

Your Questions Bible Answers

How Do I Make My Faith My Own? (Part 1)

Faith is one of the most elementary principles of Christianity. Elementary, but absolutely necessary: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3.16). All of us were told that to be saved we must believe in Jesus. And so we came to believe in our minds that Jesus is the Son of God. But is that all there is to faith? Have I really made faith, something so important in the Scriptures (cf. Eph. 2.8-9), a part of me? Is it my own? We will spend a few lessons looking at ways to make faith our own, but before we can do that **we must first examine what faith is!**

Sadly, this most elementary of principles has furnished one of the most fiercely contested religious arguments in history. What do passages such as John 3.16; Ephesians 2.8-9 mean in relation to our salvation? Does faith eliminate the necessity of following God's commandments? Can one be saved without being baptized? If we are not saved by works, then why do them?

There are 2 equally erroneous notions that need to be combatted. The first is the typical denominational attitude toward faith, that faith is the only thing and any work is excluded from salvation. The second is one we are sometimes charged with, and perhaps guilty of, that we deny the plain teaching of John 3.16; Ephesians 2.8-9; etc. and place merit in a particular work or even ourselves. To learn what true, biblical faith is, let's look at Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus as recorded in John 3.

Faith Is Convinced (John 3.1-2)

1. By the time we come to chapter 3, Jesus had already performed His first sign in Cana (2.1-11) and then travelled to Jerusalem where He cleansed the Temple before the Passover feast (2.12-17). His actions stirred the animosity of the Jewish rulers (2.18-25).
2. After this we read that many believed in Jesus because of the signs He performed (2.23).
3. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus.
 - a. Note that he came to Jesus by night, possibly indicating that he did not want the other members of the Sanhedrin to know of this conversation.
 - b. Note that he was convinced by what he had seen (vs. 2). He was not ready to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but he recognized that Jesus' signs proved that He was from God!
4. Faith is convinced.
 - a. Many view faith as something that cannot be known. Or, as put by the American writer and skeptic H.L. Mencken, "faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable."
 - b. It is true that our faith involves believing that which cannot be seen (Hebrews 11.1; 2 Cor. 5.7).

- c. However, faith is not baseless. It is convinced by evidence! (John 20.30-31)
- 5. We don't want to think of faith in academic terms, but real Biblical faith starts with your mind being convinced of what you believe. Nicodemus was convinced by what he saw; we must be convinced by the testimony of those who saw

Faith Is Absolute Trust (John 3.3-17)

1. Jesus responded to Nicodemus' statement of conviction with teaching about the new birth, vs. 3. One might wonder why Jesus responded in this manner, but we must remember that Jesus knew "what was in man," (2.25). Jesus knew that Nicodemus' conviction had not yet led to complete trust (vss. 4-9).
2. A basic definition of faith is "state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted." (BDAG)
3. The Scriptures implore us to believe in God based on His trustworthiness (Hebrews 11.6; Romans 4.19-21).
4. Nicodemus was dismayed by Jesus' teaching of the new birth because he was not at the point in his faith where he would trust all that the Lord said. Jesus sought to give Nicodemus reason to trust Him (vss. 10-17).

Faith Is Complete Surrender (John 3.18-21)

1. After giving Nicodemus reason to trust in Him, Jesus closed this discourse with a call to surrender. Even though He did not come into this world to condemn it, much of the world will be condemned because of their love of the darkness. That is, they have a choice to do "what is true" and come "to the light" (vs. 21), but most love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (vs. 19). They do not wish to surrender.
2. As has been said often before, "faith that saves is a faith that obeys." The Scriptures bear this out:
 - a. Jesus said that those who come to the light are those who's "deeds have been carried out in God," (vs. 21).
 - b. John the Baptist confirmed that those who will not obey will not be saved (vs. 36).
 - c. "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17 ESV)
3. Real faith is a matter of being **convinced** by the testimony. Convinced that Jesus is God's Son and that He gave Himself for our sins. And when we are convinced by that testimony, we will place our absolute **trust** in God. We will place so much trust in Him that we'll **surrender** to His will.