

DOCTRINE OF FAITH

by
Dr. Robert Dean, Jr.

A. Definition.

1. Basically there are four systems of human perception.

a. Rationalism asserts that ultimate truth can be deduced from the principles of reason alone which is in itself, superior to and independent of any other source of perception. Rationalism ultimately places faith in the autonomous use of human reason based on the rigorous use of logic, developing conclusions from first principles. Unfortunately for rationalism, these first principles must be assumed and thus are based on faith.

b. Empiricism is knowledge from perception by observation and experience rather than by theory. All ideas are derived from some sensuous experience using the eyes, ears, nose, touch, etc, having no innate or a priori conceptions. Empiricism, like rationalism, develops arguments using rigorous rules of logic to develop conclusions from its starting point. However, like rationalism, its starting point can only be assumed, and it too is ultimately grounded upon faith in man's sensory perception and ability to interpret this data correctly.

c. Mysticism is knowledge based on intuition or direct insight and rejects reason and logic as inherent to truth. Mysticism is pure subjectivism and is often irrational and emotional.

d. Faith is a non-meritorious system of perception based on confidence in the authority and the veracity of another. Faith is not based on one's own knowledge, as is rationalism or empiricism. In a real sense faith underlies the other systems of perception. In rationalism faith has as its object autonomous human reason, in empiricism, faith has as its object man's ability to interpret his experience correctly, in mysticism, faith has its object in man's ability to intuit correctly and interpret those intuitions correctly. In Christianity, the object of faith for salvation is the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross. In the Christian life, the object of faith is the promises and principles of the Word of God, summarized as Bible doctrine. When the object of faith is the Scripture and the revelation of God, both reason and experience are utilized but in a way that is consistent with and dependent upon the revealed Truth of the Bible. Thus faith is neither irrational, anti-rational, nor anti logic, but uses the rules of reason and logic to understand and comprehend what is initially perceived by faith. As Augustine said, "I believe that I might understand."

2. Perception by faith is always non-meritorious. It depends on the authority, veracity, and ability of someone else. Faith depends upon the validity of its object for its own merit.

3. Faith means to trust, rely on, have confidence in, believe, accept something to be true. In order to operate faith relies first on understanding, the comprehension of the mentality of

the soul, then volition, to accept what is understood as true.

4. Faith does not mean to commit to, to invite, to feel, or to have a relationship with. The Bible makes it clear in numerous passages that salvation is by faith (John 3:16, 18, 32; 29:30; Acts 16:31) not by inviting Jesus anywhere, He is the one who invites, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden" not by commitment, He is the one who committed to save us, not by how we feel, or by having a relationship with Him. Judas had a relationship with Jesus and he was never saved. The issue in faith is to believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins.

B. Etymology.

1. Greek.

a. The noun *pistis*.

(1) Used as an attribute, *pistis* means to trust or rely on something, Tit 2:10; 2 Thes 1:4.

Titus 2:10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

2Th. 1:4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

(2) In the active sense, *pistis* means faith, confidence, trust, faith as a recognition of and acceptance of Bible doctrine. In the active sense, faith is used in three ways.

(a) Saving faith, Eph 2:8; 1 Jn 5:4-5.

(b) The three stages of the faith-rest drill, Rom 3:20; Heb 4:3.

(c) The assimilation of Bible doctrine into the thinking of your soul.

(3) The passive meaning of *pistis* is what is believed, the content of faith, Bible doctrine. Gal 1:23; 2 Pet 1:5; 1 Tim 1:19, 4:1,6; Heb 11.

Gal. 1:23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith [Bible Doctrine] which he once tried to destroy."

b. The noun *pistos*, used as an adjective in the passive sense means being trustworthy, worthy of trust, faithful, dependable, and inspiring trust. In the

active sense, it means trusting or believing.

c. The verb *pisteuo* means to believe, to trust something to someone, to use someone as an object of faith, Gal 2:16.

Gal. 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

It only takes a little more than no faith at all to be saved, Acts 16:31.

Conclusion: The Object of Faith at salvation is the person and work of Jesus Christ:

1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Faith for the spiritual life, the Faith-rest drill, is directed toward the promises of Scripture and the principles of Bible doctrine. This doctrine comprises our faith, to have doctrine without application, "faith without works" (James 2:24-26) we cannot benefit from our new position in Christ.

C. Meaning of Faith

1. Faith is a mental activity triggered by volition. As such faith cannot be emotion because emotion cannot respond to a command.
2. Faith is always directed toward an object which can be expressed in a proposition. A proposition is the expression of a thought which can be verified or falsified. Therefore faith is not a function of emotion but of reason. You believe with you mind only. There is not such thing as believing with your heart defined as emotion or feelings.
3. Therefore you do not believe directly in a person, or come to salvation through a relationship with Jesus, but first believe the propositions in Scripture that inform you about Jesus and His saving work on the cross. This means faith is rational not irrational. Though what is believed may be irrational, faith itself is not.
4. Therefore, faith is an activity of the mentality of the soul which is directed toward first and foremost a proposition.
 - a. The Scripture is the object of faith for the immature believer, 1 Jn 1:9; 1 Cor 11:31; Ps 35, 32:5, 38:18; Prov 28:13.
 - b. For the mature believer, doctrine is the object of faith, and the integrity of

God is the basis for understanding the forgiveness of our sins through confession of sin and the filling ministry of God the Holy Spirit who illuminates our minds to the truth and teaches them to us.

5. Faith has no merit in itself--all the merit lies in the object of faith. Ex. it doesn't matter how much faith I have (or how sincere I am) that I have \$1,000 in my checking account if I have only \$1 I'm in trouble.

6. Faith as an intellectual activity excludes emotion, irrationalism, and mysticism. These are therefore destructive to salvation and the spiritual life. The spiritual life is based on reason, on the right use of the mentality of the soul which is the essential aspect of man as the image of God.

7. Faith is rational and logical in conformity with the ultimate Person of the Universe, the Logos of God.

8. All the faith in the world secures nothing but condemnation from the integrity of God. We are born with faith. We first learn vocabulary by faith. Faith in itself is nothing, however. . .

9. The tiniest bit of faith in Christ, faith like a mustard seed, secures eternal salvation. It only takes a little more faith than no faith at all. It is the object of faith that counts, not the worthiness of the one with faith.

10. Faith is not something we do, but it is the channel by which we appropriate what God has done for us. When we understand the principles of Scripture and accept it as true, then we apply it. This is faith, this is done with our intellect, not with our emotions.

APPLICATION

1. There is no Biblical distinction between "head" and "heart" belief. Heart in the Bible always refers to the thinking, the cognitive mentality of the soul.

2. Saving faith is not a different *kind* of faith but a faith with a saving object, the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

EX. "I Know Whom I Have Believed" Verse 2.. "I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart." This views saving faith as a different *kind* of faith than everyday faith. It is the *kind* of faith that saves, making faith meritorious, not the unique object of faith, Jesus Christ, what saves. Verse three verifies this "Revealing Jesus through the word, Creating faith in Him." This reflects the distortion of the definition of faith that entered Calvinism after Theodore Bezae, Calvin's successor, redefined faith. Calvin wrote on John 3:33 That to believe the Gospel is nothing more than to assent to the truths [propositions] which God has revealed. Thus, this popular hymn promotes a heretical view of faith.

3. Salvation is not based on a personal relationship with Christ, Judas had one, James had one, all his brothers and sisters had one, yet none of them was saved until they put their faith alone in Christ alone. Judas never did, the others did after the resurrection. Salvation is based on the acceptance of a true proposition that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for our sins. After all, all we have is the propositions of the Bible, that is the only way we can come to know Jesus.

Today we live in an era of anti-intellectualism and mysticism, an era when reason is debunked as of value in the spiritual realm. Put the mind in neutral we're told and engage the emotions, yet this is completely contrary to the Bible which emphasizes putting the emotions in neutral and engaging the mind.

Principle: If you emphasize and rely on your emotions as a believer you will fail in the Christian life. You must put your focus on doctrine. You know you are exercising faith when what the Bible says is more real to you than how you feel or you're subjective impressions.

Remember what John wrote in John 1:1 In the beginning was the *Logos*, *logos* means reason, thought, logic, not emotion. Emotion was not in the beginning, reason and thought were.

Recommended Reading: *Faith and Saving Faith*, Gordon Clark. Especially his analysis in the first half of the book. His conclusions get a little shaky and in my opinion don't follow from what he says in the first part of the book.

Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*

©Robert L. Dean, Jr., 1999