

The Source of Faith

(by Bob Pulliam)

The words "faith" and "believe" in the Bible have little difference from the same words we use in our everyday conversations. The only difference is that in the Bible they are used regarding man's salvation. Now some draw unnecessary conclusions about faith that should be abandoned. Some seem to think that man cannot believe on the basis of evidence presented to him. They think that God must literally give faith to the individual. To see that the Bible process of "faith" for salvation is a natural process, compare I Corinthians 1:21 with I Corinthians 11:18. Paul uses the same word for believing in both verses; but the first refers to salvation for those who believe the gospel, and the second refers to a conclusion drawn based on reports. The same can be seen by comparing Matthew 24:23 & 26 with Mark 1:15. There was no special word reserved for the *faith* one would have in being saved, and then a common word for just believing because of certain reports.

Many people in the religious world would have us believe that faith is mystically generated within us by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. There could be few other doctrines further from the truth than this one, for it plainly contradicts a clear statement made by Paul in Romans 10:17. There he says, "So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The process is quite simple. The word of God is taught, the person hears, and he believes. This passage does not say that hearing the word will always generate faith. It says it is the way it is created within a person. You will never find anyone believing who did not at some point in time hear the word. It is the simple process of listening to evidence, evaluating that evidence, and then accepting it, or rejecting it!

You'll find the same process in any courtroom in this country. A jury makes its decision on what to believe about a defendant based on evidence. If I accept the doctrine which demands the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of people to create faith, I must in turn consider many passages given by inspiration as useless. For example John 20:30f:

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Why were "these" written? That "you may believe"? Surely not! Not if I accept the necessity of God's miraculous power to make me believe! I will either accept the Bible, or man's doctrine.

Jesus taught the same as Paul regarding the source of faith. The parable of the Sower (Lk 8:4 - 15) tells us that the word of God is like seed (v11). It is sown in the hearts of men to produce fruit for God. The Holy Spirit is nowhere mentioned in the passage. How did Jesus tell His disciples faith is produced in the hearts of people? does it come by a sowing of the word (preaching - Rom 10:14 - 17), or by a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit? The bible offers only one way! And what determined the occasion of faith for those who received the word and bore fruit? Was it the Holy Spirit? Or was it a "good and honest heart"?

"Proof-texts"...

Now let's note two passages which are twisted to teach that God must directly give saving faith. Consider them with me carefully: Jesus said in Jn 6:44, "No one can come to Me

unless the Father who sent Me draws him". The immediate assumption that many make here is that Jesus means a supernatural calling or leading. But this is no more than an assumption. We should, instead, be left asking, "By what means will the Father draw people?" This is answered, for interested parties, in the very next verse. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." God *could* directly influence a person to believe; but *he has chosen* to influence people through the word instead.

An incident found in Acts 16:13 - 15 is also twisted for a "proof" of this doctrine. Here we find these words spoken of Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." It is once again immediately assumed that the Lord did this in a supernatural way. But the context, along with the passages we've already noted, tells us *how* the Lord opened this woman's heart. Verse 13 says, "and we sat down and spoke to the women".

A Questionable Doctrine...

If it were true that God must give a man saving faith before he can believe; how could man be held accountable for not doing something he was never capable of doing? God has never expected more of man than man can render. But here is a doctrine that places God in the position of sending people to hell because *he* (God) did not want to give them the faith they needed to be saved. People end up in hell because of God's unwillingness to save them!

Have you ever met anyone who believed on the Lord before the word was preached to them? If this doctrine were true, you would expect to find at least one case of God's saving faith imparted before hearing the word. Can you find such a case? No you can't! Why? The reason is found in Romans 10:17. "Faith comes by hearing". Otherwise, we would have to conclude that God just never really wanted to save anyone who never came in contact with the gospel.

Conclusion...

The conclusion to all of this was written by Paul nearly 2,000 years ago. "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." That's what God says on the matter. Either you believe God's word, or you don't! Jesus said, "They shall be taught of God...". Either you believe it or you don't. But if you do *believe* it, it's because God's word convinced you; not because God did something mystical to you through His Spirit.