

Faith: Sine Qua Non

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11.6).

Introduction

The author of Hebrews defined faith:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval (Hebrews 11.1).

The Bible declares no one can please God apart from faith. In the above definition, we learn faith is the means of perception that apprehends unseen reality. Through such perception, men and women achieved God's approval. Why is faith so important to God?

What is Faith?

Faith, trust, and believe mean the same thing. In theology, faith means believing God or in other words, believing the Bible. God has given man three means of perception to obtain knowledge of the external world. They are rationalism, empiricism, and faith. Rationalism derives knowledge about the external world through reason. Empiricism gains knowledge about the external world through sensory perception, through taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing. Faith obtains knowledge about the external world through authority with is beyond personal experience or reasoning.

Means of Perception	
Rationalism	Trusts Reason
Empiricism	Trusts Senses

Faith	Trusts Authority
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What is Biblical Faith?

A vast difference exists between these two propositions:

	Statement	Meaning of Statement
1.	I believe in God	Mental Assent
2.	I believe God	Personal Trust

The first proposition is a statement of mental assent. It means one believes in God's existence. No reliance, trust, or personal engagement with God is present in this statement. It is a non-personal statement about the reality of God's existence. The second proposition, however, moves beyond intellectual assent of God's existence. It is a statement of personal trust. When one declares that he believes God it means he *trusts* God. It is personal. It means one believes what God has said. This is Biblical faith. Biblical faith is personal trust in God and what He has said.

Epistemology or How We Know What We Know

Science deals with knowledge gained through our senses and reason and operates primarily through the scientific method. With the scientific method, one observes the world and formulates a hypothesis or theory. The hypothesis or theory is tested through experimentation. These results are analyzed and interpreted to see if they confirm or deny the theory. New conclusions are drawn and the process begins again. In the scientific method, data are valid if they can be observed and reproduced. If they cannot, they fall outside of the realm of science. Scientific knowledge is extremely valuable. However, valuable as it is, it occupies only a small subset of knowledge. For example, all historical knowledge falls outside of science. No scientist can form a theory and run an experiment to determine if Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon, what year he crossed the Rubicon, or even if there was a Julius Caesar. All historical knowledge is based upon

authority. To possess historical knowledge requires faith for we must trust historical records. Almost all knowledge is non-scientific. I have never been to India but believe India exists. Why? Because I trust atlases, satellites, and persons who have been there. News from newspapers, television, radio, and the internet is based upon trust. We directly experience almost no news we receive through the media and no experiment can validate it. It is knowledge based on faith. Similarly, all learning begins by faith. A child begins to learn language, for example, by a parent saying "dog." The child then says, "dog." He learns because he trusts the parent.

What's Special About Faith? or Why Does God Require Faith?

Answering this question is complex. It goes to the heart of the problem God had to solve to save the human race. Adam and Eve's disobedience caused them to die spiritually (immediately) and physically (later). The Hebrew expressed this thought grammatically as an infinitive absolute: "dying you will die" (מֵתָּ תָּמוּתָּ). Adam's action plunged the human race into a condition of sin and death (Genesis 2.17; 1 Corinthians 15.22; Ephesians 2.1-3). Tragic as this was, as soon as man sinned, God began His redemptive plan (Genesis 3.15). Because the penalty of sin was death (Genesis 2.17; Romans 6.23; Ephesians 2.1-2) man was incapable of saving himself. A dead man cannot save himself from death. How then could man be saved?

God's Dilemma

God's character is composed of His sovereignty, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, veracity, eternal life, righteousness, immutability, justice, and love. God's justice demanded death for sin. God's love for man demanded his salvation—life for man. God created man in His own image (בְּצַלְמֵי אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֱדָם, Genesis 1.27) and put His breath of life, literally, "breath of lives" (רוּחַ חַיִּים) into him so he became a living being

(אדם בראשית ,אדם בראשית, Genesis 2.7). Man was God's special creation. God loved man and desired man to live. How was this possible?

Man could live only if someone who was not dead satisfied God's justice and paid the penalty for sin. The penalty of sin required death, i.e., the shedding of blood, since the life of the flesh is in the blood (Genesis 9.4; Leviticus 17.14; Deuteronomy 12.23; John 6.53-54; Hebrews 9.22). As early as Genesis 3.21, we read of God shedding the blood of an animal to provide animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve. This act began the requirement of animal sacrifices to cover man's sin. It was a hint towards how God would solve the problem of sin ultimately. God replaced Adam and Eve's feeble attempt to hide their sin with fig leaves and clothed them in animal skins and in His righteousness. For hundreds of years, God taught this fundamental truth to mankind and later to the Jews. Sin required a blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9.22) which the Jews practiced in their Levitical sacrifices. All pagan peoples practiced animal sacrifices. Even though most of the world had rejected God's revelation they retained this fundamental knowledge. But animal deaths could never atone for sin (Hebrews 10.1). They were but a shadow or a type of a greater reality to come. They were temporary and imperfect. What man needed was a sinless man, another "Adam," to pay his penalty of sin (1 Corinthians 15.22, 45).

This "new" Adam, was, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 15.45). As God, He stepped out eternity, became a man, and died to pay man's sin. Theologians call His work, redemption, reconciliation, justification, atonement, propitiation, redemption, etc. Each of these theological terms reveals an aspect of Christ's salvific work. The proof Christ's death effectively paid man's sin was His resurrection.

Because man is spiritually dead he has no ability to save himself. He must depend upon another to regain spiritual life.

Man's dependence is expressed by faith, he must trust God. Only God has the ability to save fallen, spiritually dead, man. Man's apprehension of God's salvation is by faith—to trust-obey what God has revealed about salvation. That is why faith is essential.

Faith Throughout History

Faith has always been required as the means of salvation. In Romans 1.7, Paul, quoting Habakkuk the prophet (Habakkuk 2.4), wrote,

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Hebrews 11 is an account of those who lived victorious lives, conquering the world and death, by faith.

Paul and Faith

Paul revealed a new revelation and doctrine about faith. He began his great treatise of Romans with the following introduction:

¹ Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

In this preface, Paul identified himself as God's chosen apostle and defined his mission: to proclaim the gospel—that Christ died for us and rose from the dead—and to bring about “the obedience of faith” among the Gentiles. Prior to Paul, God's attention had been on Jew only (with a few exceptions). The ascended Lord commissioned Paul, however, as “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11.13). This was a vast change of God's program—something that had not occurred since God called Abraham, 2,000 years before. What did Paul mean by the phrase “obedience of faith” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως)? The phrase is a genitive of apposition. It means “obedience, which is faith,” or “obedience, namely, faith.”

Faith had always been required for salvation. However, faith before Paul included works.¹ In the economy under which Israel operated, under the Mosaic Law faith and keeping the Law were required for salvation. As an example, consider the Mosaic Law's requirement for one who had sinned (Leviticus 1). The Law required the sinner to bring a sacrifice to the priest. If a person reasoned, “I believe God will cover my sin but I'm not going to bring an animal” he could not be forgiven because he had disobeyed God, i.e., he had refused to believe God regarding the necessity of the animal sacrifice. If a man reasoned, “I will bring the sacrifice because the Law demands it, but I don't believe God will cover my sin,” this man too would not have been forgiven for he had no faith. To experience God's forgiveness, a man had to bring a sacrifice for sin in obedience to the Law and exercise faith. Faith responds to God by believing what He had said. So under the Mosaic Law faith and works were required (a man expressed faith through works). God pounded this into the Jews' thinking for hundreds of years. This is why Paul had such a difficult time with Jewish believers with his doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Believing Jews were adamant Paul's converts were not saved apart from works. They insisted believing Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law to be saved (Act 15.1, 5). Paul said “no” to this—not because he was in

rebellion to Judaism or the Mosaic Law but because he had received new revelation from God. This revelatory new doctrine became such a source of contention that it precipitated the necessity to resolve the matter. Thus, they gathered for the Council of Jerusalem, c. 51 A.D.

Paul received his gospel directly from the ascended Lord. He did not consult with the Twelve or anyone else (Galatians 1.1, 11-12). Because of this, Paul set his feet like a bulldog and would not give an inch. Paul's gospel, that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) required no works or Law keeping. It was faith alone: faith + 0. Paul declared that any who believed his gospel was saved (1 Corinthians 15.2), became a member of the body of Christ, the Church, (1 Corinthians 12.13; Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18), and was free from the Law and works (Romans 6.14, Galatians 5.18; Ephesians 2.15). Thus, the "obedience of faith" (genitive of apposition) meant obedience was faith *alone*. In other words, according to Paul's theology (the revelation he received directly from the glorified Lord), one could not obey God unless one adhered to faith + 0. This is why Paul wrote the following to the Galatians:

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1.6-9).

Note Paul wrote this *after* the Council of Jerusalem. In the council, Peter had declared,

¹⁰ Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are" (Acts 15.10-11).

Any who teach otherwise disobey God and are under His condemnation (Galatians 1.6-9). Paul could not have written such strong words until after the matter of his gospel of faith + 0 had been settled at the Council. In that meeting, after much dissent, Peter finally spoke up and made an astonishing declaration: Jews were now to be saved as Gentiles. From the Scriptural record, we learn few Gentiles were being saved under the ministry of Peter and the Eleven. Those who were had been commanded to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law. In other words, they had to live like Jews. That is why the believing Jews at the Council had been so adamant. In fairness to them, they were right. No one had told them differently. They knew nothing of the revelations Paul had received from the ascended Lord.

Paul revealed something totally new to the believing Jews in Jerusalem. The risen Lord had given to Paul, not Peter or the Eleven, the new doctrine that those who believed Paul's gospel of grace (Acts 20.24) were saved by faith alone. No works were required and they were not under the administration of the Mosaic Law. Paul's gospel was different from the gospel the Twelve preached. To the Jew, this was almost incomprehensible. They had been under the authority of the Mosaic Law for 1,500 years. Jesus Himself had ministered under the Law. But Peter, under the direction of the Holy Spirit recognized Paul was right. He recognized Paul's gospel had superseded the "gospel of the kingdom" though he found these new truths difficult to comprehend even at the end of his life (2 Peter 3.14-16).²

Life is a Gift

God is the source of all life. He alone gives it. It is a gift. We cannot earn it and we clearly do not deserve it. God owes man *nothing* (Romans 4.2, 4-5).

God is sovereign. He makes the rules. We come His way or not at all (Matthew 7.13-14; John 14.6). If God declared one could be saved by doing 10 jumping jacks, a person would trust God by doing 10 jumping jacks. God has changed the requirements for salvation over time but the means of salvation has remained the same: faith.

At this present time, we are under the administration of Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Salvation is obtained by faith + 0. Paul wrote:

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3.23-24).

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4.4-5).

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶ The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Romans 5.15-17).

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6.23).

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2.8-9).

These passages are so easy a child can understand them. They are crystal clear in their meaning. Salvation is a gift given by God simply by trusting Him: that He died for our sins and rose from the dead. If one trusts God about the work Christ did on the cross for him and rose from the dead a person is saved. Period. It is that simple.

¹ The exception was Abraham. Abraham was saved apart from works, that is, by faith alone. This is why Paul chose him as an example of his doctrine of faith (Romans 4.1-5).

² God had prepared Peter for this critical moment 13 years earlier. God foresaw the crisis Paul would face. For that reason, He orchestrated Peter to visit the Gentile Cornelius. Peter obeyed God and traveled to the house of Cornelius—dragging his feet the entire way. While Peter was getting warmed up in his message, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the others with him. Peter and the six Jewish believers with him were stunned. It wasn't supposed to happen this way! These Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit without baptism, works, Law-keeping, circumcision, etc. (Acts 10.44-48). It was a faith + 0 event. However, Peter did not understand this at the time. Flummoxed, Peter commanded them to be baptized (Acts 10.47-48) since water baptism was required for salvation under the gospel of the kingdom program (Mark 1.4; 16.16).

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