 7)*
- *By faith Abraham (verses 8-19)*
- *By faith Sarah (verse 11)*
- *By faith Isaac (verses 17-19)*
- *By faith Jacob (verses 20-21)*
- *By faith Joseph (verse 22).*
- *By faith Moses (verses 23-29).*
- *By faith Joshua and Israel (verse 30).*
- *By faith Rahab (verse 31).*
- *The unnumbered heroes of faith (verse 32-40)¹*

c.

VII Conclusion: *(1 Peter 1:9)*

“Faith is one threefold action:

- *In **understanding**—being convinced of redemption;*
- *In the **feelings**—resting in His saving love;*
- *In the **will**—devotion to the personal Saviour.*

¹ Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3, “Great Truths of the Bible,” Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulas, OK p. 121.