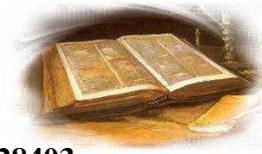


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Basic Concepts Concerning Faith - By Robert F. Turner

We are seeking to explore the “bottom line” of some doctrinal differences that exist in the religious world — differences in basic ideas which affect the particular details of conflicts. An earlier article discussed various fundamental concepts of how we can know the things of God, and even before we began this series our article on “Two Concepts of God’s Grace” (G. O. T., Mar. 20, ’86) presented “bottom line” arguments on that subject. Now, we move attention to “Faith.”

If you are already familiar with the Evangelical concept of Faith you know that in many debates on the subject the chief difference is overlooked, and pseudo arguments are made. We argue as though they were using “faith” in the same sense as we use “faith, repentance, and baptism”; and they argue as though we were saying one earns redemption by doing three or four things. They complain about man lifting himself by his own boot straps; while we say faith is a work; and both of us may be confusing the use of the word “faith.” Justification by faith is stated in a context which contrasts it with justification by meriting or perfect works; and indicates right-standing with God depends upon

our trust in Jesus Christ rather than in ourselves. Rightly understood, justification is indeed by faith and not by works; but to say by “faith only” evokes a different concept of faith, and leaves a very erroneous impression.

Faith is used or applied in many different ways in the Scriptures. (1) It may mean simply a mental acquiescence, an agreement to the truthfulness of testimony; and of that “faith” it is said, “devils also believe,” and “faith without works is dead” (**Jas. 2:19-20**). But (2) the “believer” is sometimes contrasted with the “disobedient” (**1 Pet. 2:7**), and that I faith, I obviously includes obedience. The church consists of (obedient) “believers” (**Acts 4:32**). If baptism puts one into the church, baptism is necessary to be a “believer.” By metonymy of effect for cause (3) “the faith” is sometimes used to designate the word, the gospel message that must be believed. When Jude wrote “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered” (**1:3**) he referred to the truth, that which produces belief on our part. It is called the “revealed” faith in **Galatians 3:23**; the message of the new covenant. Then (4) in **Romans 14:23** “faith” is used subjectively, in the sense of

conscience. “He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith. . .”

But when justification is the subject, we must take another look at faith. The early chapters of Romans are devoted to showing that God is just in condemning all men, for “all have sinned” (**3:23**). We are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (**v. 24**), on the condition of faith (**vv. 25-26**). But Paul is not saying there is a “sole” condition, namely mental acceptance. Using a Greek text, note the absence of the article in **Romans 3:20**, as well as its insertion in portions of **verse 21**. “Because by works of – law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through – law cometh the knowledge of sin. But now apart from – law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (emphasis and indications mine, rt). This contrasts the Christian system with Judaism; but also with any system which requires perfect obedience to any law for justification. We are “free of guilt” (justified) by way of mercy, or forgiveness.

To seek justification via works of law is to be under a curse: namely, “Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things . . . to do them” (**Gal. 3:10**). But Christ freed us from “the curse” (**v. 13**) (i.e., of having to be perfect in our obedience), by dying for us. This makes it possible for man who is less than perfect in his doing, to have forgiveness — or justification — through the mercy of God. But this

forgiveness is conditioned upon a faith that obeys — that seeks to do all possible in the service of the Lord. There is law in Christ, just as there was law under Moses, but the difference is far more than in the things commanded. Christianity is a system of faith – it is possible to so strive, from the heart, to serve the Lord, that He will forgive us even though we are less than perfect.. Such was not possible without Christ -for the Jew, or for anyone. This is not “automatic” (i.e., without conditions). It is ours by virtue of our faith — and because it offers forgiveness for sin, it is far superior to a system of law which justifies only upon perfection or merit. That is why “trust” in Christ more correctly identifies this “faith.”

Basic Concepts Concerning Faith.

But we have yet to get to “the bottom line” of faith arguments. The basic concept of Evangelicals, though sometimes unrecognized by adherents, is that the descendants of Adam are so depraved they can not of their own will move toward God. They must be “regenerated” by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before they can have a saving faith, and therefore “faith” itself is a gift of God. They so interpret **Ephesians 2:8** although this is not grammatically correct, for “that” is neuter, while “faith” is feminine. They deny the free will of man, and contend that faith which is generated by the word alone is “human faith.” We might ask, is it man’s faith? If so, of course it is human. They have confused man’s trusting in the source of the message (as he must), and in

man accepting only that which he can prove by human wisdom (a lack of true faith). But if it is not, then they must accept the dilemma of God's arbitrarily selecting those to whom He will give faith, and therefore save. Calvinism, though wrong in its premise, is consistent in these points.

The basic opposing concept treats man as a free moral agent; considers the Holy Spirit fully capable of presenting God's message so that its intended hearers (the whole world, every creature) may understand and be moved to believe; and places no special, unwarranted definition on faith but accepts the word in its ordinary meaning. "Faith" is that which is believed: "believe" is to hold as true. It is the acceptance of testimony or evidence. First there is the fact which must be witnessed, then witness bearing testimony, and then belief of the testimony. The resultant faith may range from faith only, to acting upon that faith, and confident trust; but it all depends upon testimony. The Scriptures put it simply: "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?" and "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (**Rom. 10:14-17**).

The difference in these to concepts is so fundamental as to cause a division in the ranks of Baptists: some saying there was no need for missionary work for God would save, without preaching, those whom he had predestined. It should be noted that Baptists who say preaching is necessary must be inconsistent with

pure Calvinist tenets. Further: if man does indeed do the believing, then there is no consistency in crying "boot straps" when we point out that saving faith involves obedience to that which God says is "for the remission of sins" (**Acts 2:38**). Getting to the bottom of "faith" is absolutely fundamental to a proper respect for an understanding of the gospel of Christ. It is on this basis that "the seed (of the kingdom) is the word of God" (**Lk. 8:11**); and church identity and succession is in the seed, not in rattling the chains of organized churches. We would like to encourage more "bottom line" preaching on this and other truly fundamental subjects. --- **Via - Guardian of Truth XXX: 14, pp. 423-424 July 17, 1986**

You Shall be Perfect - by Joe R. Price

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (**Matt. 5:48**).

Christ calls us to perfection, with our heavenly Father as our model. While this is not an impossible task, it is a demanding one. Within a context of love - even for our enemies - Jesus commands us to be perfect. What does Jesus mean, "perfect?" This perfection must be our firm and resolute goal if we are to achieve it. Enormous amounts of energy will have to be spent in order to succeed. And, we will have to exercise a great measure of self-control in order to live this "perfect" way of life.

It is important to understand how Jesus uses the word "perfect" (teleios) in the text. Jesus is commanding completeness of moral character.

Perfect (teleios) means "brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness" (Thayer, 618). Therefore, Jesus is saying that our love is to be full, rich and mature toward our fellow man. We are to develop and grow so that we embody the same fullness and completeness in our love as God does in His. The same word is used twice in **James 1:4**, where we are given an inspired definition and application: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." The complete work of patience is to bring one's faith to perfection. In the face of trials we are urged to faithfully endure (**Jas. 1:2-3**). Patience is produced as one continues to do the will of God when tested by trials. This steadfast endurance in the face of trials brings one's faith to maturity (**1:4**). Thus, patience does its full work of perfecting or completing one's faith: he is "perfect and entire, lack in nothing."

We press on to the goal of heaven by becoming more and more like Christ, hence, more and more "perfect" (full-grown, complete). In **Philippians 3:12-16** we are urged to join the apostle Paul in "reaching forward" to "press toward the goal" of the heavenly prize. He says in **verse 15** that those who are "mature" ("perfect," ASV) are engaged in this pursuit. The course we pursue toward the heavenly goal is the same one that has brought us this far - the gospel of Christ (**v. 16**). **Hebrews 6:1** urges us to be those who "press on unto perfection." Thus, we must energetically and enthusiastically continue to pursue excellence in our spiritual character, knowledge and conduct.

None of us are above and without sin (**Rom. 3:23**). In that sense, then, none of us can ever expect to be "sinlessly perfect." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (**1 Jno. 1:8**). What God calls us to is a maturity of character and conduct as His holy people (**1 Pet. 1:15-16**).

Such spiritual perfection is attainable (**Eph. 4:13**). Therefore, let us "press on unto perfection" (**Heb. 6:1, ASV**).— **Via The Spirit's Sword Volume VII, Number 14 - August 31, 2003**



"...as the oracles of God:"

1 PET. 4:11

WHY SPEAK AS ORACLES?

GOD IS TRUE - **ROM. 3:4**
 GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH - **JO. 17:17**
 CHRIST IS GOD'S SPOKESMAN - **MT. 17:5;**
HEB. 1:12; JO. 12:49
 BIBLE IS SUFFICIENT - **2 TIM. 3:16, 17; 2 PET. 1:3**
 WALK BY SAME RULE - **PHIL. 3:16**
 PROVE ALL THINGS - **1 THESS. 5:21**
 CONTAINS PURE GOSPEL - **GAL. 1:8, 9; ROM. 1:16**
 STANDS FOREVER - **MT. 24:35**
 WILL JUDGE US - **JO. 12:48**

WE SHOULD -

LOVE TRUTH - **JO. 8:31, 32; 2 THESS. 2:10-12**
 SEARCH SCRIPTURES - **JO. 5:39; ACTS 17:10-12**
 BUY THE TRUTH - **PROV. 23:23**
 STUDY - **2 TIM. 2:15**
 LIVE BY EVERY WORD - **LK. 4:4; ACTS 20:32**
 SPEAK AS ORACLES - **1 PET. 4:11; 1 KINGS 22:14**
ACTS 20:26, 27
 CONTEND FOR THE FAITH - **JUDE 3**

JESUS LIMITED -

APOSTLES - **MT. 28:18-20; JO. 14:26; 16:13**
 MEN - **2 TIM. 2:1, 2; GAL. 1:8, 9**