

(John 3:14-21) In fact, in John 3:3, Jesus even refers to it as being "Born Again!"

When we belong to Jesus, we are no longer our own. We are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20,) and our lives are to reflect that. I heard a friend in high school who once said that he went out partying on Saturday nights, and then went to church to "sober up" on Sundays. However, Scripture clearly shows us that this sort of double life is not characteristic of a person who loves God. The Bible lists activities such as drunkenness, lying, murder, fornication (sex outside of marriage,) idolatry, witchcraft, and a number of other lifestyles, and tells us that those who participate in them will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This serves as a very solemn warning to anyone who feels that they can be a Christian, and still live any way they choose. As Romans 6:1-2 puts it "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!"

Does this mean that Christians are perfect, and never sin or make mistakes? Not at all. We are all learning and growing, and as we walk, we do stumble. Being a Christian doesn't mean that you won't sin, but it does mean that sin is no longer your nature. The key here is how we respond when we do sin? A pig wallows in the mud, and enjoys it. A sheep might stumble into the mud, but his first reaction will be "Get me out and clean me up!"

In taking inventory of your life, a great place to start is the Book of First John. In my opinion, First John is the first part of the Bible a new Christian should read. One of the reasons it was written so that "ye may know that ye have eternal life." (5:13) To this end, it offers us a very helpful "check list" describing characteristics of genuine, saving faith. Please read them carefully, and examine your heart in light of them. **A true Christian's life will display the following characteristics:** An **obedient heart** toward God's commandments: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."- 1 John 2:3-4 **Commitment to Christian fellowship:** "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."-1 John 2:19 **Doing righteousness:** "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."- 1 John 2:29 **Overcoming sin:** " Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin (Greek: "poieo," habitually practice sin as a lifestyle) ; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."- 1 John 3:9 **Love for other Christians:** "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."-1 John 3:14 **Overcoming the**

**World:** " For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"-1 John 5:4

### 3. A FAITH THAT WORKS

Almost 2000 years ago God (in the person of His Son Jesus) issued the invitation,

" **Walk** with me.**Teach** with me. **Feed** others with me. **Wash** feet with me. Also **feed** me. **Give** me water. **Clothe** me. **Visit** me." **Follow Me!** He commanded. **Acts** of faith. No **thoughts** of faith. No **feelings** of faith. No commands to **intense sincerity** / **intense convictions** of faith (by themselves.) It would appear that God is not "into" a faith that sits in a pew. He is "into" **a faith that acts, a faith that works**, not a "faith" that just thinks or feels, no matter how strongly or sincerely. (That kind may be reserved for the demons and those they disburse it to in James 2.)

God is only interested in a faith SO AUTHENTIC that "it works." Today our God continues to be a God of action, not (merely) conviction or feelings. He is **at work**. (To be sure, strong convictions and feelings **characterize** the man or woman of genuine faith, but those feelings and convictions are merely the invisible foundation for what **really** matters to God ... a faith that works, that proves itself out, that obeys, that follows, that shows itself in self-sacrificial giving for the best interest of another - love on legs.) God doesn't **sit around** loving people (love as a **noun**, like infatuation between teenagers.) He loves people by **acting**(love as a **verb**, like a wise couple committed to serving each other through daily acts of love.)

Much of what passes for evangelicalism today all too often invites people to "ask Jesus into their heart" as if doing so would secure some kind of point-in-time reservation in Heaven. God is likely not fooled. He's likely not interested in "heaven insurance conversions."

Too many "pastors/preachers" ask parishioners (or, more often, visitors) to "give their hearts to Jesus." Well, God never did that when HE was here in AD 30. Should we? He's not interested in merely populating Heaven, we'd propose. (He could have done that without spending so much time on His knees AD 30-33.)

God is interested in men and women who share His heart, His passion, His love, His priorities. Is much of "evangelicalism" "so heavenly minded it's no earthly good?" The Kingdom of God is not "out there" somewhere, a million miles across the universe years from now once we die. No. "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Our experience of the Kingdom of Heaven begins once we drop our nets and choose to follow the Master in His heart's desires.

# AGAPE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP PULPIT SERIES

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## THE FAITH THAT WORKS

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Going Around the World for Jesus

## 1. THE FAITH THAT IS RECEIVED FROM GOD

Faith is a topic that is probably the most confused topic in all of Christianity and since Satan is the author of confusion, the mess must be of him.

Most people think that faith is a synonym for **believe** so they think that they have to believe something is so and it will be so. Others link faith with **determination** and if they are determined enough that they will develop faith and then they can have what they are determined for. One Bible teacher classes such people as "white-knuckled Christians". They clench their fists in a strong desire to believe something is so and then they can have what they want. People even tell others that they are not healed because they don't have enough faith, or their prayers are not answered because they don't have enough faith. A Christian telling another Christian that they are not healed because they don't have enough faith is an awful thing to say. Joni Erickson had people write her telling her that she was not healed because of her lack of faith. Such letters hurt her very much. We aren't into the power of positive thinking, but what we are into is much better.

How do we find out what faith is? We should always first go to the Bible to see if It offers us a definition of any term or concept under consideration. In Heb 11:1 we indeed read a Biblical definition of faith: "**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen**".

This verse tells us that faith is a conviction that we have regarding something that allows us to be able to act on it as if it were assured of happening. But where does such assurance come from? A lot of people have the above scripture memorized but then when you ask the question about where does faith come from, you either get a "I don't really know" or somebody saying that it comes from within with the implication that faith is something we develop ourselves.

Now let us go to the Bible and see if It tells us where faith comes from. Heb 12:2 says "...Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith".

And Rom 12:3 says " ... God has allotted to each a measure of faith." These two verses clearly tell us that faith is not something that we do or a presence of mind that we develop, but that faith is a gift from God.

Rom 10:17 says " ... faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." So faith is a gift from God that we receive from the word of Christ, which in this generation we get from the Bible rather than from a burning bush. So in His time He will allot faith to us as needed from the word of the Bible.

In 2 Cor 10:15 we see that faith can grow, so as we study the Bible God can add to our faith.

Rom 5:1 says, " ... justified by faith" and Rom 4:5 says, " ... his faith is counted as righteousness".

We clearly see from these verses that faith is not of our doing for that would be a works-based salvation and we know from Eph 2:8, 9 that salvation is surely not from works. However Eph 2:8 says something else that I never hear proclaimed and that is "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

In Eph 2:8 the "it" refers back to faith, which is consistent with Rom 12:3 and the other scriptures above and speakers very seldom talk about that. Faith is a gift from God. Rom 3:28 also says, " ... a man is justified by faith." We read in Rom 9:32 that Israel did not arrive at righteousness because they did not pursue righteous by faith but as though it were by works. If we must muster up our own faith then justification is by works and again we know that is not correct. We also see in Heb 12:2 that " ...Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith." which fits in nicely with what we have already seen. Jesus is not only the author -- the originator of faith --; He is also the one who perfects it in us.

**So we see that faith is a free gift from God and comes to us at our salvation** (Rom 5:1 and Rom 4:5). In Acts 14:27 we read that Jesus had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles meaning that salvation was now freely available to all through Christ. In Acts 17:31 we read " ... having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." The two words "furnished proof" come from the same Greek word that is elsewhere interpreted as faith but in a different tense. Thus it is like a verb and could read " ... **having faithd to all men** ..." When God gives faith to people, He faiths to us the absoluteness of the truth of Christ.

**2. THE FAITH THAT SAVES** - In all of the classic christian literature there are 2 descriptions of faith. Saving Faith and Non-Saving Faith, and to get to the heart of the "faith that saves" we need to take a sobering look at the most important question of all: Are you saved? Are you prepared for eternity? Do you know that if you died right now, that you would go to Heaven? We may consider yourself to be a good, even a religious person. You may be a lifelong church member, perhaps even a minister or spiritual leader in some capacity. Regardless, the Bible solemnly exhorts us to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) and to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10.) That is why it is vitally important to understand what the Bible says concerning the nature of true, saving faith, and to make an honest assessment of where our own faith stands in comparison.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:31.) "...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord

Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9.) Simple enough. However, it is important to understand exactly what is meant by the term "Believe." It is much more than simple mental acknowledgement that the Gospel is true. Even the devils do that, and tremble because of it! (James 2:10)

The Greek word for "believe" in both of these verses is "pisteuo," which means "**to commit, to trust, to rely on**," not to simply give credence to. Saving faith is a simple, yet deep devotion born from a heart of brokenness and humility, and as we will see, results in a dramatic change in heart and life.

Most people will say they want Jesus, as long as it can be on their own terms, taking Him as Savior, but not as Lord. However, as we will examine in this study, it simply doesn't work that way. When the rich young ruler walked away (Matthew 19:16-22,) notice that Jesus didn't offer to renegotiate. He stood firm in His call for total surrender, showing that He is either Lord of our lives, or He is not.

Although it is often ignored in many modern churches, Jesus' call to follow Him invariably involves a call to forsake sin. Genuine faith brings forth **fruits of repentance** (Matthew 3:8.) In fact, the first recorded word in Jesus' public ministry was "Repent." (Matthew 4:17) If you were walking away from me, and I said "Come here," it would be understood that coming to me would involve changing directions. **Without repentance from sin, our conversion will not be complete, and we will perish** (Luke 13:3 – "unless you repent you too will all perish.)

Jesus said that those who are truly His sheep will hear His voice, and will follow Him. (John 10: 27) He also taught that those who are of God will hear God's Words (John 8: 47) and that it will not be those who simply call Him "Lord, Lord" who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who actually do the will of His Father (Matthew 7:21.)

Was Jesus teaching that we are saved by works? Not at all. Scripture is very plain that our salvation is solely a gift of God's grace, which we receive simply by faith, NOT by works (Ephesians 2:8-9.)

However, James 2:17 also teaches that faith without works, or corresponding actions, is dead. In other words, we are not saved by works, but true saving faith will produce works as a result. These works spring, not from our own self-effort, but from the new heart that Jesus gives us when He comes into our lives.

When we receive Jesus, our sins are forgiven ( Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:7,9,) we are adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:5.) we are cleansed to our innermost beings, becoming totally new creations, renewed in righteousness and true holiness (2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Ephesians 4:24,) and we receive eternal life, to live with God forever!