

What Is Faith?

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So what is faith? How shall we describe it? Is it positive thinking, as contemporary religion tries to tell us? Positive thinking is a humanistic counterfeit to faith that does nothing more than roil up the muddy waters of corrupt, impotent and fallen mortal power. It has nothing to do with true, biblical faith. Is faith agonizing, crying, becoming emotional, ecstatic, and pretending to do miracles? No, of course those things are not faith.

What then is faith? Faith could be described in a number of ways I suppose, but there are two things that I want to say about it. First of all, faith is confidence in the character of God. I heard this once illustrated by the story of a man who was walking in the woods. He pushed his way through some brush and tall grass and fell over a steep cliff. He reached out in desperation and grabbed hold of a root that was growing out of the bank. As he hung there he was conscious of two things: the root was slowly pulling out of the bank; and there were many jagged looking rocks several hundred feet below him. Just about that time an angel came flying by.

“Help! Save me,” the man cried out to the angel.

“Do you think I can,” the angel asked?

“I know you can,” the man assured him pleadingly.

“Very well,” the angel said, “then turn loose of that root and I’ll catch you before you hit the rocks.”

The significant question to ask, when it comes to faith, is: “What about God’s character? Can He be trusted?” The question is not, “Can I put God to the test and have Him do what I expect of Him?” In Jesus’ earthly ministry, He seldom did what people expected Him to do. But one man (whose faith Jesus commended) said, “I am not in the slightest bit worried about it Lord, and You

don't have to show me anything or prove anything to me. I know that You will do the right and necessary thing, whatever it is, and that is fine with me because You know better than I do." Jesus said that was a true expression of faith. Whatever God does is right, and God will do all that He has said He will do. If we do not have that attitude, we do not have faith.

You may ask, "What would that kind of faith produce in my life in terms of experiences and circumstances?" Who knows, and like the centurion, who cares? As long as God is doing it, what is the problem? The problem only arises when we do not believe that.

"You evil and adulterous generation," Jesus said wearily to that chanting host of religious followers, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." If you have any doubt whether or not God means what He says, or whether (after He has sworn an oath by His very own existence to bolster our confidence) He will do it, then you are in the wrong profession.

Faith is Not Reasonable to the Natural Mind

Faith is the antithesis of reason, science, philosophy, and experience. Faith comes into play when we come to God with the simplicity of Children, believing what Christ has done for us and what God promises in His word. Much of what God says is not rational. Nicodemus asked can a man be born again when he is old and when he is already born? The Pharisees asked Jesus, "How can you stand here before us, man, you who were born out here in Nazareth and are not yet fifty years old, and tell us that you have seen Abraham?" This truth of God that defies reason is all over the pages of the Bible. How can God be one person and three persons at the same time? How can God have always been, with no beginning or ending of days? How can man have a free will if God is sovereign?

To teach that the truth is a truth of reason by which the young intellectual of today can walk across to God and still hold up the head of his intellectual pride, or that God can be discovered by the experiences of fallen man, may be many things, but one thing it is not. It is not Biblical truth. That doctrine can make religionists of men but not followers of Christ. You cannot come to God if you

insist on keeping anything that is of the old nature alive. Faith involves repentance and baptism into Christ. Baptism is the symbol of death to the old creation and the old man. The prospect of the believer lies in hope and the truth of the resurrection. For the Christian in pursuit of the sanctified life, that is not the resurrection someday — but the resurrection *today*. This is a life that is only entered through resurrection, and resurrection only takes place after a very real death.

The old nature that we receive from Adam is shut off from that new creation. St. Paul said that when it comes to the truth of God, the eye has not seen it, the ear has not heard it and the mind has not thought it; but God has revealed it unto us by His Spirit. The natural born man has no capacity with which to know God or His truth. In that same second chapter of I Corinthians where St. Paul discusses this subject, he goes on to say that only the Spirit of God knows the mind of God. The natural man cannot know the things of God because they are only discerned by the Spirit. We have been given the Spirit of God so that we can know His thoughts. The ability to know God only comes as a result of the resurrection, after the death of the old creation and the old man has taken place.

Faith Vs. Reason and Experience

Faith means that we believe in a God, and in the Words of that God, who we cannot know by experience and reason. We can only know Him by faith and through His Word. The issue raised by this focus of attention has caused no end of controversy and confusion. The transcendental nature of God (which means that God is outside the experiences of natural born mortal man) has caused men like Heidegger and Karl Barth to take off on dialectical and philosophical tangents to try to define God in terms of *abstraction* and the *philosophical other*. Other men, like C.S. Lewis and Francis Shaffer have objected that God is *metaphysical* but not *transcendental*. By this they mean that God can be known by experiences and the reasoning abilities of natural man. This notion, which is not orthodox, has argued that truth is a truth of philosophy, of reason, or science and of art. Francis Shaeffer put this theology of philosophical apologetics into

terms that adequately express and define it when he said: “I believe in Christ because He answers the philosophical necessity.”

We could go on and on about the pros and cons of this discussion, but here is the crux of it, insofar as Historic Orthodox Christianity is concerned: Natural born man is fallen, he is estranged from God, he does not know who God is or where He is, and he will never find Him through reason, science, philosophy, and experience. There is one way to God — and one only — faith. Jesus once pronounced woes upon those who thought that they were following the light, but who were in the darkness. God help the man who thinks that faith is an experience or an exercise of the reasoning powers of mortal man. When we do that, we have not elevated mortal man to the position where he can now know God by reason and experience, nor have we brought God down to where He functions by the natural laws of this fallen universe. What we have done is to create a counterfeit faith by which we can have experiences and on which we can chew intellectually and rationally. But that has no divine power or reality because it is of men, not God. Faith is not a work. Faith is not an emotional expression. Faith is not the product of inductive reasoning. Faith is the gift of God. Every man has faith if he will use it. God has given it to him. The questions are: Will you put that faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ for your Justification?

And will you, as a Christian, put your faith in the Word of God, as expressed by obedience — not observation, experience, and reason?