

## What is Faith?

The just shall live by faith, the Bible tells us. It tells us that whatsoever is not of faith, is sin. We are told of the threefold virtues of faith, hope and love. Faith is what allows us to receive salvation in the first place. Clearly, we need to know what faith is, since it is so important. Today, many have changed the Biblical concept of what faith is for something that is practiced by the cults and those who deny Christ.

What is faith?

We find the clearest description in Hebrews 11:1.

Let's break it down:

### 1) Faith is centred around a Person.

It almost seems too obvious to mention, but some miss this point. Faith is not some ethereal force floating around, it is trust in a Person. That person is God. God is a Spirit, that's why faith is described as 'hoped for' and 'not seen'. At its core, faith is depending on God to accomplish His will and to keep His promises. Even Paul said that though he had faith to move mountains, if it lacked love, it was nothing. Faith requires love. If faith is not rooted in a personal love relationship with God, it is not faith. Biblical faith is not present if it does not have God as its object. Faith is trusting God. It is not trusting your faith. Simple logic tells us this. If you are holding onto a rope, you are trusting in that rope. You are not trusting in your trust, you are not holding on to 'holding on'. No, you are trusting and holding onto the rope. But some today tell us that our faith must be in our faith, no, our faith is in God.

You may have seen or heard of the science fiction series Star Wars in which there is the Force. The Force is a power that can be manipulated for good or for evil in these films. Is that what faith is? Some universal presence that is used for good or evil? Some say it is. Indeed, Hebrews 11:1 is quoted to supposedly support this idea. They say, "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for", 'There! Faith is a substance, an actual sub-atomic substance that we can control'. But is that being fair to the text? The word 'substance' is literally from the Greek assurance. Faith is a rock-solid, absolute assurance of things hoped for. A definition of faith that makes it an impersonal force excludes God. If I believe faith is not in a Person, then I will think I can manipulate faith any way I want to. If no Person is the object of my faith, then I'm not accountable to Him, or dependant on Him. No, real faith revolves around the Person of our Lord, it is implicit trust in Him.

### 2) Faith is submissive to God's Will

Faith is trust in a Person. If I am to trust someone, I must know something about his intentions, motivations, abilities and desires. Well, God has revealed Himself to man through His Word, the Bible. In it, we can grow acquainted with the character of God- His promises, His plans. Therefore using His Word as a guide, I can find out if something I am asking for is His will. James tells us this plainly in chapter 4:3 of his epistle "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts". James says, we ask selfishly, and that is why we do not receive. If I ask

in His will , He is sure to answer. Perhaps not always the way I want Him to- but He will be true to His Word. Prayer is not writing your ticket with God, it is God's means of bringing you to the point of accepting His will for you. Jesus taught us this both in His own prayer life and in the Disciples prayer. See, prayer is not my will be done on earth by heaven, it is, Thy will be done on earth (i.e. in my life) as perfectly as it is done in heaven. Angels are perfectly submissive to God , they are not trying to create their own universe. The first angel who did that was Satan , he declared in 5 different ways , "I Will". He was the first creature to deviate from God's will, to say, "my will first".

See, some have been so bold as to say that being submissive to God's Will, to pray "thy will be done" is indecisive and kills faith. Actually the opposite is true , knowing that something is in God's Will , e.g. that someone be saved , gives us unshakable faith. See, those who distort what faith is have two options , they must either say that faith has nothing to do with the will of God, or else they must try and re-define the will of God. That is why the same people will tell you that God wants all believers to be rich, or that if you are sick it is because of your own lack of faith. That is patently wrong. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. Epaphroditus was sick unto death. Timothy suffered with his stomach. Was the solution for them to have faith in their faith? Or to convince themselves that God wanted them healthy and they simply had to claim it? No, Paul asked God, and God instead taught him "My grace is sufficient for thee". Timothy was told drink wine instead of water and so on. God includes sickness as His will for some to test, try or reveal Himself. Job is an example. The man born blind in John 9 is another.

Anything that denies God's right to rule sovereignly in our lives is an unbiblical teaching. Some twist 3 John 2, but there John is simply sending a greeting. Faith is in a person , so consequently it must conform to the will of that Person. The more empty we are of self, broken and surrendered , the more we will be able to discern His will as revealed in the Word.

- 3) Faith has to do with a trusting heart, not the spoken word. Faith as defined by Paul, James and the writer of Hebrews is an act performed trusting God, with God as the motive and center of the act. Consequently faith is not just an intellectual nod to a fact, nor is it invoking the name of Jesus to have a certain act performed. Matthew 7:21-23 teaches that many acts done in Jesus' name will turn out to have been empowered by someone other than Jesus, since He denies involvement.

But is faith, as some have said, a law of the universe that responds to our words? Some have gone so far as to say, "If I say 'I'm feeling sick', it causes me to become sick. If I say 'life is tough' it makes life that way. But if I say 'I am wealthy' my bank balance will shoot up."

Is this biblical faith?

I'd like you to know where this thinking originated , and it wasn't with Paul, the apostles or Christ. Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), the father of New Thought, taught that sickness and suffering were the result of incorrect thinking. He

taught that by positive affirmation or confession , you could create your own reality. His basic teaching was expanded on by Mary Baker Eddy, who said that sin and, in fact, most of life, is an illusion , you create your life by speaking positively. New Age and occultic groups teach that you can create your own reality, your words have power, and that creative visualizations speak things into existence.

Now there are Christians taking what was never a biblical teaching and calling it faith. Certain verses are twisted like Proverbs 18:21 which says “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”

Now, was Solomon really teaching us that our words have power like God’s do? No! He is pointing out the destructive influence of our speech. James says the same thing 3:6 “And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” Does that mean that the tongue is flammable and should be kept away from gas stoves and petrol stations? No. Be sensible and responsible with Scripture. God never told man that his words create reality, He told man to use his speech to glorify God and edify his neighbour. Saying that your speech creates your reality is a New Age teaching that finds no basis in Scripture, otherwise Jesus Himself was violating this principle when He said in the Garden of Gethsemane “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death”. Paul said he has continual heaviness and sorrow when he thought of lost Jews. Was this ‘negative confession’?

If faith could only be exercised by speaking things into reality how did those born deaf and mute receive their healings by Jesus?

No, faith is in a Person. It trusts that Person to do His will as revealed in Scripture, to keep His promises. That means , the more we’re in the Word , the more we know of God - the stronger our faith will be.

Faith is an act performed with spiritual motives , to God. It focuses on an eternal reward , in heaven. It relies on an unseen strength , God. Faith can be expressed with or without words. Let us return to Biblical faith.