

THE SYSTEM OF FAITH

Personal faith is absolutely essential in order to please God (Heb. 11:6), yet it must be understood that it is the system of faith that saves man. In Peter's defense for healing the lame man, he said he performed the miracle by the system of faith that is in Christ (Acts 3:16). It was the same system of faith that Felix desired to hear and to which end he sent for Paul (Acts 14:24). Felix thought he wanted to hear "the faith," but like many others do, he made an excuse not to do anything about his unrighteous state. However, Paul encourages the Romans and us that those who do not believe "the faith" do not make it of none effect (Rom. 3:3).

In various ways, the New Testament affirms that men are saved by the system of faith that is in Christ. Obedience to the system of faith is required for salvation. Luke records that a great company of the priests were obedient to "the faith" (Acts 6:7). As an apostle, Paul's commission was to bring people of many nations unto obedience to "the faith" (Rom. 1:5). Part of that obedience is spelled out by the apostle in Colossians 2:12: *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* Men are justified and made righteous by "the faith," not by the law of Moses (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). That is what Paul meant when he wrote he was *"crucified with Christ"* and lived by "the faith" (Gal. 2:20). Since that is the case, what a terrible condition those are in who change "the faith," or in some other way cause men to be turned away from "the faith" like Elymas attempted to do with Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:8).

The claims of Calvinistic and other stripes of false teachers notwithstanding, it is necessary to continue in "the faith" to enter into the eternal phase of the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). The New Testament refers to that continuance in "the faith," including: being rooted and grounded (Col. 1:23), standing fast in "the faith" (1 Cor. 16:3), and being established in "the faith" (Acts 16:5; Col. 2:7). In view of these verses, it is amazing that the doctrine of once saved always saved, especially when Paul exhorted the brethren in Corinth to examine themselves whether they be in "the faith," and that Christ was in them unless they were reprobates (2 Cor. 13:5). In order to be steadfast in the faith we must resist the devil (1 Pet. 5:9), because he is walking about as a roaring lion seek those he can destroy (1 Pet. 5:8).

"The faith" imposes obligations upon those of us who are in it. We are to strive together for "the faith" (Phil. 1:27). That includes the charge of Jude that we earnestly *"contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3). Part of that is giving a defense of the hope that is in us *"with meekness and fear"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Elders have a special responsibility to stop the mouths of gainsayers and exhort them to be sound in the faith (Tit. 1:13). We are also to love others who are in the faith, and do it without respect of persons (Tit. 3:15; Jam. 2:1).

The New Testament writers prophesied that the days would come when men would not be true to the faith. Paul wrote to Timothy: *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and*

doctrines of devils" 1 Tim. 4:1). That was already occurring in Paul's day through men like Hymenaeus and Philetus who corrupted "the faith" by saying the resurrection was already past, resulting in the overthrow of the personal faith of some (2 Tim. 2:16-18). False teaching is not the only way one can be untrue to "the faith." For instance, those who refuse to provide for their own deny "the faith" (1 Tim. 5:8), those who go after false science have erred concerning "the faith" (1 Tim. 6:20,21). Although it is not limited to them, it certainly includes those who teach or believe the godless theory of evolution. There are many ways to depart from "the faith." As John says: *"If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth"* (1 John 1:6).

For those who remain loyal to "the faith" there is promise of great reward. Near the end of his life, and in his last epistle, Paul wrote: *"For I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept **the faith**: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:6-8). If the reward goes to those who keep "the faith," it will not go to those who do not keep "the faith." But what a wonderful hope and promise it is to live eternally in forever bliss. The older one grows the more he realizes how short life is. As James wrote, *"It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"* (Jam. 4:14).

As we said at the beginning of this article, personal faith is absolutely essential, but it is by the system of faith that men are saved. Consequently, it is imperative that one be in "the faith" the New Testament teaches and describes. Those who are in a false system of faith, that is, a perversion of the gospel of Christ, will stand before Him in judgment and hear the saddest words one could ever hear: sad because of the place to which they lead, and the everlasting duration of the punishment that will be there. Jesus said, *"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity"* (Matt. 7:23). Start today on the road that avoids that end by believing the gospel, confessing faith in Christ, and by being baptized into Him for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). By so doing, you will be in the faith and through faithful continuance in well doing have that reward Paul expects.

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