

IS FAITH THE GIFT OF GOD?

"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." – EPH. 2:8,9.

From this scripture it is generally presumed that faith is the gift of God, and that this is what the Apostle here meant to teach. And so, we often hear of Christians praying and waiting and expecting God to increase their faith, while they entirely ignore the means he has provided for its increase. As well might we fold our hands in idleness and expect food after praying, "Give us this day our daily bread."

We wish, therefore, to consider, first, whether this is the true and logical inference to be drawn from the Apostle's words; and, secondly, what is faith and how obtained?

It should be evident, we think, that Paul is not here speaking directly of faith, but of salvation. He is affirming that salvation is the gift of God; that it is not received as the reward of works, but that it is purely of God's grace and favor; and that though it is not procured by works, it is received "through faith." Yes, salvation is the gift of God, granted by his grace or favor, and grasped by us through FAITH; for actual salvation is not yet – now "we are saved by hope." This, we think, is the only logical inference which can be drawn from these words and their context.

Let us then, inquire, What is faith, and how may it be obtained? To have faith in any statement or doctrine is to have confidence in its truthfulness, and this should only be based on clear evidence. To have faith in any thing without evidence is foolishness; and it is equally foolish to be lacking in faith when the evidence produced is clear and convincing. To have faith in a

statement or doctrine, then, it is only necessary to examine the evidence on which it claims to stand, and, if reasonable, accept the conclusion – have faith in it.

To have faith in a person is to have such a knowledge of his character, of his principles of action, and his controlling motives, as to warrant us in believing that those principles will always govern, and then to repose confidence in that knowledge.

In order, then, to have faith in a person, it is necessary to become thoroughly acquainted with him. The more thorough our acquaintance, the stronger will be our faith, if he is true. If we would "have faith in God," it is also necessary to acquaint ourselves with his character as expressed in his two harmonious books – Nature and Revelation.

The Apostle tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and it is equally impossible to have faith without knowledge. It, therefore, becomes our duty to acquaint ourselves with God. We should be constant students of his character. God has sufficiently revealed his character to us to enable us to clearly discern the governing principles in all his actions, and, therefore, we may safely and confidently trust him, knowing from the evidence given, not only in his present and past dealings, but also in the statements of his word relative to his future purposes, that the Judge of the whole world will do right.

Faith is an act of our own, and the only way in which our faith can be strengthened by another, is by their supplying the necessary evidence on which to base it. Hence, we do not need to pray for its increase, but to pray and search for knowledge out of which it will grow, and for grace to resist pride and prejudice, that we may receive the truth into honest minds.

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THE Roman Catholic Church was not organized, it grew. Many of its peculiar doctrines date back from a comparatively late epoch. Thus Papal infallibility was not claimed until about the eleventh century, nor dogmatically asserted by Council till the nineteenth; the celibacy of the clergy was not adopted till after the fourth century; penances were introduced about the middle of the third century; indulgences in the fourteenth century; there is no trace of the worship of the Virgin Mary prior to the fourth century, and it has been ever since then growing in extent; the very word transsubstantiation had no existence till the beginning of the twelfth century. Thus it will be seen that so far as Romanism is a system of doctrine, it does not in its present form date from the Apostolic days.

– Christian Union.