

“FAITH”

The Seventh Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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Faith is the seventh attribute of "the fruit of the Spirit." Along with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness, there is faith — all describing the singular "fruit of the Spirit." Though faith should not be emphasized above the other characteristics, it is a vital and crucial topic because without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). However, in order to please God, we must have the right kind of faith. Not just any faith pleases God nor is this characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit."

Within the pages of Holy Writ, there are basically two kinds of faith: dead faith which is the faith of devils and saving faith. The faith of devils is mere belief or knowledge of facts. James says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). The devils have knowledge of who God is and who God's Son is. They also know and believe Jesus died for the sins of the world, but this is as far as their faith goes. They do not have saving faith, and, therefore, they tremble in fear of God and His judgment.

Saving faith is belief coupled with obedience of acts of faith. When Paul was in Philippi, he and Silas were beaten and imprisoned. After the miracle of the earthquake, the jailhouse doors were opened, and "everyone's bands were loosed," the Jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:19-30). Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). Was Paul commanding them to merely believe? I think not. Why? Because of the following verses. In verse 32, the text goes on to say, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." Because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17), their faith was being increased by the word spoken to them. Then verse 33 says, "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Why did the Jailor and his family wash their stripes? Because they were repenting of their sin of beating Paul and Silas. By washing their stripes, they were helping the healing process, and thus correcting their sin as much as humanly possible. Also notice in this verse, they were baptized. Finally, in verse 34, we find them rejoicing. Why? Because their sins were washed away. At the point of mere belief? No, after they heard the word, repented, and were baptized. Finally, notice the summary Luke gives by inspiration, "believing in God with all his house." Luke summarizes all that they

did in the word "believing." Thus, we see saving faith includes acts of obedience. For this reason, James says:

- "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18).
- "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20).
- "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:22).
- "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).
- "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

Therefore, without obedient, saving faith it is impossible to please God.

Now that we understand there are two kinds of faith, what is faith? Some would point to Hebrews 11:1 for a definition of faith. However, this is more of a description of faith than a definition. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." From this verse we learn some more qualities of faith. Within faith, there is substance or a quality of confidence which helps a person to endure, and there is evidence which is proof. It is not some "leap in the dark" but has its foundation in proof.

So, what is faith? The actual definition of faith is "firm persuasion" or "firm conviction based upon being persuaded." However, it is used three basic ways within Scripture.

First, the word faith is used of trust. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, Paul wrote, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Paul was speaking about trust. We should not put our trust in man's wisdom but in the power of God. The Jews of old trusted in their own wisdom, and God led them into captivity. Today, rather than trusting God and preaching His word, many draw disciples after them by the wisdom of man with good words and fair speeches (Romans 16:18). Let us grow in faith by trusting God and taking Him at His word.

Second, the word faith is used of trustworthiness or fidelity. Paul wrote in Titus 2:10, "Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." The word translated "fidelity" in this

verse could have been translated "faith." It is the same Greek word. To show "good fidelity" is to show one's trustworthiness, dependability, or reliability. This is probably the specific characteristic Paul is describing in "the fruit of the Spirit." When the Bible talks about the faithfulness of God (Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:13), it is this characteristic. When we read of those who are "faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:2), again it is this characteristic. Please notice this application: in order to be faithful in Christ Jesus, one must have all good fidelity. His or her life must be characterized by trustworthiness and dependability to God, His word, and His people.

Third, the word faith is used in reference to a scheme of belief. By inspiration, this is generally designated as "the faith" and refers to the holy scriptures by which we grow in faith (Romans 10:17). Luke records, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). They were obedient to a scheme of belief or system of faith. Nearing the end of his life, Paul wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Again, Paul kept a system of belief — the word of God. Finally, Jude wrote we "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Similarly, Paul said, "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). To defend the gospel and to earnestly contend for the faith is the same concept. Notice further, Jude said, the faith "was once delivered unto the saints" or "once for all delivered..." The Bible is the complete revelation of God. There is no place and no need for further revelation for God has given "unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Faith is not some subjective leap in the dark. It is concrete and objective. It has its foundation in the word of God. Since without faith it is impossible to please God, let us determine now to grow in faith. How? By reading and studying God's eternal word for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Let us do more than just maintain this marvelous attribute of "the fruit of the Spirit," let us grow in faith so that we will not have "little faith" (Matthew 6:30) but will have "great faith" as the centurion (Matthew 8:10) and the woman of Canaan (Matthew 15:28). And let us be like Abraham, the father of the faithful, who was "not weak in faith" but "was strong in faith" (Romans 4:18-19). Therefore, like the apostles, we plead unto the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).