

## COMMON QUESTION NO. 5

### IS THERE A FALSE FAITH?

Today, if any one says, 'I believe in Jesus Christ', then it is assumed he/she is a true Christian. Yet in the Bible the noun 'faith' and the corresponding verb 'believe' are often used of people who turn out not to be true Christians. We need to examine what is that faith which saves, both in reference to ourselves and to the church. Do you have saving faith, or is yours one of many false faiths?

#### 1. There is a **faith in signs**.

(a) "Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25). Immediately John writes about a particular man, Nicodemus, who believed Jesus was a teacher from God because of the signs He was doing (3:2).

(b) "Even Simon himself believed,..." Peter later declared, "you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:13,23). Simon was amazed by the signs and great miracles that Philip performed.

The teaching that people must see signs and wonders in order to believe is obviously wrong. If being impressed by signs and wonders is the only reason for faith then it is not genuine. Jesus clearly told Nicodemus he had to be born again to see the kingdom of God. Simon was amazed but by wanting to obtain the same power with money he showed was not truly a believer. The emphasis today on Miracle Crusades, and people professing faith because of the miracles they have supposedly witnessed, is producing multitudes of false believers. They are impressed by what the Evangelist can do and come to Christ so that their problems in this world might be solved by this power. They do not come to Christ because He is a Saviour from sin.

2. There is a **temporary faith**. "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away" (Matthew 13:20-21). The 'rocky ground hearer' is the one who receives the word, i.e. believes, and receives it with joy. Jesus gives this as one of the three kinds of soil in which the plant bears no fruit. Such persons are not genuine believers as they only endure for a while. They get discouraged by tribulation or persecution and then give up. John refers to such people and emphasizes that they were never of us (1 John 2:19). It is not a sure evidence of saving faith that a person has strong emotions when hearing the word. Remember the hymn, "Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow, all for sin could not atone". Thousands had sought to make Jesus king and looked for him on the other side of the Lake, but then became offended at His claim to be the bread come from heaven (John 6:41), so that many turned back (verse 66). Crowds hailed Jesus as "Son of David" as He entered Jerusalem in triumph (Matthew 21:9), yet within a few days many of them were crying "crucify Him". A faith that only lasts for a while, then gives up because of difficult circumstances, or is offended by hard teaching, is not genuine faith. True faith perseveres to the end, which is the emphasis of the letter to the Hebrews (3:6,14, 6:11, 10:39). How unkind are Evangelists when they assure a seeker he has eternal life just because of repeating a prayer. This is not the way Jesus dealt with people.

3. There is a **faith of demons**. “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe---and shudder!” (James 2:19). It is a shock to hear that even demons have a sort of faith. It does not lead them to trust God; rather to shudder in fear. It is obviously not a faith that saves, yet it is called a type of faith in the Bible. It accepts certain things about God as true, that He is one; in the same way demons knew who Jesus was (Mark 1:34). For so many people being a Christian is accepting as true certain teachings, for example:

There is only one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
There is a heaven and a hell  
Jesus Christ is the Saviour who died and rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. day

It is possible to be 100 percent orthodox, accepting as true everything that is taught in the Bible, and still not be a true Christian! Many children grow up in Christian families and never question what the Bible teaches, but their faith is no more than that of demons. This is how it can be claimed that at least 3 out of every 4 Kenyans are Christians.

4. There is a **dead faith**. “Faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:17,26). James is addressing Christians who are content to have a kind of faith that does not show itself in works. He gives the very practical example of one who is needy, but only nice words are spoken (verses 15-17). This was the opposite problem Paul was dealing with, for example with the Galatians. That false teaching insisted that works were necessary for justification before God, so Paul most strongly refuses any place for works. James also teaches that faith is the way to justification, but it is a faith that necessarily shows itself in works. He gives the example of Abraham who believed and was so counted righteous (verse 23), but it was not until he had “offered up his son Isaac on the altar” that his faith was completed (verse 22). In other words, how do we know Abraham was a genuine believer? It is when he responded in immediate submission to the command of God to sacrifice his son. Faith which is fruitless is like a barren tree, dead. So James gives a different emphasis from Paul to the doctrine of justification. For James justification is not by faith alone, that is, a faith that is alone, without works, for that is a dead faith. While it is through faith alone that anyone is justified, it is a faith which is completed by works. Because works inevitably flow from a living faith, judgment will be by works (see for example, Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus pictures many standing before Him on the day of judgment, professing His name, claiming miraculous works. But Jesus will reject them because they did not keep God’s law (Matthew 7:21-23).

5. There is a **genuine faith**. “...faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). It is such an important question for anyone to ask of himself, ‘What kind of faith do I have?’ In the strongest teaching that salvation is through faith and not works, Paul teaches that faith shows itself to be real when it produces love (see also verses 13-14). That is expanded in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (verses 22-23). How was the writer sure the Hebrews had a faith unto salvation? Because of their work and love in serving the saints (6:9-10). John writes to give his readers assurance of eternal life as believers (1 John 5:13). How did he seek to give that assurance? By teaching them the true marks of a believer – keeping God’s commandments (2:3), loving one another (4:7), holding to the true doctrine about Christ (5:1). The faith that justifies a sinner also unites him to Christ who by His Spirit transforms this sinner into a saint. This is why it is impossible for a true believer to be ungodly.  
(<http://www.gracesermons.com/hisbygrace/faith.html> where you can read a sermon by Ernest Reisinger comparing counterfeit with true faith)