

What Does Faith Mean?

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The general sense of the word "Faith" is described as knowledge that engenders belief. The word "Faith" denotes to "know, believe or be convinced" beyond the least shadow of doubt, thus it connotes firm belief arising out of knowledge and conviction. As this relates to God and mankind, it is the Divine deposited entity that exudes total unconditional commitment. To them which such has been conferred, it is characterized by knowledge and repose of unshakable belief in the essence of God, i.e., His attributes, principles and the revealed guidance of His purpose. Divinely implanted faith invariably leads its recipients to obedience and submission to the will of God, thus "faith" is a gift that is exclusively given to His elect. This should clearly establish the fact that without "Faith," no one can know nor come to God. It is the indispensable essential.....rather, the very starting point, without which no beginning of a relationship is possible. The relation of men to God is the same as of a tree to its seed, as a tree cannot sprout forth without its seed, hence in the same way; it is not possible for a man who has no belief to start with, to move to God.

Non-recipients of "Faith" do not possess it nor can acknowledge the Sovereignty of God. Even if their conduct is not bad; if they are not spreading corruption and violence, they remain estranged from God as their apparent "good deeds" are of no value. All men are like outlaws in proportion to the righteousness of God, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In this sense, there is no difference in that righteousness is not relative, thus the redeeming value of the actions of a loyal and obedient citizen is no better than the wrongdoers and criminals that spread disorder perpetrating all types of violence and oppression in the world. In the end all revolt against God and cannot compensate for the gravity of the real wrong, revolt and disobedience that is inherent in the sinful depraved nature of mankind.

The above classification of mankind clearly shows that the only success of mankind's salvation depends exclusively on "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." Faith in His life and obedience to death as enacted in eternity and manifested in time is the underlining force in the identification of salvation that was eternally secured in Christ. He alone is flawless or non-defective and without Him, there can be no righteousness or salvation. Where there is not Christ, there is no righteousness, where there is no righteousness there is no salvation. The scriptures are all crystal clear as to the one essential condition of salvation, which truly establishes the importance of the "faithfulness of Christ," as the exclusive exemplification of total submission to the Holy standard of God's Righteousness.

In this view of theses exact stipulations for righteousness and salvation, it is critically important to comprehend the correct thought conveyance of the most direct scriptures (Ephesians 2:8-9) that state how mankind is saved. The theme of "Faith" entails the determinant resolution of several interrogatives:

1. What generally speaking is **FAITH** and what does it mean to **BELIEVE**? Faith (belief or trust) is not some difficult thing which no one really understands. People walk by faith every single day. When someone sits down in a chair they have faith in that chair in believing that it will hold them up and not break into pieces when they put their weight upon it. When someone drives an automobile they **TRUST** by believing that when they need to stop suddenly the brakes will work properly. When someone flies from one city to another, they have faith in the workability of the airplane trusting that it will carry them safely to their destination without crashing to the ground. Every time someone eats food, they trust that the food has been properly prepared and is not contaminated or poisoned. Other

instances of common everyday trust engenders: pillars and walls holding up to support a structure from collapsing, bridges holding up and not collapsing into the water or the highway below, relatives and friends holding to their obligations and commitments as well as many other everyday life experiences.

2. Who and what is **FAITH** actually in? Sometimes brakes in automobiles do fail and people have accidents, airplanes do crash and lives are lost, chairs do break and people fall, food is contaminated and people get sick and some even die, roofs on buildings do come crashing down and relatives and friends don't keep their promises. Thus **FAITH** is only as good as the object (person or thing) in which it is placed!!!

3. Is it possible to **TRUST** something or **SOMEONE** that will never fail us? In other words, is it possible to have faith in anyone who will never fail, disappoint or malfunction? The scriptures adequately address exactly WHO one should believe and trust completely. It is **not** in any man, no not world leaders nor even spiritual leaders even though these may be very fine people. And it certainly should *not* be in oneself because more often it is from within oneself that failures ruminate, as self disappointment become evident. But there is **SOMEONE** that can be unconditionally **TRUSTED** and **RELIED** upon in every sense of what it all entails and that is **GOD!**

4. What does it mean to "**BELIEVE in God?**" There is great difficulty in the sphere of creation in adequately defining the important word "**believe**" as none of nature possesses the innate ability to produce its will and desire. In essence it means "to rest all in." Thank God this is possible because there is the **CREATOR!** Thus, believing is just casting oneself unreservedly into the open arms of God because of the "Faithfulness of the Lord Jesus," because in Him everything is anchored in eternity. The underlined fact is everything that in Christ is safe and secure forever! Belief, trust *al la* **FAITH** means to unconditionally cast and lean wholly upon Christ. Hence all things ultimately rest completely in Him as He is the only hope of salvation!

5. What does it mean to **believe on the Lord?** A crude illustration of what it engenders is told in the story of an expert tightrope walker whose tightrope was extended across Niagara Falls. Of course, to fall from this rope would mean instant destruction. Balancing his long pole lightly, he steps upon the rope and starts across. The crowd is silent. Finally he triumphantly places his foot on the farther bank and a great cheer rises even above the noise of the falls. The man then turns to the crowd and makes a thrilling proposal. He offers to re-cross the falls with someone on his back! But who will it be? "Do you believe I am able to carry you across?" asks the ropewalker turning to a likely individual. "I certainly do," at once responds the one addressed. "Will you let me?" inquires the waiting hero. "Will I let you? Well, hardly. You don't think I am going to risk my life like that, do you?" and he turns away. "And what about you?" as he asked another man who was standing by. "I believe. In fact, I have no doubt about it at all." "Will you trust me?" "I will!" Breathlessly the people watch as he climbs onto the tightrope walker's back and they begin step by step. At last they are over; their final step is taken and they stand once more on firm ground!

This might be analogous to the manifestation of bridging the gulf between time and eternity as the great and only hope of salvation in saying that Jesus Christ alone is able to carry souls cross it but there are pointedly several gigantesque problems with this illustration. First, it gives the impression that trusting the Lord Jesus could be something very dangerous and risky. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the "faithfulness of Christ" guarantees one's eternal salvation and is the safest position a person be in! Human tightrope walkers sometimes fail and some have even plunged to their death. The Lord Jesus Christ has never failed and never will because His work is actualized (finalized) in God's decrees. Secondly the Lord is not requiring volunteers as no one has the capacity, as He has chosen those who He is the causes of those coming to Him for salvation and they will never be disappointed because it is impossible for anything to occur outside of His Eternal Decrees!

6. WHAT MUST A PERSON DO TO BE SAVED? In the vast array of ministries today, there are various very risky and dangerous answers delineating erroneous formulas for salvation:

1. Try to live a good life, and you will be saved.
2. Keep the Ten Commandments, and you will be saved.
3. Love your neighbor, and you will be saved.
4. Be baptized, and you will be saved.
5. Observe the mass and the sacraments, and you will be saved.
6. Do your best, and you will be saved.
7. Go to church every week, and you will be saved.
8. Live a good life and you will be saved.
9. Do good works and you will be saved.
10. Say (sinners) prayers to God and you will be saved.

7. WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD TEACH CONCERNING FAITH? Ephesians 2:8-9, among other scriptures, are interpreted in different ways by various factions of both the Sovereign Grace and Free Will camps, inciting numerous debates concerning the role of men's faith in the reception of salvation. Those of the Free Will persuasion state that "it is God's will to save all men," which they construe to mean that He has a general or universal will to save all men but the specific enactment of it depends upon some supplemental catalyst or some act or acts of reciprocation. Those who espouse Sovereign Grace, assert that God in eternity had a desire to and did in fact made provisions to save all men but in effect only chose to save some. Still others of the Sovereign Grace persuasion hold steadfastly to the premise that salvation is designed for and provided to the Elect Only. Yet nearly all of these diverse proponents hold to the position that the exercise of ones personal faith is either the direct cause and/or means of ones receiving salvation. In addition to their basic encounters as to what is the underlying cause of men's faith and whether personal faith comes from ones own choice to exercise; in all of these interpretations there are limitations and restrictions of the efficacy (capacity) of God's omnipotence, omniscience and perfect resolutions.

The lesson presented herein relies solely upon the proper and sound principles of scriptural exegesis in ascertaining the intended wording of these verses. All the decrees and workings of God consistently establish the unconditional and individual election of certain men to salvation and further that the exercise of personal faith plays no role in the reception of it but it merely identifies its recipients. When these verses are properly exegeted, they prove that the exercise of personal faith is not the underlying cause of salvation in that it depicts human acts. The grace of God is the basic cause of salvation by imputation of Christ's righteousness. Manifestation in time of Jesus in the world working out righteousness for the elect is consigned to the revelation of all things having been previously accomplished in eternity. Hence no other cause can be assigned why certain sinners are assessed as righteous in the sight of God other than His free favor and sovereign pleasure, as that which He pre-determined to do void of any human participation.

Thus salvation is conferred exclusively on the basis of the obedience and sufferings of Christ and consequently not by ones personal faith but by the faithfulness of Jesus. Hence one is justified by His blood, and is made righteous exclusively by Christ's obedience (Roman 5:19). Therefore, no act other than Christ's work in eternity, i.e., ones expressed faith could ever be the means, for only the faithfulness of Christ (His propitiation) could be such an instrument for the removing of the curse of sin. Thus, it may be strongly concluded that the act of believing in itself is not the qualifying cause of salvation in any manner, as the object of ones personal faith is confined only to the identifiable aspect of salvation.

8. WHAT DO EPHESIANS 2:8-9 MEAN?

In verse 8, the generally accepted rendering of the Greek Text is, "For by the grace you have been saved through faith, and this not out of you, (it is) the gift of God." Here the Greek noun rendered "the gift" is the subject of this verse, as it is linked to "of God," so the thought revolves around what "the gift of God" is. Moving in this vein, the coordinating conjunction rendered "and", functions as a connector

of the pronoun rendered “this”, in that it agrees with the word “gift” grammatically. In this light the wording of the first phrase of the verse is **“the gift of God and this.”**

The phrase rendered “not out of you”, is the subject of much unnecessary debate by those to seek to link it either with grace or faith or both. It does not seem that neither of those who contend this have a legitimate basis for their contention, due to the fact that neither (grace or faith) are grammatically consistent with the usage of the pronoun “this”, which obviously defines the noun that it agrees with and obviously replaces, which is the word “gift.” Hence the progressive structure of the verse is, **“the gift of God and this (is) not out of you.”** The following sequence or order of the next phrase in this verse is rendered “you are, having been saved.” Here we observe that “you are,” is the condition of being, while the “having been saved,” describes what the posture of the condition is. Thus what one is, is as a result of such one having been saved or it may be stated, **“You are those who have been and are saved.”**

This lines up with the fact that “having been saved,” means “the gift” is salvation, the essence of having been saved. Here it is ultra-important to glean the implications that salvation is a past completed action (in eternity) with continuous results (in time); and is that which is received (void of any action) by its recipient(s). Note, the verb rendered “are”, states the fact that one is currently saved and “having been saved,” implies that the salvation God gave is a continuous possession (Ephesians 2:5). In this regard, the progressive wording of the verse is, **“the gift of God and not out of you, you are; having been saved.”**

The final phrase of verse 8 shows how the act of salvation is accomplished, i.e., “by the grace through faith (faithfulness).” Here we note the definite article “the” before the word “grace”, as it emphasizes that the grace of God or the particular grace of God, is the underlying basis of how He has saved us, i.e., God’s motive for saving is by grace. Hence, “grace” denotes the means that God utilized to save the elect, which was the only possible stimulus that moved God to save. In this light, this wording is **“by the grace.”** Finally, it is imperative that we accurately assess the meaning of the Greek noun (*pees•teh•os*) rendered “faith”, as it is used in this context. Note, the emphasis must be placed upon the possessive factor as it defines the agency through which grace is transferred to the sinner. Here, it is totally necessary to document that no human activity has any effectuation i.e., neither works nor even the passive participation of those who are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Romans 9:11-16). In this sense, “faith” is focused on the One who accomplished salvation and thus indicates that the source, which makes it possible for God to impart grace, is the **faithfulness of Jesus Christ**. Now it is clear that purely grammatically speaking, the Greek translation is literally “faith” but rendering it “faithfulness”, more accurately conveys the intended thought, as it is impossible that any other than Christ, could be “faithful” in respect of being the possessor of this grace.

So the absolute faithfulness of Jesus Christ entails His faithful propitiatory work in eternity, including His life and death as manifested in time, as this is the essence of imputing unto sinners **His** righteousness, which is the only reason why God is able to save by His grace (II Timothy 1:9). Note, it is absolutely out of context in this verse to consider the enactment of the salvation of sinners apart from the faithfulness of Christ as the only means of imparting His righteousness to such depraved ones. Thus, this progressive rendering is, **“by the grace through faithfulness.”** Observe that the elect’s “faithfulness” would not be of grace but of works if one’s faith in any manner is utilized as the transitional means of the transaction; as the exercise of it thereof could then be construed as a work or at least as one’s participation (either actively or passively) in actuating one’s actual conversion. Further, the act of salvation was accomplished in its actuation by decree in eternity and expressed in time by the manifestation of His death on the cross, which all effectively eliminate any human actions or motions. Accordingly, a more concise yet awkward English translation of Ephesians 2:8 is **“for the gift of God and this (is) not out of you, you are, having been saved by the grace through faithfulness.”**

In verse 9 the certainty of God's exclusive work in salvation is certified, as it eliminates mankind from any of its transactions. In verse 8, the phrase, "not out of you" is akin to "not out of works" in this verse. This leaves absolutely no room for men's works in the enactment of salvation, as its essentials, grace and faith (faithfulness) can not be acquired from human works. "Works" also refer to any mental exertion, actions, deeds, laboring or toiling. The phrase "that no one might boast," is conveyed in consideration of the fact that no aspect of salvation is accredited to mankind in that all his works are excluded. In this sense, "boasting" implies that there is absolutely no room for bragging, glorying and focusing on self accomplishments, as these achievements are all entirely and exclusively the eternal workings of God.