

Biblical Keyword - Faith

There has been much controversy about faith. Remonstrants and Evangelicals think that one can believe by himself. If he believes in Jesus, he is saved. Others make faith something impossible. Man cannot believe in and of himself. But how that faith looks like is quite complex. Let us think about this. Again the table for an overview.

| Keyword | Timeline | Description |
|----------------|-----------------------|---|
| conviction | Process | Knowing his sinful heart and lifestyle |
| calling | Moment | Words of Scripture or the sermon speak |
| regeneration | Moment | Receiving of new spiritual life |
| faith | Moment/Process | Trusting in Jesus as the only Savior of sin |
| justification | Moment | Acquitted from sin before God and right to eternal life |
| conversion | Process | Turn from sin and turn to God |
| sanctification | Process | Process of renewing of a man |
| glorification | Process | Man is made sinless and perfectly glorifying God |

The Origin of Faith

Where does faith come from? Is it what man does himself, or is he passive in this? Its answer is not so easy. What does the Bible say about this? Paul writes this fundamental point to the Ephesians, “For by grace are ye saved *through faith*; and that not of yourselves: *it is the gift of God*” (Eph. 2:8). What is written here? One is saved through faith. At the same time that faith is a gift of God. It is not produced by man himself. But is this all what the Bible says about faith? No. We read also, “And when the Gentiles heard this [the sermon of Paul] ... and as many as were ordained [that is elected] to eternal life *believed*” (Acts 13:48). The word for believed is active. Now it looks like that one believes by himself. How should we look to this? The answer is found in the Gospel of John, “But as many as *received* him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe* on his name” (John 1:12). The word for “received” can be both translated as receive and accept. The latter is used in the Dutch Statenvertaling. What does the word receive say? That one can only receive something when it is given. As simple as that. God gives faith and by this one embraces the Lord Jesus.

The operation of faith

What does faith? What is the operation of faith? Because some think that ‘their faith’ saves them. Because they believe, they are saved. Is that true? No. Faith does not stand on its own. It is only a *means*. This becomes clear with an example. In a refinery they have various tanks for oil. Some are huge, others small. How does oil get from one tank to another? By a pipeline. Those lines are essential for transferring oil. Without these pipes, oil can never get into another tank. However, what is the purpose of a refinery? Is that the pipes? If they look nice? No. It is about oil. Without this precious stuff those pipelines are worthless. We can compare faith with a pipeline. The ‘oil’ comes from a full tank of salvation. Via the ‘pipeline’ of faith it comes into an empty tank of the heart of a sinner. The pipeline is only the connection between the two. Nothing more or less. Without this line, oil does not get from one tank into another. But without oil the pipeline, it is in and of itself without value. This is true with faith too. Without the Lord Jesus faith is useless. But a sinner can only be saved *through* faith. Thus, it is essential. Therefore, it is only a means, but it is ultimately about the Savior, the Lord Jesus.

The path to faith

How is one going to believe? How does one come to the point of receiving the Lord Jesus? What is needed? Those are great questions. Let us look to them in light of our daily lives. Who do you believe in your life? How well do you know that person? How much trust is there? Let us use a daily example. You meet an unknown person on the streets. He is friendly and you have some talk. Then he asks, "I invest money in large companies. Profit is twenty percent. Shall I manage your bank accounts and do such investments for you?" What is your answer? I think that you say no. Why? He is unknown. You do not know if he is trustworthy. Thus, you do not trust him with your money. But what if you are married for years. Your wife can manage finances well. One day she asks, "Shall I invest our money in shares? I have done much research. Here is the document. Profit is twenty percent. Shall we invest \$500,000?" There might be reasons not to do this. But you could answer it positively with peace of mind. She is capable of doing this? It will profit you. Why would you say yes? Because you know her and can trust her. Therefore, knowledge and trust are needed to believe a person.

Let us now go back to faith needed for salvation. What is necessary for that true faith? Two elements: knowledge and trust.¹ In the first place, one needs *knowledge*. Without knowledge there can be no true faith. What kind of knowledge? First of ourselves. We have to experience that we are sinful. Why? Otherwise, we need no salvation. The Lord Jesus says, "Blessed are those that mourn" (Mat. 5:4). Thus, they are sad about their sins. Still we need to know more. What then? That we cannot be saved of ourselves. That our ways and paths to salvation are dead. Our prayers, tears, and mourning cannot save us. Why is it necessary to realize this? That we will see that we need Another for our salvation. Second, we need to know who God is. It is about knowing God in all areas. On the one hand to know that He is righteous and holy. He has to punish sin. He cannot have communion with sinners. On the other hand that God is merciful and gracious. He wants to forgive sins. He desires to draw people out of their need and misery. True faith knows God in both areas. Not only the knowledge of God's holiness without mercy. Neither God's love without the knowledge that He is righteous. Thirdly, the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Is He not the only one that brings that God and the sinner together? He is the way to the Father (John 14:6). Without the knowledge of Him there is no eternal life. He explains, "And this is life eternal, that they *might know* thee the only true God, *and Jesus Christ*, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). There is not only knowledge of God, but also of the Lord Jesus. In another place He says that man are only saved who have seen and believed the Lord Jesus spiritually (John 6:40). What kind of knowledge about Jesus is this? That He existed? For sure. But that is not sufficient. That He is the Savior? That comes closer. Still the devils know this and are not saved. What then? The realization that He is the *only Savior* who *can* and *wants to* save me. How does that look like? One will receive knowledge of His suffering on the cross. He gave His own life for them. He *is able* to save them by this. He Himself has paid the price. Also, He is merciful and gracious. He has a burning heart to save sinful people Therefore. He *wants to* save. Even gladly. One will realize this in his heart. Further that this is the *only* way and there is no other. And that this *can* and *want to* save is meant *for me personally*. Not only for others, but also for me. It is no longer my own trying to appear before God righteously. No, that is coming way to short. But it is only the work of the Lord Jesus that is able to do this. That is sufficient.

In the second place there is a need of *trust*. For this one needs to distrust himself. By his own trying he is unable to get saved. Furthermore, the trust in God. What then exactly? That it is fully true what He says in Scripture. This is mostly the trustworthiness of the promises. Those are true and sure. He can rely on them. What may we think of? For instance that God will have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). A doubting soul sees this as something very high. That God wants to save others, he does understand. But for him? Is that possible? Is he not such a great sinner? Still this text gives hope. He sees: God wills the salvation of men, thus that of my too. What more? Gods love for sinners. He so

¹ Some argue three: knowledge, ascent and trust.

loved the world that He was willing to give His only-begotten Son (John 3:16). The mercy of God (Ps. 103:8). He wants to have compassion on me, a great sinner. His bowels are moved because of me. It is like a mother that has compassion on a dependent baby. So God also on a poor human. The sinner feels in his heart that he can trust the LORD in this. He is more than welcome. Lastly, it is about trust in the Lord Jesus. How? He came to seek the lost (Luke 19:10). That is also applicable to me, who am lost. He came to save sinners (Luke 5:32). Then the soul notices: if I am a sinner, then He has come for people like me. Also, to be welcome with the Lord Jesus. He indeed said, "Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). I, who am heavy laden with my sin and misery, may come to Him. I can find rest with Him. When I come to Him, I will never hunger and thirst (John 6:35). The sinner receives the trust that he may come to Jesus as he is: sinful, unclean and unrighteous. With Him there is life. Even though this trust is small and tempted, it is there in principle.

The reception of faith

Faith exists in knowledge and trust. But how does one receive this? Does one awake one morning and then suddenly has trust? No. Is it more like a kind of spiritual lightning striking him? That a person gets suddenly a clear insight that the Lord Jesus has died for his sins? No, not in that way. It is indeed true that from a certain moment he will have such matters clearer and realizes them. How does that happen? This has a beautiful simplicity. This is a mark of Gods true work: simplicity. Knowledge and trust are steadily growing. In most cases this takes time. It is like the sun that arises. First it is fully dark. Then the first dawn appears. The first rays of sunlight appear above the horizon. It shines brighter and brighter. This is true for faith too. At the beginning it is small and much tempted. It seems not to exist. But it becomes little by little clearer for that person: God wants to save me. Jesus desires to receive me. The Son of God is the only way to salvation. How does one obtain this? Quite simple. The LORD has given the Bible for this. One hears the preaching. A minister says that the Lord Jesus came to save sinners. That word enters the heart of a hearer. He suddenly realizes: that is true for me too. What a wonder! Or he reads the Bible. At a certain moment his eye is drawn to the promise: "Him that cometh to me [Jesus] I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). With his heart he understands that he may come to the Savior with his large burden of sin. He will not refuse him. It touches him deeply in his soul: this is the way to salvation. Or he reads a book that speaks about salvation. Little by little he gets this realization: this is true for me. In other words, by hearing or reading the gospel this light shines in one's heart.

What does then happen with that person? He will believe. What is that? To see the glory of Jesus on the cross. He acknowledges that His blood cleanses from all sin. He flees with all his misery and need to Him. He comes to the Lord Jesus in prayer. He confesses all his sins. He embraces the Savior as his only hope. This is called a *fleeing faith*. The sinner seeks his salvation only in the Jesus and His work. Nowhere else. He entrusts himself to this Savior. What then is the assurance in this faith? That Jesus can and will save him. Still this differs from an assured faith. Sometimes called a firm faith. What is an *assured faith*? Then one *knows* that Jesus has died for him personally. He feels that he belongs to Jesus. He realizes that God is his Father. What is the difference? A fleeing faith is like a germinated seed. This is necessary. Only then he is saved. Nevertheless, the believer does not realize its profit. He has many doubts and fears. When God feels night, then it is true. If that is not the case, he fears that he deceives himself: do I belong to God? Is the work in my heart really true? Do I have faith? Feelings still play a large role. But an assured faith is the fruit that comes forth from that seed. One that is assured has a firmness in himself that he knows that it is the work of God. Although there could be moments of doubt, he is no longer moved by his feelings. He rests more and more on the promises of God. But is it Biblical to distinguish the two? Certainly. We read in the letter of Peter, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10). This call shows that one can have faith without being assured. And at the same time that one can be assured.

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How does someone receive that assurance? Is that with a vision? Is that an experience of the court of conscience? That could be thought. However, we do not find that in Scripture. Even our forefathers of Dort do teach that it does not happen by a special revelation.² They mention three elements that give assurance: first the promises of the Bible. God causes someone to lean and rest more and more on the gospel. Second, the witness of the Holy Spirit. He says in one's heart that he is a child of God (Rom. 8:16-17). Lastly, from a good conscience and good works. One sees that his conscience has more and more peace and that there are fruits belonging to true conversion. Think for instance of love, happiness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22). We could also say: one sees the marks of grace in his life. No special things, but simply a Biblical foundation and its effect.

² “En dienvolgens spruit deze verzekerdheid niet uit enige bijzondere openbaring, zonder of buiten het Woord geschied, maar uit het geloof aan de beloften Gods...uit het getuigenis des Heiligen Geestes...uit de ernstige en heilige oefening van een goede consciëntie en van goede werken.” (Dordtse Leerregels, hoofdstuk 5, paragraaf 10).