

How's your faith?

Is it your faith that will save you, or even condemn you?

If you are anything like me, you see your faith as pretty pathetic when compared to some of those people listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Is that because we think of faith as a strength they had that we should have, or as an act which we must perform, too? Is faith something we do?

Not according to the Bible, it isn't. It may seem like the Bible says it is because Jesus called upon people to have faith and believe the Gospel, and he told some people that faith had made it possible for him to heal them. He even chided some for their unbelief and lack of faith, but nowhere in the Bible are we told that belief and saving faith originate from a base within ourselves or that they are part of our nature.

The Bible tells us, instead, that human nature is desperately wicked, unfaithful, deceitful and unbelieving, and if we're honest with ourselves we have to admit that our experience bears this out. If my salvation, then, is dependent upon the strength and stability of my own faith and belief, it is anything but a sure foundation upon which I can stand. Fortunately, it is not my own faith upon which I rely but upon the steadfast faith of Christ Jesus who died and was resurrected and now lives in me, as Paul brings out in **Galatians 2:20**:

"I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Some translations say "by faith *IN* the Son of God," which suggests it's our faith. But how can it be our faith when we're dead and the life we now live is Christ living in us? It must, therefore, be Christ's faith upon which I rely, not mine, since he is alive and I am dead.

But even if it is translated "by faith *in* the Son of God," Paul himself corrects it when he says "not I, but Christ lives in me." He's saying "it's not *me* that's alive it's *Christ* that's alive, living *in* me." Paul knew that he was dead, so the faith he had couldn't have been his own, it had to be Christ's. Likewise, when I say "I believe," or "I have faith," I really should be adding "not I, but Christ in me," too, because the life I live and the faith I have are Christ's, not mine. Perhaps this verse would be better understood, then, if it was translated as "I live by trusting in the faithfulness of the Son of God who lives in me," which is the sense given in the Living Bible and the American Standard versions.

On the other hand, if I'm supposed to be dead how is it that I'm still walking around making decisions and doing my own thing?! Because I've been given a new life. This is the spectacular reality of what God has actually done in our lives through Jesus Christ. He's released us from our old life and lifted the burden off our shoulders of trying to maintain our own faith at what we consider to be an adequate level.

We can now live the new life of Christ living in us. To truly live this new life, though, we need to stop thinking in exclusively self-interested terms, like "my faith," or "my salvation," or "my relationship with God," because God came in Jesus to do those things for us. They're not our doing, they're his.

And how did this come about? By God using the ultimate act of sin when humanity crucified their Creator, as the very means by which he rescued us, redeemed us and bound us to him. Jesus then assumed our nature in all of its alienation from God, and within his human sacrificial life restored human nature back into perfect union and communion with God, taking it to the cross where the body of sin was destroyed (**Romans 6:6**). God then resurrected the human Jesus who took the new redeemed humanity to the throne of God where it remains hidden with him. Jesus became the firstfruits of the new humanity, the new creation, and that is where our real life is, a new

creation, hidden with Christ in God (**Colossians 3:1-4**). Jesus now comes to each of us at the point of our individual need, which he knows so much more precisely than we do, which includes our need for faith.

But what about this “life in the flesh” we’re stuck with? It is being constantly upheld and established by the unvarying faithfulness of the Son of God living in us, who in spite of our sin and inconstancy, promises never to leave us.

If we insist on thinking, then, that we must exert our own personal faith in order to relate to God and get him to act in our lives, the result can be very confusing, because our faith doesn’t always “work.” We may want to believe God responds to our faith but what is our experience? It’s like a lottery; sometimes he seems to respond to us and sometimes he doesn’t. But we justify it by saying our faith wasn’t firm enough, our belief wasn’t strong enough, or God decided to answer “No” or “Wait” and such like, which gives us no rock on which to stand but rather sand, and the sand shifts beneath our feet!

Some Christians, to validate their faith, read into events what they imagine to be God’s intervention, while others live with a sort of “Aladdin’s Lamp God” whose genie is there on call to satisfy their wish list. But what happens when the genie fails them? They have to make excuses for the failure, or they re-arrange scripture to make their experiences self-validating. But is this what Jesus died to achieve for us? Is this all there is, just a life lived with only possibilities, burdened by a personal faith that vacillates from day to day and is brought into doubt by experience?! Is that the sort of faith that took Jesus to the cross?

No, it isn’t. Paul told us that Jesus, God and human in one being, is alive, and by the power of the Spirit lives within us. The faith that took Jesus to the cross, therefore, is the faith that’s also within us now - his faith, that is, not our own personal faith. There is nothing we can boast about or be proud of (**1 Corinthians 12:29**). “It is because of him (**verse 30**),” and the faithfulness of Christ Jesus that we have faith. It is he who upholds us in our unfaithfulness and our hypocrisy in trying to justify ourselves as being faithful. He takes our wavering belief - “I believe; help my unbelief” - and he brings us before the Father as accepted, justified and faithful in him, and in him alone (**Ephesians 1:3, 2:6**). Christ *is* our life (**Colossians 3:4**), and we forever draw our life from him now, through the Spirit.

If we’ve been taught though, that faith is supposed to be our faith, then we’ll feel the need to prove to God we’ve got it, thinking that’s good. Like Peter, then, we might say “Lord, I am ready to go with you both into prison and to death.” But that was the impetuous Peter making a boastful claim based on confidence and pride in his own personal faith, and even though Jesus prayed that Peter’s faith would not fail, it most certainly did fail (**Luke 21:31-33**).

So would our faith fail if we were to rely upon our own faithfulness and not on that of the Son of God. And like Peter we may end up weeping just as bitterly when we mistakenly try to exercise our own so-called “faith” and fail our Saviour.

Yet all through the ordeal of the betrayal, capture, denial, judgment, crucifixion and burial of the Son of God and beyond, Peter was upheld by Christ’s own perfect and unflinching faithfulness, and it is upon *that* rock that the Church is founded.