

Biblical Faith # 10 ***Is Personal Faith a Gift ?***

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Biblical Faith - Is Personal Faith a Gift? - Biblical Faith # 10 - January 6, 2002

Is personal faith a gift?

Some time ago, in fact last summer, we talked about faith. I asked the question: if someone were to ask you what faith is, what would be your response? Most of you responded that faith is personal faith. Some also responded that faith is a gift. That is our subject this morning. Is personal faith a gift?

Now, as we looked at faith, we saw that there are four aspects of Biblical faith. The first was faith in its essence. We looked at Hebrews chapter eleven and verse one. That faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. We saw that faith was the reality of Who Christ is, Who God is, His ways and His thoughts, that's the essence of faith.

Then we saw that Scripture uses the definite article in front of the word "faith". We saw that usually it's referring to "the faith", either as the entire Word of God, or a portion of the Word of God. So, Scripture is called "the faith".

We also saw a third aspect of faith, personal faith. Personal faith is only a portion of the total picture of faith. Personal faith is rest and trust in what is revealed to us through the Word of God, in the essence of faith, or the faith.

Then the last aspect of faith, faith as a principle. God desires us to walk by the principle of faith. Personal faith in what He has revealed in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His Word. That's the principle of faith.

So we looked at those four aspects.

Lots of questions came up, but question number two is: "Is personal faith a gift?"

Four passages seem to indicate personal faith is a gift: Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 12:3 & 6, 1 Corinthians 12:9

There are four passages that seem to indicate that faith is a gift. The first passage is in Ephesians two eight and two nine. Two passages are found in Romans twelve, verses three and six, then the last passage is in First Corinthians twelve verse nine.

Romans 12:3 & Romans 12:6

What I'd like to do this morning is to briefly go through the Romans passages and the I Corinthians passage, and then spend most of our time looking at the Ephesians two passage. This is the primary passage that is used to teach that personal faith is a gift from God.

So, let's look at Romans chapter twelve first. I've quoted the last portion of the passage: "according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith". Now, as you look at that passage, you would say here it is!

There is no question that every man is given a measure of faith, or the gift of faith.

However, the passage is in a context, so we have to take a look at the entire context, and part of the context is in verse six, and it talks about gifts. It says, having spiritual gifts, differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of the faith.

Notice I added in "spiritual gifts", because the passage is talking about spiritual gifts. The moment you believed, in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, you were given a spiritual gift. You may not have a clue what the spiritual gift is. You may have been given several spiritual gifts. But, independent of whether you know that or not, the Lord says that He has given you spiritual gifts. So He has given spiritual gifts to the Body, and we're to use those spiritual gifts to edify each other, to build each other up.

Romans 12:3 . . . according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith

Romans 12:6 Having then (spiritual) gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy (forth-tell) according to the proportion of the faith;

context: believers are given spiritual gifts by God

So, here's the gift of prophecy. Now if I interpret the gift of prophecy as just forth-telling the truth as opposed to foretelling the truth; predicting the future, that gift of prophecy, forth-telling the truth, notice how it's to be done – according to the proportion of the faith.

the measure & proportion of "the faith", are for the function of our spiritual gifts

So the proportion of the faith has to do with the functioning of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are to be exercised according to the proportion of the faith. And notice that there is the definite article, it's according to the proportion of "the faith". Remember in our summaries a minute ago we looked at "the faith". It's what is revealed in the Word of God, either the whole of Scripture or a portion of Scripture.

4 MAJOR ASPECTS OF BIBLICAL FAITH

1. FAITH - ITS ESSENCE
2. FAITH - THE FAITH
3. FAITH - PERSONAL
4. FAITH - AS A PRINCIPLE

QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS NON-BIBLICAL FAITH?
2. IS FAITH A GIFT?
3. IS FAITH A WORK?
4. ARE FAITH AND BELIEF THE SAME?
5. DEGREES OF FAITH?
6. DOES OUR FAITH INCREASE OR GROW?
7. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH & KNOWLEDGE?
8. DOES GOD TEST OUR FAITH?
9. DOES FAITH DETERMINE OUR WALK?
10. WHAT ENERGIZES OUR FAITH?

proportion of “the faith” = the objective truth from God’s Word

You can not forth-tell the truth unless it is according to a norm or standard. The norm or standard is “the faith”, what is revealed in the Word of God. So, in Romans chapter twelve, it’s talking to believers. It’s not talking about unbelievers being given a gift of faith to believe. It’s talking about believers being given a measure or a proportion of “the faith” to exercise their spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:9

How about the next passage in First Corinthians chapter twelve and verse nine, . . . to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit. Here we have a gift being given to a person, “the gift of faith”. One could say, there it is, there is no question that here’s the gift of faith being given to someone. There’s also the gift of healing.

1 Corinthians 12:9 . . . to another **faith** by the same **Spirit**, to another the **gifts of healing** by the same **Spirit**.

context: **believers** are given **spiritual gifts** by **God**

What’s interesting about this passage is that, if you go back to the beginning in verse one, you’ll see that the context is just like Romans twelve, the context is spiritual gifts given to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and it has nothing to do with unbelievers.

this gift of **faith** is included in a list of **gifts**

The gift of faith is included in a whole list of gifts, the word of wisdom, healing, miracles and tongues, etc. Faith is included with these gifts.

this gift of **faith** = the **revelation of the objective truth** by the **Holy Spirit**

These gifts are no longer exercised. These gifts were given prior to the New Testament, before we had the Word of God. So God gave people the gift of faith, of being able to proclaim His Word without the New Testament being written. So, that gift is included with these of wisdom, healings, tongues.

this list of **gifts** were **temporary gifts** until the **New Testament** was finalized

I don’t believe those gifts are in effect today in the Church. Now there are many that believe that they are. The point is this: these two passages, in Romans and in First Corinthians, are talking about believers and not unbelievers.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Now let’s head into our main passage, Ephesians two eight and nine. For by grace you are saved through faith and that (this) not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, that no man should boast.

I want you to notice that I added the word “this” parenthetically, because if you take a look at the word, it is talking about something that is contextually or physically near. If you were to use a pronoun that is contextually remote or far away, you would use the pronoun “that”. But, in the Greek text, it uses the word “this” and not “that.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by **grace** you are **saved** through **faith** and **that (this)** not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**, not of works, that no man should boast

So it’s talking about something that is contextually near. And it’s critical. And we’re going to see why.

Notice that the writers of the King James added “it is”, because it’s understood in the Greek. In fact, when you sentence diagram this passage of Scripture, you’ll find that there is more than one verb that is understood that is not in the text. And there’s more than one pronoun that is understood and not in the text.

When the Greeks wrote, they didn’t repeat pronouns and verbs all the time, especially when it is an essence verb, like the verb “is”. They just didn’t repeat them; they’re just understood. So, let’s put into this text all the pronouns and verbs that are understood. It looks like this:

For by grace are you **saved** through **faith** and **this is** not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**, **it is** not of works that no man should boast.

This is what it looks like when you put in those pronouns, the two “its” and the three verbs “is” that are understood in the text.

Now, this is critical; I’m building up to something here and you will see why.

What’s the “it”? Because if faith is the gift of God, then we would translate that faith is the gift of God. What’s the “it”? We have to define what the word “this” is, because “this” is a pronoun, it baby-sits for a noun, and “it” is also a pronoun that baby-sits for the same noun. The two “its” and “this” refer to the very same thing.

Question: What is “it”? That’s the question we have to ask.

What’s contextually near in this passage is “faith” and “salvation”. Those are the two things that are contextually near in the passage. Remember, the word “this” refers to something that is contextually near.

So we are going to substitute for the words “this” and “it” the word “faith”. This is what we get:

For by grace are you **saved** through **faith** and **this faith is** not of yourselves, **this faith is the gift of God**, **this faith is** not of works that no man should boast.

Now, for all those who believe that faith is the gift of God, they're going to say, let's stop right here, there it is, it just all fits. But let's press on and let's substitute the other thing it could be standing for, and that is salvation.

So, when we substitute "salvation", this is what we get:

For by grace are you saved through faith and this salvation is not of yourselves, this salvation is the gift of God, this salvation is not of works that no man should boast.

Now, does that make sense? It sure does.

So there's the big question: is **faith** the gift of God, or is **salvation** the gift of God? Which is it?

Is this gift of God, faith or salvation?

Rule: each pronoun must agree with the noun it "stands for", in both gender and number

Well, we have a rule in grammar. The pronoun stands for some noun and every pronoun must agree with the noun in both gender and number.

If I were to say to you, "Lindy is a marvelous cook because **he** cooks delicious meals", does that make sense? (No) Why? Because I used the pronoun "he" for Lindy. It didn't agree in gender. It agreed in number, but it didn't agree in gender. So if I said, "Lindy is a marvelous cook because **she** cooks delicious meals", that goes together.

So the question is: what's the gender of "faith", and what is the gender of the pronouns "this" and "it"?

If the genders agree, then the answer is that faith is the gift of God. If they don't agree, then it's salvation.

If we take a look at the pronouns "this" and "it", their gender is neuter. If we take a look at the noun "faith", it's feminine. The pronouns "this" and "it" cannot stand for faith. The genders don't agree.

Pronouns "this" & "it" not feminine gender so can not "stand for" faith

Faith is not the gift of God, therefore Salvation is the gift of God in this passage

Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that faith is not the gift of God, therefore salvation is the gift of God in this passage.

In Scripture personal faith is never used in conjunction with the gift of God

How does that correlate with the rest of Scripture? We have come to the conclusion that personal faith is not a gift of God. The correlation is this: as you go through Scripture and look up the gift of God, is the gift of God ever used in conjunction with faith? You'll find in Scripture that personal faith is never used in conjunction with the gift of God.

The gift of God is used for other things, such as everlasting life, in John 4:10-14.

The gift of God is talking about the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17.

The gift of God is used for justification or righteousness in Romans 5:15,17-18.

The gift of God is used for Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 9:15. In fact, it says that He is the unspeakable gift!

So when you look at other passages of Scripture, you don't find faith as being one of those gifts of God.

The other thing is this: Remember when Paul and Silas were in Philippi and were thrown in prison? There was a great earthquake and they were loosed from their chains. The Philippian jailer looked down into the prison and sees the empty shackles and Paul and Silas are not there. The Philippian jailer, knowing that it is his responsibility to keep those prisoners and he thought they had escaped, so he took his sword and was just ready to plunge it into his heart. Because he knew that his punishment from the Romans would be much worse, so he thought he was just going to end it right there.

Then, all of a sudden, Paul and Silas see him, ready to plunge that sword into his heart and they said, "Do thyself no harm! We are still here". The Philippian jailer dropped the sword and came down and asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Now, Paul and Silas answered, well you must receive the gift of God, you must receive the gift of faith, and then you can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Right? No! They did not say that.

When the Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

They didn't say that he had to receive the gift of faith, just believe.

He was an unbeliever. Did this unbeliever have the capacity to believe? If he didn't have the capacity to believe, Paul and Silas would never have said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ". So the Philippian jailer, who was an unbeliever, had the capacity to believe.

Personal faith is how we receive the gift of salvation - Eph 2:8-9; Acts 16:30-31

The point is this: that **personal faith** is **how** we receive the gift of salvation.

Many **object** that man is **unable** to respond in **faith** to **God's** drawing of man to **Christ**

So when we say that personal faith is not a gift of God, there are a lot of hands that go up and it's said: "I object! And the reason I object is this, that man is so depraved, so lost, man is totally unable to respond to God's wooing or drawing of man to Christ. He is totally unable to because he's so lost and so depraved".

The teaching goes on that God regenerates man first, and then he can believe. The teaching is that a person must be born again before he or she can believe.

This is what reformed theology, or covenant theology teaches.

This is totally inconsistent with God's Word

This is totally inconsistent with the clear teaching of the Word of God.

God makes sure every man knows God exists and knows God's power

Listen. Every single person ever born in this world – every person – knows that there is a God. God has manifested it within every single person. Every person knows there is a God.

And every single person not only knows there is a God, but every single person knows God's eternal power.

. Romans 1:19 . . . that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. 20 For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even His* eternal power and Godhead; so that they are **without excuse**:

God says in His Word that every man is without excuse or not believing this knowledge of God

So God can say in Romans chapter one that man is without excuse. He has no excuse not to respond to God and not to glorify Him. Because it goes on to say, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God but became vain (empty) in their imagination.

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, . .

In the same manner, God has also given every person the capacity and responsibility to respond to God's drawing, by faith.

God has given every man capacity & responsibility to respond to God's drawing by personal faith

God is wooing and drawing every man to Christ and we have the capacity. Not only the capacity, but also the responsibility to respond by faith. Faith in the gospel of Christ for salvation.

So man is without excuse; there is no excuse.

As you look at the total picture, salvation is totally the Work of God. Faith is wholly the responsibility of man.

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. God does not contribute to man's unbelief.

God alone must do the saving; man must do the believing.

Those who are saved have only God to thank. Those who are lost have only themselves to blame.

Listen. No one will ever stand before God and say, "I'm condemned because I wasn't given the gift of faith." No one will ever say that. All men have the responsibility to believe.

John 12:32 And **I**, if **I** be lifted up from the earth, will **draw all men** unto **Me**.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it **pleased God** by the foolishness of preaching to **save** them that **believe**.

John 3: 16 For **God** so **loved** the world, that **He** gave **His** only begotten **Son**, that whosoever **believeth** in **Him** should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For **God** sent not **His Son** into the world to condemn the world; but that the world **through Him** might be **saved**

All men have the responsibility to believe, It pleases God to save those who believe

God has promised to save all who come to Him through Christ. That's His absolute promise.

What is personal Biblical faith?

It is the **subjective trust and rest** in the **objective truth** from the **Word of God**, which is **reality**, resulting in man's rest.

The **object of this faith is Jesus Christ**.

So, if personal faith is not a gift, what is personal faith? I've tried to summarize what personal faith is. Notice that I've added the word "Biblical" there. Personal Biblical faith is a subjective trust – that's where we come in, it's subjective, from within – and rest (we do the resting), in the objective truth – something that's outside of ourselves, from the Word of God. And we respond to it by faith. By resting in that objective truth. The object of faith, is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's personal Biblical faith.

Why the word "Biblical"? Because every single person, whether an unbeliever or a believer, lives by the principle of faith. It's either unbiblical faith, or Biblical faith. Every single unbeliever can only live by unbiblical faith. Every believer can either live by Biblical faith, or he can live by unbiblical faith.

You as a believer in Christ, are going to be living one way or the other. The thing is you will always, moment by moment, every moment of your life, be walking by faith. And it's going to be either by Biblical faith or unbiblical faith.

What is personal unbiblical faith?

It is the **subjective trust** in the **ways and wisdom of man**, which is **assumed reality** and is **uncertainty**, resulting in man's **unrest**.

The **object of this faith is self**.

What is unbiblical faith? Unbiblical faith has, as its object, self. Self is the object of unbiblical faith. If believers are walking in unbiblical faith, we are walking in self. Self-sufficiency, self-worth, self-wisdom, self-esteem, you name it, all of the "selves" – that's the way we're walking.

Biblical faith rests in the object of its faith, and the object of its faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's not self-sufficiency, but Christ's sufficiency. It's not self-worth, but Christ's worth. It's not self-wisdom, but Christ's wisdom, and it's not self-esteem, but Christ's esteem.

Hebrews twelve two I think really describes this whole process. It says this: Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.

Hebrews 12:2 looking (away) unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith . . .

Now, I must say, if you are looking at the King James, it has a personal pronoun in front of "faith", looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of "our" faith. That personal pronoun does not appear in the text; it was added. Now, I did add something in there. It is the word "away". Looking **away unto** Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.

The "looking unto" Jesus is a compound word. It has those parts, "looking **away unto**" Jesus.

**Looking away from self unto Jesus, the essence of faith, not personal faith;
He's the essence of faith**

And I think that that is very significant, because we are to be looking away from self and self-interests, our problems and sufferings. Looking away from all those things that self gets wrapped up with and looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith - the essence of faith - NOT personal faith; He's the essence of faith.

When we're wrapped up with self and self-interest and all of this self-stuff and the self-pity and the trials and circumstances in life, and all of those things, in the context of Hebrews chapter twelve, it says that these weigh us down. They just weigh us down and we can't run the race and the Christian life is a race and it has a goal, and the goal is a wonderful goal: it is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

God's eternal purpose is to share His very glory with you, the very glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, that's His purpose. And self and self-interests, all of those weights, can weigh us down.

As we look unto Jesus and behold Him by faith, the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us & we're transformed.

That which is being formed within us, the Holy Spirit manifests outwardly so what's being formed in us is the very glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the very life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit manifests that outwardly so others can see the Lord Jesus Christ through us. This is God's eternal purpose: to share His glory with us by reproducing the life of Christ in us.

Heb 12:1 . . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race . . .
Col 1:27 . . . God would make known . . . the glory . . . Christ in you, the hope of glory:

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:3 . . . ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

How wondrous is this in your life and in my life! God is taking earthen vessels, which are weak and fragile and there's a big sign on them, "Handle with Care", but God takes these vessels and manifests in us the Person of Christ for the world to see.

Personal faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as ground of rest.

Personal faith receives, it loves, it apprehends what the Father has revealed in His Word and His thoughts about the Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom He has His rest.

Is the Lord Jesus Christ your rest? Is He my rest? My prayer today, and I'm sure your prayer, is that Jesus Christ would be our rest.

Amen? Amen.