

Faith

Where does faith come from?

The ability to possess faith flows from God's grace. God gives a measure of faith to everyone (Romans 12:3), but He leaves it up to each individual whether or not to accept and apply faith to his life. Every human being has the ability to believe, but not everyone chooses to believe in God; nevertheless, everyone believes or can believe in something, whether it be God, self, other people, false gods, the devil, or material things.

Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus begins our faith in us, carries it on, and perfects it. However, we are responsible for letting God develop faith in us and for using the faith He has placed in our hearts.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

The Word of God creates faith in the heart of the hearer. The more of God's Word you receive into your heart, meditate on, and put to work, the greater your faith. When we read the many examples of men and women who walked in faith and victoriously conquered their challenges. Observing how they stepped out in faith and how God responded to them, gives us confidence, it builds trust in God, it generates faith. It serves as a constant reminder that with faith, we can move mountains.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

The gift of God in this verse is “saved,” not “faith.” Because the gender of “that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” does not agree with the gender of the word “faith,” it agrees with the gender of the word “saved.” In this verse:

- Faith is not the gift, it is the salvation that is the gift, but we have possession of it only through faith.
- Faith is what we need to do.
- Faith is in the imperative and not the indicative mood.
- Meaning faith is commanded of us! We are told to believe and go on believing in Christ.
- They asked Jesus what must we do, to do the works of God, He said “believe in the one whom he has sent.”

Faith is the means by which man accepts and receives God's saving grace. Man cannot help God in providing salvation, but man does have the responsibility to accept or reject what God offers. Man's response to God in accepting His work of salvation is called faith. It is the means by which we yield to God, obey His Word, and allow Him to perform His saving work in us. Thus faith is the channel through which God's grace comes to man. Both God's grace and man's faith are necessary for salvation. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

So what is faith?

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Just as our physical eyesight is the sense that gives us evidence of the material world, faith is the “sense” that gives us evidence of the invisible, spiritual world.

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is a very practical thing, in spite of what unbelievers say. Faith enables us to understand what God does. Faith enables us to see what God sees. Faith enables us to see what others cannot see. As a result, faith enables us to do what others cannot do.

“In scripture when man expresses meaningful ‘faith’ to God it is not just mental agreement, it is an active, productive, working relationship.” [1]

In 1 Thessalonians 1, we read “remembering without ceasing your work of faith.” It is important to see faith works. Saving faith produces something, it works. “So, whether it is justification, establishing the law, or performing acts of righteousness, it works. It is not that the person has power or authority, but because he is calling on the promises, power, provision, and enablement of God. Since God will always support what He has promised.” [2]

“So faith is an activity of man, but it is linking up with and utilising the power and provision of Almighty God. Notice some of the ways in scripture that faith works: ... justified by faith, righteousness which is by faith, walk by faith, live by faith, united by faith, received ability to conceive, were not afraid of the king’s edict, kept the Passover, the walls of Jericho fell down, did not perish, conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions...” [3]

So why is it “faith” that makes it possible for us to live “by grace”? Faith is like a branch abiding in the vine or like a light plugged into an electric power source to function.

“So faith is connecting to God for fellowship, guidance and strength; for His provision – grace.” [4]

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4).

“Just as the electric appliance or branch can only work as it is plugged into the power source, Jesus said we can only work for God as we are plugged into Him.” [5] We are commanded to make and keep the connection. God is the source of the fruit, but we are responsible if there is no fruit.

“When we plug in our electric appliances we pay the electric company for the use of the power. When we plug into Jesus, how much does He charge? He says His power, grace, is His free gift to us — no payment.

“That is how God’s salvation is said to be His free gift to us in Christ Jesus. Eternal life and all of His gifts are ours as we are “in Christ.” [6]

“His ways are beyond our reach. Who can be holy? Who can love in an unselfish way? Who can forgive a major hurt? We are not capable. God must enable us, provide inside help, and He does. This ‘enabling,’ this ‘inside help’ of His Holy Spirit is called His grace. And how do we secure this provision of God for ourselves? By faith.” [7]

Faith is not tangible, not visible, not a thing, but a choosing—choosing to reject my way in exchange for God, His desires, and His way. Faith is choosing to accept God’s promise of eternal life regardless of the cost in this life. Faith is like electricity. You can’t see it, but you can see the light, you can see the obedience, you can see the works, you can see the fruit of the Spirit.

For we walk by faith, not by sight, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The result of true faith

“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

As we abide in Christ by faith we bear the fruit of the Spirit.

What is the fruit of the Spirit?

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

All these qualities are the fruit of the spirit, by grace, through faith in Jesus.

As the branch grows and draws strength from the vine it produces more fruit.

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

The fruit of the Spirit are intrinsically dependent on each other. You can’t have one without the other. Did you know that some of the fruit that proceeds from love? Love breeds all these beautiful character qualities:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Love is the fulfilment of the law:

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You

shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

Those who love keep God's commandments:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

If you're keeping God's commandments, you're keeping God's Great Commission.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in My name, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19–20, *"in my name" as quoted by Eusebius, and practised by the apostles: cf Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5*).

Is there another verse that shows that God gives His children power to keep His laws and commandments? Yes.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Faith produces faithfulness.

The fruit of the Spirit leads to holiness.

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

The will of God is to believe in His Son and to bring the fruit of the Spirit to maturity.

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29).

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

The problem Jesus called out in Matthew 23:23, was that the Pharisees did not believe in the one God had sent: they did not have faith. Justice, mercy, faithfulness, proceed from God. They proceed from a heart of love.

"For love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7).

But the Pharisees were not born of God. They did not know God; they had no love.

If we put this all together, we can see that abiding in Christ through faith is produces all the following effects:

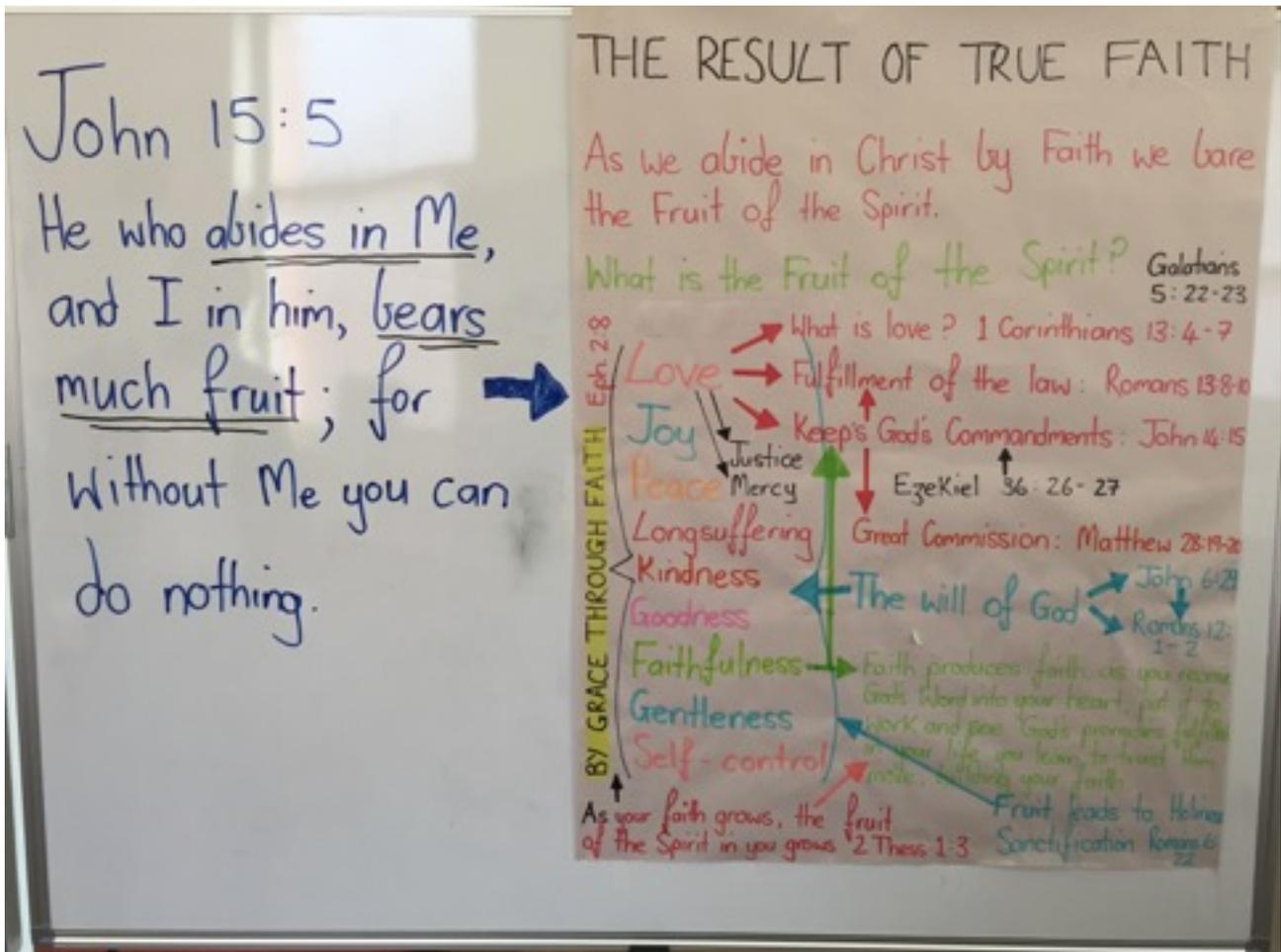


Figure 1. The result of true faith.

So we see the result of true faith; all these characteristics are intrinsically woven together to form the character of God. The fruit of the Spirit all by grace through faith in Jesus.

So, just as eternal life is a gift from God, obedience and sanctification are like wise the gift of God, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, all by faith. When we disconnect from ourselves and connect to God He can do great spiritual things in us and through us. The power of God is such that it can transform a once sinful, unregenerate man to one who produces obedient behaviour and the fruit of the Spirit all by faith.

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name” (Romans 1:5).

If one has chosen God as his god, his life will demonstrate it. He will begin to think and act more and more as God does. The key characteristic of that person is “obedience to the faith.”

A growing faith

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness”

love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5–11).

Being born again is not the end: it is the beginning; the birth of our faith in God. Where there is life, there must be growth. God gives His children all that they need to live godly lives, but His children must apply themselves and be diligent to use the “means of grace” He has provided.

Spiritual growth is not automatic, it comes from obedience to the will of God. It requires co-operation with God and the application of His Word.

“... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you ...” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Peter listed seven characteristics of the godly life, but we must not think of them as seven beads on a string or even seven stages of development. The word translated “add” really means “to supply generously.” In other words, we develop one quality as we exercise another quality. These graces relate to each other the way the branch relates to the trunk and the twigs to the branch. Like the “fruit of the Spirit,” these qualities grow out of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Literally, Peter wrote, “Make every effort to bring alongside.”

Faith helps us develop virtue, and virtue helps us develop knowledge, and so on, and so on ... All these characteristics are by grace through faith. The more we become like Jesus Christ, the more the Spirit can use us in witness and service.

A working faith

The Christian who is not growing is barren and unfruitful, which means only one thing: He’s not abiding in the vine. He is shortsighted, even to blindness, whose end is to be cast out as a branch into the fire, and burned.

There is no faith apart from or without obedience and works. Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes!

James wrote of the inseparableness of faith and works:

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

Without works Abraham's faith would have been dead. What if Abraham had said, "I believe God, but I won't offer up Isaac?" According to James, he would not have had true faith and so would not have been justified. God Himself told Abraham after he had willingly offered Isaac, "I will bless you... because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:16-18).

Faith grows and dies

Many people start out with just a small seed of faith, but then it grows; as in the parable of the sower, the plant which sprouts is our "faith plant." In some people it grows to maturity and produces an abundant crop, "100, 60 and 30-fold," for those who "accomplish the good works prepared ahead of time for us" (Ephesians 2:10).

However, in some people, the plant shrivels and dies under pressure. Those Christians who are not pursuing sanctification and holiness, those who are not growing spiritually end up in a process of spiritual degeneration. Through surrender to a life of sin and compromise, they fall away.

Sin is the antithesis of faith.

"Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

Unrepentant wilful sin chokes the seed of faith in our heart, it hardens the heart. Just as the hearts arteries are choked by a buildup of fat due to a bad diet, restricting the flow of blood leading to physical death, so un-repentant sin restricts the flow of truth, hardening the spiritual heart leading to spiritual death and apostasy. Cut off from God and His grace.

Just as sin is to faith, corrosion is to electrical wires until there is complete disconnection from power. A break in the circuit. Unrepentant sin is a perilous threat to a Christian's spiritual life, to a Christian's faith.

Beloved, we need to take heed, sin is very deceitful, very cunning. Neglecting our salvation through a life of compromise eats away at our faith, depriving us of God's grace. Depriving us of the ability to bring the fruit of the Spirit to maturity, depriving us of cultivating a life of holiness.

What we need to be doing is building a faith that will endure to the end. We need to be doing the will of God. We need to walk in the good works God has prepared before hand. We need to purify ourselves. We need to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We are told to purify ourselves. Not only has God sanctified us in Christ. He calls us to strive to be holy. He calls us to purify ourselves. Following holiness requires personal effort; it is not automatic.

We need to be abiding in the vine to bring the fruit of the Spirit to maturity, lest we be choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of life, lest when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, we fall away.

Beloved, I'm preaching on faith, a saving faith, a living faith that works, a faith that hears God's Word and obeys, a faith that draws power from the living God.

The words faith, believe and abide are used very loosely in a lot of churches these days. A lot of churches that have a form of godliness with out the power. A religion to the external.

Faith changes you

I want to give you an illustration.

Let's say I arrived here late, terribly late. Pastor Joseph is very upset, and says, "What are you doing, don't you appreciate the opportunity to preach here? What's your problem?"

"Sorry," I reply, "I was out in the forest doing some logging, gathering some wood fire. And as I was chopping away at this one big tree that was 60 meters tall, weighing 5 tonnes, it came down falling on my head. And that's why I'm late."

Now, I'm standing here in front of you in good health. And yet I'm insisting that a 5 tonne tree had fallen on me. There would only be two logical conclusions. Either I am a liar, or I'm insane, because this story is absurd. It's impossible to have an encounter with a falling tree that is 60 meters tall, weighing 5 tons and remain the same, it's absolutely crazy.

Well let me ask you a question, "Who's bigger? God, or a 5 tonne tree?"

How can so many people say they've had an encounter with God and not be changed? How can you say you have faith in God and not be changed? How can you say that you are abiding, believing and trusting God and remain the same? It's blasphemy to say the Holy Spirit dwells inside me, but I'm not being changed.

If you're not changing, if you're not growing examine your faith, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

If you have faith in Jesus, if you are believing and trusting the Lord, if you are abiding in the vine, if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, if you are being lead by the Holy Spirit, then you must be lead in bringing the fruit of the Spirit to maturity. You must be lead in perfecting holiness. You must be lead in conforming yourselves to the image of Christ. This is faith. This is obedience to the faith. It is our responsibility to respond to God, to obey Him, and to act upon our faith. Saving faith is a living faith that works. God holds us responsible for turning away from sin and unto His holiness, sanctification. We must continue to choose between obeying our fleshly desires or obeying Him.

Jesus said, "by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:20-21).

References

Quoted passages drawn from "Trust and Obey: Man's Part in Joining God's Family," by Ken Nissen.

- [1] pg 9
- [2] pg 7
- [3] pg 8
- [4] pg 10
- [5] pg 10
- [6] pg 10
- [7] pg 14