

Faith Has Several Definitions

'Open the gates (of heaven) so the righteous may enter; the one who keeps faith ... because he trusts in You' (Isaiah 26:2 & 3). 'Faith is the assurance or confirmation of the things we hope for, convinced (or proof of evidence) of the things we have not yet seen' (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith is mentioned in the Bible over two hundred times but not all faith is the same. There are several definitions, expressions or variations of faith. For example, we can have faith in God, we can worship God and express our love for Him, but like the disciples we can still lack faith to believe in His miracles. On four different occasions, Jesus rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith. "Oh, you of little faith" (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). The disciples could not believe in miracles but they loved and served God as faithful Jewish men, so they were not without faith in God. Another area of faith is the ability to forgive and as righteous men, the disciples wanted to be forgiving and said to the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Another time, Jesus was very impressed by the faith and confidence people had in His miracles; "I have not found such faith anywhere else in Israel" (Matthew 8:10). Yet another time Jesus was unable to bless the people of Galilee with many miracles because of their unbelief and complete lack of faith. 'Jesus marvelled at their unbelief but continued to go around the villages teaching' (Mark 6:6). We can see here, there are different expressions and depths of faith. God is almighty and nothing is impossible for Him, but that does not mean He will do everything we ask. He can do all things but sometimes He might not. We need to ask ourselves, "Is our prayer His will for us?" "Are our prayers God's will for the people we are praying for?" We know all things are possible with God but not all things are His will for us. Many times people pray for things, sometimes for years and may be accused of not having the faith to believe when their request may never have been God's will for them in the first place. When we place our trust in Him, our obedience will help us learn the difference between what God can do and what He will do.

The first time faith itself is mentioned in the Bible (not faithfulness but faith) is when the Lord described faith as having trust in Him as we read in the opening verse. 'Open the gates (of heaven) so the righteous may enter; the one who keeps faith ... because he trusts in You' (Isaiah 26:2 & 3), so trusting in God is keeping faith in God. Belief in God and trust in God are two very different things. Trusting in God can see us welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven through the gates of heaven. That type of faith gains eternal rewards. However, merely believing in God is not enough to secure our place in heaven. Demons believe in God and shudder in terror, and they are eternally damned. 'Do you believe God is one. You do well. The demons also believe and shudder' (James 2:19). We need to have more than belief in God, we need to have complete trust in Him, reliance and dependence on Him. It is the trust in God that brings hope – the assurance we will receive the things we have prayed and asked for, as long as they are according to His will. 'This is the boldness we have in Him. If we ask anything according to His will, He listens to us' (1 John 5:14). In this Bible study we will explore four definitions of faith.

Definition number one: Faith in this context is our relationship and allegiance with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Three important matters of the Law of Moses are justice, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23), that is faith in God as our supreme ruler, our sovereign, the One Whom we must obey. We were created to obey and serve Him according to His will. He is not there to pander to our whims according to our desires. We are saved by our faith in God, not by our works of obedience. 'Have faith in God' (Mark 11:22). We receive the Holy Spirit by faith in the knowledge He is available to us. We are justified through our faith in Jesus, the Son of God and His ability to rescue us from the eternal fire (Galatians 2:16 & 20). 'I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus' (Ephesians 1:15). 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law or by hearing of faith? ... He Who gives the Holy Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law or by hearing of faith? ... Those who are of faith (those who have a relationship with God) are blessed by the faithful Abraham ... No man is justified by the law before God for, "The righteous will live by faith." The Law is not based on faith ... We receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith ... The Scriptures (and the Law) imprisoned all things under sin so the promise by faith in Jesus (to save us) might be given to all those who believe. Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which would afterwards be revealed so the law has become our tutor to bring us to Jesus so we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor for we are all children of God through faith in Jesus' (Galatians 3:2 to 14; 22 to 26). We must have repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). 'They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit ... Stephen, full of faith and power, performed great signs and wonders among the people ... Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' (Acts 6:5 & 8; 11:24). 'The righteous will live by faith' (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17). We could say, 'The righteous will live by their relationship with God'. Without this particular kind of faith, it is impossible to please God and those who come to God must logically, believe He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Our faith in God is counted to us as righteousness (Romans 4:5 & 9). 'In Jesus we have boldness and access (to God) in confidence through our faith in Him' (Ephesians 3:12). We cannot please God if we do not have a relationship with Him. It is this definition of faith

that sometimes fails when people are overwhelmed by shock or sorrow. "I (Jesus) prayed for you so your faith would not fail" (Luke 22:32). We must not ever try to turn others away from faith in God (Acts 13:8).

Definition number two: Faith in this context is the belief a pledge, promise or vow has been sincere and will be fulfilled. Jesus wondered if the people who have pledged a covenant relationship with Him would still have faith when He returns to earth. "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). 'The promise to Abraham and to his descendents, he should be heir of the world was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is of no effect ... It is of faith ... the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all ... Without being weakened in faith, Abraham did not consider his own body worn out, he being about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb, yet looking to the promise of God he did not waver through unbelief but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God' (Romans 4:13 to 20). Abraham believed God would keep His promises and was credited as being righteous because He believed in God's promise of a son and heir regardless of his and Sarah's advanced age (James 2:23). Jesus was resurrected by faith (1 Corinthians 15:14 & 17), as promised by God through the prophets. Jesus dwells in our hearts through our faith (Ephesians 3:17).

Definition number three: Faith in this context is assurance, confidence, conviction, hope or a strong belief we will receive what we pray for, but only according to the will of God. When we read the whole of Hebrews chapter 11:1 to 40, it is this definition of faith that is being referred to. This definition of faith is the one that is supposed to move obstacles as difficult as mountains (Matthew 17:20) although a study of Hebrews 11 from verse 35 tells us not everyone received answers to their prayers. 'Some men brought in a paralysed man on a thin mattress to lay him before Jesus ... Seeing their faith Jesus said to him, "Son, cheer up, your sins are forgiven ... Get up, take your mattress and go home"' (Matthew 9:2 & 6). "Daughter, cheer up, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your illness" (Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34). The blind beggar was healed when he called out to Jesus several times. 'Jesus said to him, "Go your way. Your faith has made you whole." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way (that is, during the preaching of the way of salvation through grace)' (Mark 10:46 to 52). "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (Matthew 15:28). "Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:48 & 50). "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed ... nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt ... it will be done" (Matthew 21:21). One of the lepers saw he was healed, turned back glorifying God with a loud voice. Jesus said, "Your faith has healed you" (Luke 17:15 & 19). 'What I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk ... Having faith in Jesus' name has made this man strong ... Yes, the faith through Jesus' name has given this man perfect health" (Acts 3:6 & 16). 'At Lystra a certain man sat, born cripple from his mother's womb he had never walked. He was listening to Paul speaking, who fastening eyes on the crippled man and seeing he had faith to be made whole said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" The man leaped up and walked' (Acts 14:8 to 10).

Definition number four: Faith in this context is our religious belief, doctrine, reverence, peace and love, often referred to as THE faith. We must all continue to walk in THE faith (Acts 14:22). 'Until we all attain to the unity of THE faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown spiritual adult, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Messiah ... but speaking truth in love, we should grow up in all things into Him Who is the Head, Jesus' (Ephesians 4:13 & 15). 'Continue in THE faith, grounded and steadfast and do not move away from the hope of the Gospel' (Colossians 1:23). We must be obedient to THE faith (doctrine) (Acts 6:7). 'God opened a door of faith (salvation through grace) to the nations' (Acts 14:27). We have 'received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the nations for Jesus' name's sake ... faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world' (Romans 1:5 & 8). 'Our righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus ... Whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in His blood for a demonstration of His righteousness ... He is just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus ... By a law of faith, we maintain a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law ... There is one God Who will justify the Jews and Gentiles through faith. Do we nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not!' (Romans 3:22 to 31). Abraham received the sign of the Covenant, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had before, so he might become the father of all those who believe' (Romans 4:11). 'We are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus through Whom we also have our access by faith into His grace in which we stand' (Romans 5:1 & 2). 'By grace we have been saved through faith, which is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:8). 'Peace, love and faith from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus the Messiah' (Ephesians 6:23). 'Through the Holy Spirit, by faith we wait for the hope of righteousness. In Jesus, neither being Jewish amounts to anything nor being a Gentile, but faith working through (God's) love' (Galatians 5:5 & 6). 'Have this confidence ... for your progress and joy in the faith ... Let your behaviour be worthy of the Gospel of Jesus ... Stand firm in one spirit (of unity) with one soul striving for the faith of the Gospel' (Philippians 1:25 & 27). 'Be found in Jesus, not having a righteousness of our own ... but through faith in Jesus, the righteousness from God by faith' (Philippians 3:9).

Here are a few more interesting facts about faith. Faith offers us protection from the devil. 'Above all, take up the shield of faith so you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one' (Ephesians 6:16). Our service to God is determined by the level of faith we have in Him. God expects us to mature as disciples and as we grow in the Lord, He gives us responsibilities according to our measure of faith and belief in Him. God measures out the level of faith He gives to each of us (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 4:13). 'According to your faith be it done for you (for healing) ... According to the proportion of our faith (to prophesy)' (Matthew 9:29; Romans 12:6). Faith cleanses our heart (Acts 15:9). Faith strengthens us (Acts 16:5). We are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18). We are encouraged by faith (Romans 1:12). We grow in righteousness as we grow in faith, from one level of faith up to the next, as the Bible says, 'From faith to faith' (Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 10:15). We have access to the grace of God by faith (Romans 5:2). Faith comes by hearing (or reading) the Word of God (Romans 10:17). We need to stand firm in our faith (Romans 11:20; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 1:24). We need to remain steadfast in our faith in Jesus, deeply rooted, built up, established in the faith, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:5 & 7). Faith is the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). Faith is one aspect of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:13) and faith is one fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Faith without the love of God is worthless. Of faith, hope and love, the greatest of these is imparting God's love (1 Corinthians 13:2 & 13). No one can control the faith of another person (2 Corinthians 1:24). We abound in faith (2 Corinthians 8:7). We need to test our faith to be sure we are saved (2 Corinthians 13:5). We should preach the faith (Galatians 1:23). We should be especially good to people of the faith (Galatians 6:10).

Our lack of faith or weak faith does not nullify God's faithfulness (Romans 3:3 & 4). We must accept people who have weak faith and not judge them because God has accepted them as they are. 'Accept those who are weak in faith. Do not dispute over opinions. One person may have faith to eat all things but those who are weak in the faith might eat only vegetables. Do not let those who eat meat despise those who do not eat meat. Do not let those who do not eat meat, judge those who eat meat, for God has accepted them all. Who are you who judge another servant? To their own Lord they stand or fall. Yes, they will be made to stand, for God has power to make them stand ... Do not cause your brother (or sister in the faith) to stumble, be offended or made weak in faith. Do you have faith? Keep it to yourself before God ... Those who doubt (or have weak faith) are condemned if they eat meat because it is not by faith and whatever is not of faith is sin' (Romans 14:1 to 4, 21 to 23).

One very important aspect of everyone's faith is baptism by full immersion, just like Jesus did, which symbolises the death, burial and resurrection of our Saviour. We must be obedient and accept the whole blood covenant written for us by God and fulfilled by Jesus. Salvation through Jesus 'is revealed by the Scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the Eternal God and is made known for obedience of faith to all the nations' (Romans 14:25). 'Do you not realise, all we who were baptised into Jesus were baptised into His death? We were buried with Him through baptism to death so just like Jesus was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too can walk in newness of life. If we have become united with Jesus in the likeness of His death, we will also be part of His resurrection' (Romans 6:3 to 5). To be saved and be part of the resurrection, we must 'die' to sin, have our sin 'buried' in the waters of baptism and be 'resurrected to new life' as we come out of the waters of baptism. Read what Jesus said. "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born-again, they cannot see the Kingdom of God ... Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water (baptism) and of the Holy Spirit, they cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3 & 5). We must be, 'Buried with Jesus in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God Who raised (resurrected) Him from the dead' (Colossians 2:12). 'I desire to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own ... but what is through faith in Jesus, the righteousness from God by faith, that I may know (be personally acquainted with) Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus' (Philippians 3:9 to 11 & 14). To those people who have not yet been baptised in water by full immersion, it is a very necessary step in everyone's walk with God. If we refuse to be baptised then we are being disobedient to the faith and may not be part of the great resurrection of the righteous.

This is what we are called to do as we walk by faith. 'Walk worthily of the calling with which you were called with all meekness and humility, with patience, bearing with one another in love, being eager to keep the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace, for there is one Body and one Holy Spirit. You were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in us all' (Ephesians 4:1 to 6).

Amen and God bless you.

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