



# Bible & Life

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### Is Faith the Gift of God?

by David Dunlap

The evangelist D. L. Moody was once asked if he thought faith was a gift of God. He replied, "Some say that faith is the gift of God. So is the air, but you have to breathe it; so is bread, but you have to eat it; so is water, but you have to drink it. Some are wanting some miraculous kind of feeling. That is not faith. 'Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.' It is not for me to sit down and wait for faith to come stealing over me... it is for me to take God at His Word."

The teaching that faith is a gift of God is a truth stated in Scripture. It is given by Him who gives every good gift and every perfect gift. Faith is not the only gift which comes from above from the father of lights. The Scriptures also teach that salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is an unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15), and that our daily bread is a gift from God, along with the grace of God, the Word of God, and the Son of God. These all and many others are God's gracious gifts. Indeed, the gift of faith is one of God's most gracious and precious gifts, for it is through faith by grace that we are saved. This gift is within the grasp of us all, for God desires all to be saved. All that was necessary for our salvation has been accomplished and so He charges us to receive this free gift of salvation through faith.

The question is not so much whether faith is a gift from God but rather, is faith a unique characteristic exclusive reserved for the elect? And thereby the elect will unconditionally and irresistibly be saved; but concerning the non-elect, from them God will withhold this gift and they will be eternally lost, for faith is a condition for salvation, without which none will be saved. What does the Bible teach? Is faith given only to the elect for salvation and withheld from others? Is faith the gift of God referred to in Ephesians 2:8?

### The Scriptures and the Gift of Faith

There are a number of Scriptures which speak of faith as a gift of God. There are scriptures such as Romans 12:3, "As God has dealt to every man a measure of faith", and in 1 Corinthians 12:9, "For to one is given...faith by the same Spirit." These Scriptures, when carefully studied, reveal that this gift of faith is not a condition for salvation but a requirement for effective Christian living and service. The gift of faith in this sense is the special ability given to members of the body of Christ to accomplish great things for God. George Mueller of Bristol, England, who established an orphanage which thousands would call home, and

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**D. L. Moody**  
(1834-1899)

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the missionary Hudson Taylor, who reached the previously unevangelized interior of China with the Gospel are examples of this special gift of faith. This may have been one of the gifts that Stephen possessed, for it speaks of him as being “full of faith”(Acts 6). This gift may have been in the apostle’s mind when he wrote, “...if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). This gift is not the faith which saves, but the gift of faith for service. This gift of faith for service is received after one comes to Christ.

The question then naturally arises: What does Ephesians 2:8 teach about the gift of faith? Does it not say, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”? Many Calvinists would insist that this verse teaches that faith is the gift of God, and that the faith spoken of here is saving faith, without which no one can be saved. Salvation is truly of God, they argue, because faith cannot proceed from the flesh or the natural man; it must be a gift of God. Many would also conclude that faith which flows out of the natural man cannot save, for his faith would be a “work”, and no one is saved by works of the law. Let us explore these and other questions as we examine further this subject.

### **Is Faith the Gift of God in Eph. 2:8?**

Is faith the gift spoken of in Ephesians 2:8? The Greek construction of this verse seems to indicate that faith is not the gift, but rather, salvation is the gift of God. New Testament Greek authorities contend that the key to understanding Ephesians 2:8 is to properly identify the antecedent of the pronoun “that”(touto). A general rule of Greek grammar concerning antecedents is: Pronouns agree with their antecedents in gender and number. Their case is determined by their use in their own clause. The fact that the demonstrative pronoun “that” is neuter and the words “faith”(pistis) and “grace”(charis) are feminine in gender must rule out faith as the gift of God. If Paul wanted to say that “faith” was the gift of God he would of used the feminine form of the word “that”(houte).

A number of respected evangelical Greek scholars have commented on the grammatical structure of this verse and have concluded that salvation, and not faith, is the gift of God. The word “that” seems to refer back to the verses 2:4-7 to God quickening, and raising us up together and showing His grace toward us. None of this is of works, but it is a gift of God. British Bible commentator, New Testament theologian, and former professor at the University of Sheffield, F. F. Bruce writes:

*The fact that the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ is neuter in Greek (tauto), whereas ‘faith’ is a feminine noun (pistis), combines with other considerations to suggest that it is the whole concept of salvation by grace through faith that is described as the gift of God.<sup>1</sup>*

W. E. Vine, a respected authority on the Greek New Testament and author of *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, writes concerning the word “gift”:

*...‘Doron’, to give, is used of salvation by grace, as the gift of God in Ephesians 2:8.<sup>2</sup>*

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*“Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends. The province of faith begins where probablilites cease and where sight and sense fail.”*

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**George Muller**  
(1805-1898)

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## What is Faith?

After considering whether or not faith is the gift which leads to salvation, one will naturally ask what then is faith? We know that even demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). But what is faith? How does one obtain faith which leads to salvation. Hebrews 11:1 is often considered to be the biblical description of faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." A proper description of faith must contain the three elements mentioned in Hebrews 11:1-3: substance, evidence, witness. But how might we define what faith is? A number of evangelical theologians have given us biblical definitions in answering this question.

Reformed theologian and former Princeton Theological Seminary professor Charles Hodge writes,

*That faith, therefore, which is connected with salvation, includes knowledge, that is, a perception of the truth and its qualities; assent, or the persuasion of truth of the object of faith; and trust, or reliance. ...the exercise of faith is the reliance on the truth as revealed in the gospel.* <sup>3</sup>

It is striking to note that this definition of faith includes the exercise of the human will. Both Calvinists and non-Calvinists will concede this point. The Calvinist insists that the will is in bondage to a corrupt sinful nature, and without "new birth", faith will never be placed in Christ. The non-Calvinist believes that the boundless grace of God, the penetrating power of the Word of God, and the convicting of the Holy Spirit are more than sufficient to provide all that is necessary to enable a man to exercise faith as an act of the human will.

This leads us to ask, What is the source of faith? The Word of God tells us that from the divine side, the Scriptures, the Spirit of God, and the grace of God work in concert to produce faith. But there is the human side, which is the exercise of human will in response to these divine promptings. The Word of God tells us: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17); and "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth forever and ever" (1 Peter 1:23). Although God enables us to believe through divine promptings, the responsibility to believe is ours. God has done all that is necessary for salvation. Our responsibility is to receive the gift of salvation by faith. Bible commentator and former professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost comments:

*The Word of God, convicts, reproves, enlightens, exhorts, reveals, not only our need, but the Lord Jesus Christ who can meet that need. The instrument that convicts is the Word of God, but it is the Spirit that produces the new birth. The Word of God, energized by the Spirit of God, produces new birth.* <sup>4</sup>

C. H. Mackintosh writes on faith which leads to new birth:

*New birth is not a change of man's fallen nature, but the imparting of a new—divine—nature. How is this new nature produced? This is a point of immense importance, inasmuch as it places the Word of God before us as the grand instrument which the Holy Ghost uses in quickening dead souls...All who place their trust in Christ have gotten new life—are regenerated.* <sup>5</sup>

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**C. H. Mackintosh**  
(1820-1896)

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Faith is indeed a gift of God. God has provided the One who paid a price that we could not pay, the Lord Jesus Christ, the object of our faith. Faith is an important condition for salvation, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of our salvation. Salvation is rooted in Christ, the giver and object of our faith; otherwise salvation would depend on our own meager efforts. Faith is not a work that man does, but a gift that he receives.

The very nature of faith is an admission that man is unable to earn or merit salvation, but rests upon God alone and His grace. It is an act of the will prompted by the moving of God's abundant grace. Faith is not the act of doing something, but rather, receiving something. Does a downtrodden beggar who receives a handout receive the credit for the gracious deed, or the one who graciously gave it? The act of receiving God's unconditional gift of salvation is of no merit to the receiver. However, all praise and glory goes to the Giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

### **Conclusion**

Faith may be rightly considered to be a gift of God, in the sense that all good things come from God. Faith is of God, who has inscrutably given fallen man the ability to respond to the drawing power of God, through the promptings of divine grace, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God working together to form faith in a willing heart. Yet the responsibility to believe is all of man and not God. The charge from God to the lost is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. We are not to pray to receive the gift of faith so we can believe. No. We are to believe as an act of the human will in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.

### **Endnotes**

1. F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1961), p. 51-52
2. W. E. Vine, *Dictionary of N. T. Words*, (Old Tappan: Revell, 1981), p. 146
3. Charles Hodge, *Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 29
4. J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter*, (Westwood: Revell, 1963), p. 131
5. C. H. Mackintosh, *Mackintosh Treasury*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1976), p. 618