



Study #04-A

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Faith—Necessary for Salvation?

Defining our terminology when speaking with one another is extremely important. Voltaire (pseudonym of Francois Marie Arounet—1694-1778) is credited with saying, “*If you would speak with me, define your terms.*” Good idea. Lacking accurate definitions of essential terms leads to blunders of the grossest kind. Can you imagine going off to war believing that a tank was a container to hold heating oil? —Or that a plane is something used to smooth wood? Translators are unable to translate one language into another, and simultaneously, insure that the second language contains all the nuances and gradations of meaning as the first. This is one of many problems facing translators attempting to interpret the original biblical manuscripts: *a lot of Hebrew and Greek words have no counterparts in English.* Therefore, translators toss around for an equivalent word or phrase to clarify a point. Sometimes they get it just right, and sometimes they do not. Witness the words “gospel, love, hate...” etc. Compounding this difficulty is a popular *religious* language heavily sprinkled with tradition, catchphrases, and buzzwords. Sometimes they add words to “clarify” a meaning, but the net result is a modification of the intent of the author. The fact is clear: *any particular Hebrew or Greek word may be garbled or given the wrong shading when translated into English.*

Without doubt, God inspired (in some sense) the original writing of the Bible, but it should be obvious that subsequent translators were not stimulated in the same manner and for the same reasons. Further, preachers today often get sloppy—they confuse matters by using words that have multiple meanings without first defining to their listeners the particular term or definition they have in mind. Consequently, the speaker forces his listeners to invoke whatever definition they happen to already have in mind. Under these conditions, the message as understood by the listener is predictably not the message understood by the speaker. Being on two different wavelengths, as it were, quickly brings any reliable communication to a screeching halt. ☹

Faith

FaitH is the substance and assurance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. *Do you understand what you just read? Can you explain it?* Yet, this is the standard definition of faith offered with a straight face by Christian people everywhere. The statement above, purporting to define the word “faith,” is essentially the same as found within the Bible. Actually, the declaration is not much of a definition at all, but a more of a characterization. We have just defined the problem.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. This is another scriptural statement. It points to the absolute essential need for faith to be present within the Christian if the believer is to gain salvation, for without faith, salvation is impossible. Pleasing God includes a belief system and obedience to Jesus Christ. Preachers everywhere preach on “faith.” It is a popular subject. Yet, the precise definition of “faith” is fuzzy at best in many believers’ minds. Should you ask any

ten professing Christians what the definition of faith is, you are likely to get ten different answers if you press the issue once they have finished reiterating the “Faith is...” passage of Hebrews.

Without a clear definition of faith, we can argue ourselves silly and still miss the point about the necessity of faith, or lack thereof, at the time one responds to God’s call to salvation. We might similarly argue our positions relative to either the presence of faith in our lives to “become perfect” as God is perfect (**Matt.5:48**) or in just overcoming our day to day difficulties in this life.

One laments that since one has sinned in some fashion or another, or, since one feels weak and helpless, his faith is essentially nonexistent or terribly feeble. Another believes that because it is physically necessary to use drugs to alleviate depression or psychological turmoil, one’s faith is very weak at best. *After all, shouldn’t Christians have enough faith and be strong under all conditions, putting on the whole armor of God, which includes the “shield” of faith?* (cf. **Eph.6:10-20**).

Unfortunately, this popular idea adds nothing to the solution and much to the problems of those among us that are unable at times, for various reasons, to cope with what the world is dealing them. Christians readily take medicines and drugs to ease physical pain and to heal physical wounds, even after having a minister anoint and pray over them for God’s intervention and/or healing. They obediently take their medicine, and no one thinks any the less of them for so doing. In fact, for a believer to *refuse to take* a prescribed medicine in such cases is not a sign of strong faith—it is a foolhardy move, rather akin to testing God. Those who are on antidepressant medicines must not think that they are any different because of the *type* of malady they are confronting; psychological as opposed to physical.

To think of oneself as “faithless” or spiritually weak, or even as a sinner because of any given illness, needlessly fuels the fire of the problem. While we are in these physical “temples,” we will experience physical, psychological, and emotional problems. Psychological and emotional troubles are handicaps of a different sort, just as real as any physical handicap, but all too often, we attach a stigma to the former. Society (religious and secular) often makes us feel guilty about mental problems. This should not be so. Thankfully, Jesus Christ has promised to unburden *all* those who come to him—*he gave no basis for discrimination about the type of burden carried*. Whatever your burden is, come to God. You have a true friend in the Lord who will ease your pain and suffering. Then there are those among us who think: “I was not healed,” or, “I have a hard time coping in life, so I must not have enough faith.” The amount of faith in these situations should not be part of a judgment concerning the state of affairs at all, but in practice, we *know* it is—we have convinced ourselves of this “fact.”

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt.11:28-30). Christ did not differentiate between one person and another according to their burden, whether it is physical, spiritual, emotional, or psychological. He wants “all who labor” to come to him so that he might give them rest. Sometimes, it is a matter of “letting go” of your guilt and reservations and placing all your cares upon Jesus.

“Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name” (Psa.33:18-21).

“But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who dili-

gently seek him” Heb.11:6). In *everything* give thanks for this is the will of God... (1Thess.5:18).

Jesus Christ commanded all that desire to make gains in this life to begin at the beginning by first seeking the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt.6:33).** Make no mistake. In his ministry, Jesus focused on our *needs* rather than our *wants*. Those who diligently seek the Kingdom of God (KOG) are in fact seeking Yahweh God and his righteousness, and they will soon come to Jesus. Notice that believers are *first* to seek the KOG—they are not to *first* seek the doctrines of a church organization.

Faith, Faithfulness, & Fruit

A number of theologians teach that faith is a gift from God. The King James Version of the Bible indicates that faith is a fruit of God’s holy spirit. To produce any “fruit” of the holy spirit, it seems reasonable and logical that one must have the holy spirit indwelling within one’s being first—before personal growth, as in fruit, emanates from it. One cannot pick apples from a nonexistent apple tree—one that was never planted. The planting of God’s spirit must take place within your being before it can begin to bear fruit. The apostle Paul wrote: **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1Cor.3:6-7).**

Many versions of scripture are unclear about faith itself being a fruit of the holy spirit. They use “faithfulness” instead of “faith.” **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal.5:22-23a, NKJV, cf. ASV, TLB, NLT, NRSV, CEV).** According to the NKJV and other versions, being faithful in some fashion seems to be a fruit of the holy spirit, rather than the fruit being faith itself (or of your personal faith). Most of the terms listed above project qualities of an individual that may be enhanced through the holy spirit. They are *characteristics* of an individual. The King James Version says it differently: **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal.5:22-23, KJV).** Here, in the middle of a series of qualities is a term denoting an “object” as opposed to a condition. It seems out of place. But is it really? Perhaps the majority opinion is wrong this time.

The Interlinear Bible renders **Galatians 5:22-23** as, **“... kindness, goodness, faith, meekness” (TIB).** The writer of Hebrews tells us that faith has “substance” and is “evidence,” as though faith is something that we can see or experience. **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony” (Heb.11:1).**

Just what is faith? The text of Hebrews 11 states that it is the “substance” and the assurance or “evidence” of things hoped for. How does faith become evidence or substance? Faith is evidence and substance because it should be a “working” faith and a work in the Lord will always produce visible fruit. In addition, scripture claims that without this substance, there is no way you will please God. A preliminary inference based on a few scripture references would suggest that faith, whatever it is, is a prerequisite of salvation: *you must have faith before you can receive salvation.* However, is not salvation free for the asking? Is that not what you have been told all your lives? How then, can salvation, represented as eternal life, be free, if it is necessary to first come up with faith? These questions tend to highlight the lack of a concrete understanding of not only the definition of faith, but of an understanding of the subject in general. Many religious people are satisfied with what they think they know, but when pressed, they have little substance—their understanding is woefully shallow, and they begin to de-

defend themselves against so-called “wolves” that would dare question their theology.

Whatever faith is, it is “made perfect” by doing the good works that God decreed through Jesus Christ. **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph.2:10).** How can any activity like feeding the poor cause anyone’s faith to become perfect? The problem seems to be the definition of faith.

An Important Point: The change from “faith” to “faithfulness” between Bible versions is significant because the two words in English are not interchangeable. “Faithfulness” is defined as “*the quality of being faithful; loyalty; constancy in affection,*” whereas “faith” is defined as “*belief, trust, to confide in; unquestioned belief; complete trust, confidence, reliance, as children usually have faith in their parents.*” To be “faithless” would declare that one is, “*without faith, especially religious faith; without belief in the revealed truths of religion; unbelieving; unreliable, undependable, deceptive— ref: ‘O faithless generation’ Matt. 17:17.*” [Webster] In the same breath, Jesus also declared that “faithless” generation to be “perverse.” If “faithfulness” is the correct rendering of the Greek word in the Galatians 5 passages, faith is not a product of the spirit of God living within a person. On the other hand, if “faith” is the correct rendering in English from the Greek, it is not the “quality of being faithful” that is produced, but the “unquestioned belief” that is produced by the union of man with God’s spirit.

Receiving the Kingdom as a Child

One passage in favor of the latter is a statement by Jesus of Nazareth. **“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it” (Mk.10:15).** His words in this passage can be broken down into its component parts.

(1) A person is able to receive the KOG in his lifetime. Those who claim that the KOG is unavailable and not established at this time are being less than scripturally accurate and truthful. They will have to answer to the Judge, for the errors they are teaching their followers. They should know better.

(2) If one is able to receive the KOG as a child, one is able to enter it immediately **(Col.1:13-14).**

(3) Those who do not receive the KOG as a child are lost. *Salvation is tied directly to receiving the KOG as though you were a child. If you have not done so yet, it is time you got about doing it—if you desire salvation.*

(4) “As a little child” suggests “unquestioning belief, trust, confidence, and reliance” upon God and especially Jesus Christ, the author of all salvation **(cf. Acts 4:12).**

What are the outstanding characteristics of a child with respect to his parent? Certainly, the faith of a child is not *blind* faith—a faith based upon ignorance—a faith that says “I do not know, but I believe anyway.” This kind of faith is definitely *not* a “child-like” faith. The child bases his faith upon personally *knowing* who the parent is. The child’s bases his faith upon intimate *knowledge* of the subject of his faith. The child has not filled his faith with doubt—it is *unpolluted*—it is a *pure* faith. His knowledge-based faith contains the characteristics every child of God must have if he is to receive eternal life. One of the better definitions of godly faith is a pure belief system that is a *saving* faith directed toward Jesus Christ and the Father.

Biblical Faith Defined—The Four pillars

The biblical view of faith has four basic aspects. There may be more, but knowing these primary features is necessary to understanding the child-like aspects of godly faith. When you do understand and take these points to heart, they will go a long way in helping you cement a relationship with God.

Faith = (1) belief, (2) trust, (3) confidence, (4) reliance. These are the “four pillars” of faith. *I believe God; I trust God; I have confidence in God; I rely upon God.* How do we reconcile this definition with the “working definition” in Hebrews?

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb.11: 1-3). Your faith, i.e., a working *compound* belief system as demonstrated by belief, trust, confidence, and reliance, will lead you down paths that testify of a holy God. It further represents the visible effect (the substance) of works that further testify to a child-like belief system. Faith is not just a feeling; not just emotionalism—it is a way of life.

James talks about deeds of the faith. Deeds of the faith are works of the faith. **“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas.2:20).** Faith (belief system) without exercise in the positive aspects of godly living, *doing good works*, is without merit whatsoever. This empty kind of faith is without any redeeming value—it is clinical and does not stand upon the four pillars of faith as outlined. Cold, clinical *intellectual* “faith” has no trust, no confidence, no reliance, and ultimately, no true belief and no salvation. If you acknowledge God and claim to believe in and worship him, yet, do not acknowledge that you must be obedient to God’s laws, your faith (belief system) is in vain. If you profess Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, yet, by your actions you are on the “broad” path, your faith (belief system) is in vain and your salvation is in jeopardy. When the time comes for the manifestation and consummation of your salvation at the last day, the same day Jesus returns to earth called judgment day, you may come up short. Your empty “faith” may have failed you. Although you may grind your teeth and seek salvation with your tears, you may never thereafter find it. Remember Esau:

“Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Heb.12:14-17). One aspect of salvation: *pursue peace with all people, and pursue holiness.* Perhaps you have sold your birthright in God for the dictates of a church organization—for the faith in doctrines upon which you stand.

Doubt, Misdirected Faith, & Imputation

Those who come to Jesus must not doubt (**Matt.11:22-23**). Doubt is a precursor and the foundation of unbelief (**Matt.14:31**). And unbelievers have no part in eternal life (**Heb.3:16-19**). Possibly the “unpardonable sin” is unbelief because no pardon can come to unbelievers—they are lost and gone forever, should they die in their unbelief.

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom.4:13). The promise came to Abraham *while he was yet uncircumcised* (v.12) or in other words, while he was a sinner. He did not have to “qualify” for salvation or rewards by knowing and attending to certain church doctrines beforehand. God counted Abraham’s faith (belief system) as righteousness. God *imputed* righteousness to him. If you truly believe, God will impute that to you as righteousness. But just saying you believe without acting upon that belief is unbelief. Knowing and following the law does not bring about salvation. The salvation event occurs when you repent, believe, are baptized into the death and res-

urrection of Jesus. You may then say that you are saved. You have been re-generated; born again. You are a new creature in Christ. But your faith or belief in the law may well be a *misdirected* faith. To say one believes in this or that law of God is okay. But to take that belief and stand upon it and defend it against all comers may lead you to *unknowingly* begin standing upon the law for salvation. This is one reason why Paul was inspired to write the warning: **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1Cor.10:12).**

We might puff our chests out and proclaim that we are not standing upon the law or some doctrine, but we need to be very careful here. The evidence coming from many churches is to the contrary. Some denominations use the “Holy Trinity” doctrine as a litmus test of Christianity. What is your litmus test?

The #99-2 issue of The Fellowship Commentator describes one exclusivist corporate Church of God that declares publicly, through its statement of beliefs, that it “welcomes all who are Sabbath keepers and believe on Jesus Christ and his Gospel.” Presumably, if you are not *already a believer and a Sabbath keeper*, you are not welcome in their fellowship. This is a prime example of standing upon doctrine instead of upon Christ. A *misdirected* faith adds nothing to your righteousness account. If it does, then faith is of no use because the two terms, salvation by law or by faith, are mutually exclusive (Rom.4:14-15).

“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...” (v.16). God may count a person’s faith (belief system) as righteousness, therefore that belief becomes key to the grace of God. Further, God’s promise extends to all who are of Abraham, as in Galatians 3:26-29, spiritual Israel. Abraham is the father of all believers in Christ.

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he had promised he [God] was also able to perform” (v.20). Abraham did not deny the power of God through unbelief. Notice the juxtaposition of the two terms—faith and unbelief. Unbelief, as given here, is the opposite of faith. Unbelief is evidence of a lack of faith, while being “fully convinced” is an aspect of being “strengthened in faith.”

“And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’ ” (v.22). God added righteousness to Abraham’s account because of his system of belief, not his doctrines and law keeping. God *imputed* righteousness to him.

“Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (vv.23-25). The reason the Father raised Jesus from the dead was so that every believer might gain justification. *Believers* are justified, not *doers*. The basis for justification is belief.

Two blind men followed Jesus seeking his healing touch upon them. They cried out for mercy. Christ, the “Son of David,” had this response when they came to him in the house: **“And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ ” (Matt.9:28b).** Their response was immediate: **“They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ ”** Upon hearing this simple answer, their eyesight was restored. **“Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened” (vv.29-30a; cf. Matt.9:22; 15:28; Mk.10:52; Lk.7:50; 17:19; 18:42; Rom.10:8-13).** One of our problems today is our difficulty with the simple but essential response, “Yes, Lord.”

Notice how Jesus tied the healing of the two blind men directly to their “faith,” yet, Jesus asked them directly if they “believed” he was able to heal them. It appears that one element of faith is belief—but not just any belief. They had to believe that he could heal them.

Sorry, God is Not Obligated to Save Anyone at All

A minister of Jesus Christ can ask if you believe that Yahweh our God can heal you, but your answer in the affirmative does not assure you that the healing will actually take place. If it is God's will to heal at that time, then it will be done.

“What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom.9:14-16).* God is under no obligation to save anyone regardless of faith or works. He is under no obligation to save you or me. That ought to wake us up! He will save whomever he pleases. He is like a State Governor who has the power to pardon anyone or no one in a prison setting. He will not pardon everyone, but from time to time, a request comes through that he honors, and that person is set free. God is not obliged to be “fair” to anyone. He may save you but not me, or me but not you, yet, neither one of us deserve salvation. His fairness is in the law. We are all lawbreakers, and it is fair that we be punished. His mercy is outside the law—above the law. He can remove the punishment.

Every person—man, woman, or child, is under the sentence of death because of sin, whether because we are in Adam or because we have sinned before God. No one deserves any mercy. We all deserve justice. No one has sufficient faith for salvation unless God deems it sufficient. It is his call, not ours. We humans do not have the right or privilege to teach that God, to be fair, will raise everybody up and give them ANY chance at salvation, much less a second chance. When someone says that God is not a “fair” God, he is a “just” God, some rise in indignation. They do so because they want to make God in their image, and make him a “human” God—a “fair” God with whom they can deal.

Every person who has ever lived deserves nothing but justice from a just and holy God—no one deserves fairness from a fair God. It is only by his graciousness that God does not destroy the whole lot of us in one fell swoop, as he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, because we all deserve no better treatment. Present one person, one man, woman, or child, who deserves salvation or deserves a chance at salvation and you will have found a perfect, totally sinless individual. No one deserves anything from God except justice, Jesus, the Lamb of God excepted.

Many of us believe the devil is in charge of the world, and therefore unknowingly (or perhaps knowingly, *it does not really matter*) deny God's power to intervene in our personal lives. By so doing, we undermine our belief system.

According to scripture, faith (a belief system) *without works* (visible fruit) is a dead faith. So, if you are not doing some sort of good works, your faith is worthless—it is dead. What are “good works”? That will have to be another study. **“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead” (Jas.2:20)?** Further, no human being is able to raise the dead. Only God, a self-existent being, has the ability to raise the spiritual or physical dead.

If you do not expect God to do anything in particular for you, even to the point of forgiving your sins and giving you salvation, you are most pitiable.

“Faith” without *expectation* is about as dead as any other belief system. If this describes you, then you do not please God, you have no faith, and you will not receive eternal life or salvation. You are lost. A saved person should *expect* to inherit eternal life, and not worry about it.

Someone wrote, in effect, that when God calls a person, his own personal faith enables his response. Not true. This writer was saying that the person God calls (whether he hears the call or not) has the faith inside him to answer the call

and come to Jesus Christ for salvation. This is an “enabling” faith. This is truly a great mistake. Nothing we can do enables salvation. Not even our faith can facilitate salvation. We kid ourselves when we believe that we have some part in the awarding of our own salvation. Faith is the belief system that permits God to save us because he will not do so without it. If we in any way “enable” salvation, we have added our part to the process, and thus, we become active “partners” in the very event that is supposed to be a grant or a gift from God. God’s prerogative is to save whomever he will, in spite of who or what we are, or how we behave. Our part is to be steadfast in obedience, lest our salvation be removed from us.

Enabling, Facilitating, or Participating Faith

Then some people say you must already have faith that you implement or put to work prior to, thus, in response to God’s call (enabling faith), others say that faith itself is a gift, and you cannot come up with sufficient faith (work it up) for salvation. What does scripture say? The Bible is abundantly clear as to the origin of faith. Man does not generate faith. Faith, as a belief system toward God, is not generated in man by man prior the working of God’s spirit in him. It is not part of the *natural*/psyche of man. Faith does not come from man. Man does not work up or dredge up the faith necessary for salvation. He cannot. Both man’s heart and man’s mind are at odds with God and his ways. Our ways, apart from the facilitating influence of God, are not his ways.

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom.10:16-17). (1) Faith comes by hearing—it comes through the ears. Faith, as belief, is a reaction to a God-given or inspired message. Man does not generate faith. Man does not answer the call of salvation by God with a dose of his personal faith that he adds to God’s faith. (2) The hearing that generates the faith in man comes from the word of God. Where does faith come from? It comes from the word of God! Even the faith—the very belief system needed for salvation comes from God.

The natural mind of man (before conversion) is enmity against God. Man cannot come to God on his own. It is not possible for man to come up with the faith, belief, understanding, or the pricking of his heart on his own. Why can he not do all this?

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom.8:5-8). Those in the flesh, who live according to the flesh, cannot come to God by their own power. They have no “generator” of life within themselves.

Someone once foolishly said, “Yes, that is true—the *mind* of man is against God—but not the *heart!*” A tricky and clever argument to be sure, but it should not fool anyone. Certainly, the Bible has an answer for this person: **“The heart *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer.17:9).** The Bible says that the *mind* is enmity toward God and the *heart* is desperately wicked! Enmity is “hostility.” *Man’s natural mind is hostile toward God! Man’s natural heart is deceitful and wicked!*

Everyone who is not in Christ lives according to the flesh. No sinful human or *unregenerate* person—can (or will) come to Christ without a special awakening and a *regenerating* from the Father. Those in the flesh—*carnal*/mankind—are destined for death. The only way they can avert that fate is to come to Christ. Yet, they cannot respond to him unless the spirit of God *compels* them to respond.

“Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled” (Lk.14:20b-24; cf. Acts 2:38-39).

Finally, a word from the Proverbs: **“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered” (Prov.28:26).**

Here is the plain truth. **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom.12:3).** This is the plain truth. God gives faith. Man does not generate faith. God deals each person a measure of faith. Man tends to think of himself more highly than he ought in most cases so it is incumbent upon God to dispute man’s wrongheaded ideas. It is not in the nature of man to be humble. It is in the nature, the pride, of man to believe that he must add something to his salvation—to participate in salvation—that he is somehow the master of his own destiny. All of this comes from vanity. Man is a vain creature.

To suggest for a moment that individuals participate in any way in initial salvation is to destroy the concept that salvation is free. Responding does not equate with participating in salvation. One participates in the *receipt* of salvation by accepting the offer of salvation, but a person cannot take an active role in the salvation process itself. That would be assisting in your salvation by lifting yourself out of your spiritual grave. For an individual to participate only one percent in their salvation is to make the person a partner in the act of salvation. To be a partner in salvation, as opposed to being a recipient only, is to negate salvation as a gift—the person has worked—even if only one percent—to gain salvation. Suppose we say you participate by fifty percent in your salvation—that would make you an equal partner with God, an unacceptable and untenable condition. Yet, what is the difference between one percent and fifty percent? It is only a matter of degree. The basic premise remains—if you are a partner in salvation, you have done your part, and you deserve salvation. However, *no one deserves salvation in any form and to any extent. How can we say we deserve salvation?* No prisoner deserves a pardon from a Governor, unless he was not guilty in the first place. But we have all sinned before a holy God and we are all deserving of the death penalty. Repeating a passage:

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom.10:16-17). God speaks plainly when he wants to get his point across. He inspired the apostle Paul to pen the above words: *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* This truth can be no plainer: *faith comes from God.* Faith is a gift of God brought to individuals as he opens their ears to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Way... man is not. Now to the much disputed text of Ephesians:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together... in Christ Jesus...” (Eph.2:4-6). (1) God is rich in mercy. (2) God loved us when we were dead. (3) God made us alive with Christ. (4) God’s grace saves us. (5) God has raised us up together with Christ, that is, in his resurrection (which is equal to the first resurrection of the saints). Man’s effort at anything never enters the picture. Unbelievers are as dead as Lazarus was in the grave when Christ arrived to raise him up. Lazarus did not turn a finger to facilitate his resurrection—*his change from the dead to the living.* Unbelievers

are dead men walking. Unbelievers are no different from barbarians or pagans. Christ told believers to “let the dead bury their own dead.” In our land, the “dead do indeed bury the dead.”

“Then he [Jesus] said to another, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God’ ” (Lk.9:59-60). The man apparently believed Jesus and wanted to follow him, but like Lot’s wife, he really wanted to turn back. He was not quite ready to make his decision. But when do you make it? —Certainly not after your death. In essence, Christ said that if a person was indeed a believer, he was in another category. He was not one of “the dead” now, he was one of the living—one who would live in Christ. Believers are in the light and they are alive, while unbelievers are in the darkness and are dead. *There are no other categories.* By definition, the opposite of a believer is an unbeliever, just as the opposite of light is dark. Nowhere does Christ suggest that there are “shades of gray” between the two positions. God calls those found between light and dark “lukewarm” elsewhere. And he spews them out of his presence (**Rev.3:14-16**). Only two types of people inhabit the world: believers and unbelievers. If anyone tells you differently, walk away from him.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that [faith is] not of yourselves; *it* [faith] *is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph.2:8-9). (1) God’s grace saves us. (2) God’s gracious salvation comes through faith (a belief system). (3) God’s salvation does not come through man and man’s faith because salvation is of Jesus. (4) The subject of the words “and that” logically is in the previous phrase, the word “faith.” The passage already states that the grace of God saves us. The only question is the vehicle by which salvation arrives. That vehicle is faith, which triggers grace from God to salvation. By inspiring the writing of the concept that faith is a gift, God removes any reason for boasting on our part (**cf. Jn.15:5**).

Martin Luther attacked the concept that believers take part in their own salvation by their response with instinctive, natural, or intuitive faith to the call of God, as in Roman Catholic doctrine. Even today, supporters of this *semi-Pelagian* theory would seem to be returning to the Roman Church of Luther’s day. “Semi-Pelagianism” asserts some form of *synergism* (co-working) in the work of regeneration; it is dependent upon human cooperation for its efficacy.¹ “The sovereignty of grace found expression... at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration²—the doctrine, that is, that the faith which receives Christ for justification is itself the free gift of a sovereign God, bestowed by spiritual regeneration in the act of effectual calling... The crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without the works of the law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ’s sake when they come to the faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by his quickening spirit [in baptism] in order to bring them to the faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort... [Roman Catholicism suggests self-reliance upon works of sacraments, penance, etc.]

“The Reformers taught not only that regeneration *does* precede faith, but that it *must* precede faith. Because of the moral bondage of the unregenerate sinner, he cannot have faith until he is changed internally by the operative, monergistic work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is regeneration’s fruit, not its cause. Ac-

¹ *Willing To Believe* by R. C. Sproul, *Introduction*

² Accomplished by a single actor, God.

According to semi-Pelagianism, regeneration is wrought by God, but only in those who have first responded in faith to him. Faith is seen not as the fruit of regeneration, but as an act of the will cooperating with God's offer of grace... Arminians affirm the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They agree that we have no meritorious work that counts toward our justification [such] that our justification rests solely on the righteousness and merit of Christ, that *sola fide* means justification is by Christ alone, and that we must not trust in our own works, but in Christ's work for our salvation... But all Christians agree that faith is something we do. God does not do the believing for us... [T]he Arminian wants and intends to assert is that man has the ability to exercise the instrumental cause of faith without first being regenerated. This position clearly negates *sola gratia*, but not necessarily *sola fide*... {Arminius' view differs sharply from the Augustinian and the Reformed view, which insists that the monergistic work of regeneration makes the sinner not only able to [exercise] will, but also willing. To receive the gift of faith, according to Calvinism, the sinner [as a beggar] must stretch out his hand. But, he does so only because God has so changed the disposition of his heart that he will most certainly stretch out his hand. By the irresistible work of grace, he will do nothing else except stretch out his hand. Not that he cannot stretch out his hand even if he does not want to, but that he cannot *not* stretch out his hand.}³ [T]he good response people make to the gospel [according to Arminianism] [then] becomes the ultimate determining factor in salvation... But [that kind of] grace is cooperative grace. [Arminius suggests that] man in his fallen state must reach out [like a beggar] and grasp this grace by an act of the will, which is free to accept or reject this grace."⁴

The Bottom Line

Yahweh God enables your belief system through the workings of his holy spirit. God causes your eyes to open and your ears to hear. He touches you and a new day has dawned. God opens your understanding and you begin to see things in a different light, because he casts the light of truth upon you. During Pentecost, God's spirit cut the audience to their hearts. Before the address, the people who would later respond to Peter were in bondage to another system. During his address, they must have squirmed in their seats while their hearts burned within them. After his address, they made their move. God opened their understanding and regenerated—*livened*—their hearts.

“Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’ ” (Acts 2:37-39). And for no more, I might add.

Belief and acceptance came to the audience by the act of hearing the word of God through Peter. The men listening did not come up with their own belief—it was instilled in them—God caused it to be there, they did nothing on their own except arrive at the site. God opened their understanding. At the opening of their ears came belief. Those who heard, but were not convinced simply had hard hearts. Perhaps God did not open their hearts to the gospel for his own good reasons. God is not obliged to save anyone whatsoever or open any heart, and those whom he does save are favored indeed. We need to remember this every day. *“There, but for the grace of God, go I!”* has immense import in regards to God's saving grace and saving faith. Not everyone can, or will, receive Christ.

³ *Willing to Believe*, by R.C. Sproul, *Chapter 6, We are Free to Believe*

⁴ *ibid.*, *Introduction*

If God had not pricked the hearts of those who responded at that Pentecost, they would never have responded. That is why they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Had they answered God’s call with a ready-made belief system, they would have known what to do. Dead men do not respond to someone calling. They do not respond to noises, no matter how loud. The hearts of dead men, spiritual or physical, have to be “jump-started” before any response can be noted. In a narrow sense, you respond to the call with belief, but that is only after a series of events in your life brings you to the point of understanding. In a greater sense, Jesus makes it possible for you to respond, and thus, your belief system, your faith, is a gift of God—it is not of you, lest you boast.

Faith, as a necessary condition (prerequisite) for salvation, becomes or results in a belief system. If there is no belief, there can be no salvation. Salvation is only possible when belief is present. But not *simple* belief. “Simple” belief is mere acceptance of a set of facts. Remember that demons believe yet they are doomed. They accept the fact of Jesus Christ but cannot receive “faith” from God. The necessary faith for salvation that emanates from God is a *compound* belief system, one that includes at least four points: (1) belief, (2) trust, (3) confidence, and (4) reliance. Faith becomes the knowledge and *active* belief in the existence and power of the living God and Jesus Christ.

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe [have reliance], all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’ ” (Mk.9:23-24). The man’s belief at first was a *simple* belief. He cried out for the Lord to help him trust and depend upon the Messiah—to give him “compound” faith: belief, trust, confidence, and reliance. Then the man took action.

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ ” (Jn.11:25-26). “Do you rely on my words?” One might *intellectually* accept his words, yet, be without biblical faith, and of course, action.

On the other hand, when the heart becomes part of the belief system, the trust, confidence, and reliance as a small child soon follow. **Q:** Is faith (the four-pillar belief system) necessary for salvation? **A:** Yes. It is necessary in the same sense that belief was necessary for Christ to heal a person. Without a biblical belief system, Yahweh cannot save you or heal you. Jesus walked in his own land, but he was *unable* to do many great works there. Why? —Because of unbelief or faithlessness. **“Now he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt.13:58).** Similarly, God can withhold salvation or remove his spirit from anyone because of a lack of biblical faith. Remember, however, God will have mercy and compassion on whomever he will.

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’ ” (Rom.1:17). God is concerned with a *living* faith, a growing faith, not a *dead* faith. A *living* faith can only survive in a living heart, but a dead heart harbors a dead faith. Do you *rely* on Yahweh, really have *confidence*—and *trust* him? *F. Paul Haney*

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