

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHAT IS FAITH?

In my opinion, the *word faith* is the most abused and misused word in the English language. Very few have any understanding of its true meaning as established and fixed by its usage in the Word of God. If those who constantly use this word were asked to define it we would find that they have no definition for it, and when they try to explain it, a surprising amount of ignorance, superstition, and nonsense comes forth. They use the word *faith* when they mean hope, or confidence, or assurance, or wishing, or thinking, or desiring; none of which means faith or is equivalent to it in the Biblical meaning of this term.

If a list were made, one would be surprised to find how many acts of men are called "faith" by their fellow men. Even optimism and wishful thinking are dignified by this name. In the religious world many things are called "faith," which would never be so called once this word is accurately and honestly defined. This is because religious men are hostile to precise definitions. Even men of the world speak much about faith. It is a common term around race tracks and gambling halls.

We hear Christian people say things such as: "I have faith that God is going to send me a buyer for my house." Then when a buyer comes along they feel that God has rewarded their "faith," and they now look with some degree of pity at anyone they come upon who needs to sell his house but cannot find a buyer. "Where is your faith?" is often the blunt question they ask of those in this predicament. My answer to all this would be that I do not believe that God is in the real estate business.

Men of this world use the word "faith" according to their worldly concepts, but the man of God should not join them in their practices. If the believer in Jesus Christ will use the *word faith* in harmony with its usage in the Word of God, he will at once establish one clear point of difference between himself and the mixed up religious world - that is, if he wants to be different. Alas, in this day very few do. However, . we do not seek to be different out of a contrary spirit. We just want to be Biblical and

fully obey God's admonition to "**hold fast to the form (pattern) of sound words.**" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Since men are justified by faith, and their faith is put to their account for righteousness (Rom. 4:5, 14); since we are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8); since above all we are to put on the shield of faith (Eph. 6: 16); since without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:16); since the Lord Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2); and, since the end of our faith will be the salvation of our souls (1 Pet. 1 :9), we should certainly give the most careful thought to what God meant when He inspired men to write the word *faith*, and to all that He has said concerning it.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in the quest for God's truth is the failure of professing Christians to understand the meaning of many terms that God has used over and over. The word *faith* is one of these, and the abuse and misuse of this word has resulted in many errors.

A simple definition of a complex, abstract word is not easy to formulate, but we can begin by saying that faith is an act, it is something exercised, it is the performance of a deed. We can all agree on this, so our next step is to discover what kind of acts or deeds will qualify as faith in God's sight. What exercise of man is worthy of being so described?

In the Bible, the basic act of faith is always one of taking God at His word and responding accordingly. The Godward side of faith is that God speaks and says something. The manward part is that we take Him at His word and respond in harmony with what He has said. All parts must be there or the act can never be called one of faith. In spite of the poor translation in Romans 10: 17, it is entirely true that: "**Faith comes by hearing, and the hearing by the Word of God.**" It was "by faith" that Abraham offered up Isaac. He was being tested to see if he could take God at His Word and respond accordingly (Heb. 11:17). However, he had a direct communication from God which told him to do what he started out to accomplish. Apart from such a word, even the thought of sacrificing his son would have been one of heinous sin.

Probably the clearest example of *faith* can be found in Luke 5:1-6. Our Lord was teaching by the lake of Gennesaret and so many people pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God that He was in danger of being shoved into the lake. Two fishing boats were standing nearby; their long nights work was over, and the fishermen had gone out of them in order to rinse off their nets. He entered into one of these, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to back up a short way from the land. Then He sat down and taught the people from the ship.

When the Lord had ceased speaking, He turned to Simon and said: "**Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draw.**" Thus, Simon had a direct word from the Lord. It was to and for him personally, and it set up an opportunity for an act of faith, a possibility of taking God at His word and responding accordingly. However, at first he raised a weak objection. Letting out and drawing in a wet, rope net was exceedingly hard work. They had done this over and over through the night, without results. They had fished in the best waters. Why should they then expect any fish in the busy traffic lanes of small boats that sailed constantly up and down the shore. He states his objection by saying: "**Master, we have toiled all the night and taken nothing.**" But immediately he followed this by a word of faith: "**Nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net.**" And when this word of faith was followed by an act (the work) of faith the result was an enormous catch that filled both ships.

The totality of every act that can be described as an act of faith can be summed up in the words of our Lord when He said: "**Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them.**" (Matt. 7:24). So I repeat the definition: "**Faith is taking God at His word and responding accordingly.**"

In order to further our understanding of faith, we will consider the words of Christ to His disciples in Matthew 17:20: "**Verily, I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.**" The phrase, "as a grain of mustard seed," was a proverbial idiom in Israel, used when they wanted to describe a very small amount of anything. Many indeed have laid hold of this promise, and when it did not work out they have blamed it on the fact that they lacked even this small amount of faith. However, they should also admit that if one does not possess more faith than this, he could hardly call himself a child of God. So, boasting excluded, I will boldly make the claim that I have more faith than this, yea, a thousand times more. Yet I cannot move a mountain, not even a little hill. And the reason I cannot is because I have no word from *God* that He wants any mountain to be moved; therefore, there is no basis upon which I can rest even the smallest amount of faith. But if *God* should say to me: "See that Mt. San Jacinto is removed and cast into the ocean," I would stand in the very place where He spoke to me, turn my face toward this great mountain and say "Remove, hence to yonder place," and it would immediately be gone. Having no such word from Him, every mountain in Southern California will remain securely where it is.

Another informative record that illustrates the workings of true faith is found in Luke 17:12-19. Here we are told that as the Lord *Jesus* entered a certain village, He was met by ten men who were lepers, and these, in accord with the strict social code and religious laws of that time, stood at a distance from those who crowded around the

Lord. But they could cry out, and this they did, shouting as loudly as possible: "**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.**"

Leprosy, as set forth in the Bible, was the "sickness of sicknesses" (Trench). It was nothing short of a living death, a corruption that poisoned the very springs of life; a dissolution, little by little, of the whole body, so that one limb after another decayed and fell away. When the Lord heard their cry and saw these men, His complete answer to them was, "**Go shew yourselves unto the priests.**" This was a strange thing indeed to tell these ten miserable men, to direct them to start on a long fatiguing journey in their condition. However they have a word from God and if they will respond to it, it will be faith on their part and may bring the reward of faith. So they make the start.

Look at them; sick, weary, miserable, crippled; one with a hand missing, another a foot, others toes and fingers. This would probably be the usual condition one would see among ten lepers in that day. Yet they have been told to go to Jerusalem and shew themselves to the priests. However, they took the Lord at His word, and collecting their pitiful belongings and leaning on their miserable crutches, the stronger ones assisting the weaker, they start for the temple where the priests would be found, to display to them their sores and infirmities. They probably knew that the priests there would refuse to see them, let alone look upon their misery. Nevertheless, they started - not in hope, but in faith. And, we are told that "**as they went, they were cleansed.**" They had taken God at His word and responded accordingly.

A personal word will not be out of place here. I believe that God's word to me is encompassed in the Bible, and that in this dispensation we are shut up to the written Word. So for sixty years I have made it a practice to study this book and then to take God at His Word and respond accordingly. I know that faith without works is dead, and I want nothing to do with a dead faith. To me the work is that I respond in harmony with what has been said. Sometimes the "works" part requires only that I so think. At other times it means that I must act.

All I need to know concerning anything in the Bible is that it has been rightly translated, that it is rightly understood, and it has been rightly divided - that is, intended for me as a directive to me as a child of God living in this dispensation of grace - and I will receive it as absolute truth, follow it out to all its conclusions and accept all the consequences that may follow.

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