

THE FAITH FACTOR

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If we are justified by faith, it should come as no surprise that the devil would attempt to redefine “faith.” Saving faith has been reduced to a one-time decision for Christ. However, the New Testament teaches:

1. *Saving faith is a present tense faith.*

The Greek verb *pisteuo* occurs 248 times in the New Testament. Many references in the Gospels and Acts are a matter of historical record. Of particular interest are some ninety references which state general commands or promises. While there are a few instances of commands which emphasize the initial act of faith, every stated promise of eternal life or eternal reward to those who believe is based on a present tense continuous faith.

It is ironic that the popular gospel teaching today proclaims that a sinner is free to choose or reject Christ, but once becoming a Christian he then loses the power of contrary choice. That momentary decision can never be reversed. This misconception is based upon a static and unscriptural understanding of faith. True faith is like breathing; we have to keep on.

Joseph Benson, an early Methodist commentator, preached on the text from 2 Peter 3:17-18, “Beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace.” The title of his message says it all, “Growth in Grace the Only Security Against Falling From It.”

2. *Saving faith produces good works.*

James tells us that the demons have an intellectual faith. They believe that there is one God, yet this knowledge has not converted them. Therefore, James concludes that faith which does not produce works is a dead faith (2:18-26). There is a difference between a “decision for Christ” and saving faith. True faith includes repentance.

As we live by faith Romans 1:17 also teaches that we grow in faith. Romans 6 asserts that justification and initial sanctification are bound together. We cannot have the one without having the other. The term “old man” occurs three times in Paul’s writings. In Romans 6:6 Paul states that our old man was crucified with Christ. Colossians 3:9 declares that believers have put off their old way of life. Ephesians 4:22 is an imperative for Christians to put it off.

It is inconsistent with scripture to teach that one can become born again without any change. It is also inconsistent to teach that a believer can slip back and forth between the old lifestyle and the new (Rom 6:20, 22). No man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). Two natures may exist in the life of the justified, but only one can control. Saving faith produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Those who are born again do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

However, if faith is reduced to a momentary decision and our theology teaches that once having made that decision we can never perish, what will we do with those who have made a profession of faith but exhibit no fruit? People make a momentary decision for Christ, which produces no evidence of salvation, and yet are told daily by radio preachers that they cannot lose this salvation. But there are no unconditional covenants in Scripture. While certain verses taken out of context may appear to offer unconditional security, they must be reconciled with the many conditions stated.

Furthermore, every passage which describes the final judgment states that we will be judged in that day on the basis of our works. It is ironic that the sinner is held morally responsible to obey God, but when he becomes a Christian faithfulness is not required. The Christian, according to this popular teaching, is judged at a lower standard and at a different judgment.

3. *Saving faith brings assurance.*

The third deficiency in the false faith promoted today is that it produces no divine assurance. According to Hebrews 11:1, true faith produces assurance or confidence. This word *hupostasis* was found in papyri sources to denote a title deed. William Lane translates this opening phrase in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith celebrates the objective reality of the blessings for which we hope."

Faith is also the evidence or proof of things not seen. John Wesley preached that

faith is a divine evidence and conviction, not only that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,' but also that Christ 'loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.' And it is certain this faith necessarily implies an *assurance*...that 'Christ loved me, and gave himself for *me*.' For 'he that believeth' with the true, living faith 'hath the witness in himself.' The Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God. Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in him.

A false faith produces no assurance. However, the Holy Spirit still convicts of sin (John 16:8). This conviction creates anxiety. Secular psychology, therefore, complains that religion upsets people. But the “carnal Christian” should be upset. Ten percent of the total Christian population is sexually addicted. The “carnal Christian” should be anxious because the Scripture teaches that sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like are acts of the sinful nature and those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21). The right kind of preaching would produce even more conviction!

We protest a false faith which does not require any commitment or obedience beyond an initial decision. It is a dead faith which produces no spiritual fruit and brings no divine assurance. If a church member exercises no faith, gives no evidence of having been saved, and has no supernatural assurance that he is saved -- it should be obvious that he is not saved!

Yet the popular preachers teach a false assurance based on their rationalistic doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” They teach I can have it and not feel it, but I can never lose it if I ever get it! I would rather know that I am saved and yet know that salvation could be forfeited than to be talked into a profession that I did not possess, but told I could not lose.

While the Holy Spirit convicts the nominal Christian that they are not ready to meet God, these preachers misapply the Word of God by teaching a false security while the Holy Spirit calls for surrender. Yet the logic of their teaching cannot compete with the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit. The mind of the nominal Christian may accept the logic of the smooth teacher, but in his heart he knows something is not right.

Quit trying to justify what God’s Word condemns. Agree with the voice of the Holy Spirit and surrender to the lordship of Christ. God will then enable you to believe and when you trust in Christ with all your heart, He will come through His Spirit and make a new person out of you. You will know that you are truly saved because the Holy Spirit will bring peace and because you see the indirect evidence of a changed life.

Some may object that this Wesleyan-Arminian emphasis is conditional. They often scoff that we have no assurance. The caricature us as believing that “every *other* day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before” and that we have to be born again and again and again. On the other hand, *they* are eternally secure.

But the Bible warns that this salvation may be forfeited. Apostasy is a real possibility. John Wesley did preach that salvation is conditional. But he also preached

that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption that *while it is present* to the soul he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship than he can doubt of the shining of the sun while he stands full blaze of his beams.

A present tense faith produces a present tense assurance. The witness of the Spirit produces more actual security than all the logical deductions which argue that the elect can never be lost, but can provide no absolute assurance of election.

We preach a free gospel for all men and a full gospel from all sin. It is based upon a present tense faith which produces good works and brings assurance. We believe that if we keep ourselves in the love of God he is able to keep us from falling (Jude 21-24) and that he will appear a second time to bring final salvation to those who are believing (Heb 9:28). This is the faith which saves.

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