

## Salvation—Justification: Faith (12<sup>th</sup>)

(In this podcast we are beginning the study of faith as an *act* regarding the doctrine of justification.)

In previous podcasts we have been studying faith as a *principle* particularly as it relates to being justified by faith. Therefore, justification by faith is not based on the act of any particular person but is simply being justified by the object of faith which is the Person and work of Jesus Christ. However, we now desire to direct our attention to that second part of faith which is faith as an *act*. As defined by William Styles, faith as an act arises from the existence of faith as a principle graciously infused in the child of grace by the power of God as stated in Ephesians 2:8—it is the gift of God. Furthermore, this faith as an act characterizes or identifies “the true children of God.”

While the Greek words for faith (πίστις) and belief (πιστεύω) are not the same, we will often use them interchangeably since the essential difference is that faith is a noun and belief or believe is a verb. Naturally, there are other words that are related to these words but, I believe, it is safe to say that these two are the basic words for faith and belief or believe. Both are given by God and do not arise from within man. For the gift of faith, the classic passage is Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.” That belief is equally a gift from the Lord, Philippians 1:29 clearly testifies to this: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” II Thessalonians 3:2 declares that “*all men* have not faith.” Therefore, it is obvious that God does not give some men faith. However, we shall see that the Lord does give faith to all the elect and they will come to Christ. It must also be understood that an unregenerate person cannot produce or exercise faith; one must first be born again by the Holy Spirit of God before he can believe or exercise faith. Time will not allow us to explore all of the passages that teach these truths, but we shall try to set forth some of the basic ones in an orderly fashion to set these things forth.

The general consensus is that man can believe or exercise faith at any given time he so chooses. It likely cannot be expressed any better than what we saw in a previous podcast as stated by Albert Barnes. He said, “Faith is always an act of the mind. It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind. It is not a substance created independently of the soul, and placed within it by almighty power. . . . God promises; the man believes; and this is the whole of it. . . . [W]hen it is used to denote that which is required of men, it always denotes an *acting of the mind* exercised in relation to some object, or some promise, or threatening, or declaration of some other being.” (Comments from *Sword Searcher* Bible program on Romans 4:3.) Many other quotes could be supplied to show that the general idea is that faith is something that originates in the will or being of man. While it is true that natural faith may be exhibited by everyone, we are talking about biblical or evangelical or saving faith. Natural faith is often nothing more than the law of probability. For example, a person has faith that a certain chair will hold him up simply because he has seen other people sitting in a chair or such a chair of like construction many times before and concluded that the same chair will also support him. Likewise, a person knows the safety statistics of riding in an automobile or even an airplane and concludes that the odds are that he can travel by them without harm. Such confidence is generally acquired because of the law of probability regarding the security of such modes of transportation. However, when we speak of scriptural or evangelical faith we are not talking about natural things, but we are referring to spiritual things. The Scriptures clearly distinguishes between that which is natural and that which is spiritual. I Corinthians 2:11-14 says, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they

are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” This passage clearly states that there is a distinction between “the things of a man” and “the things of God,” and that “the natural man” does not receive or know “the things of the Spirit of God.” Why is this? It is because of the fall of man. Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden and “death passed upon all men,” Romans 5:12. Therefore, all mankind come into this world “dead in trespasses and sins,” Ephesians 2:1. He is so dead to the spiritual things of God that he neither has the “will” to come to Christ (John 5:40) nor the ability to come (John 6:44). This being the case, it is impossible that saving faith can be produced in or be an “act of the mind.” As stated before, faith is an act (i.e., a gift) of God, Ephesians 2:8. It is a product of the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:22) and man is born again (i.e., regenerated) by the Spirit of God in the providential timing of God, John 3:5-8. From this we see that before anyone can believe or exercise faith he must first have spiritual life given to him by God.

Previously we showed that justification is by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ charged to the account of the elect or sheep of God. Even as Paul wrote to Timothy and said that God “hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” II Timothy 1:9. Equally, II Corinthians 5:21 declare that God made Christ “*to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Many more passages could be set forth saying the same thing but this has been done in previous studies.

We have demonstrated the difference between the *principle* of faith and the *act* of faith, and confirmed that the act of faith is put within man by the almighty power of God. Furthermore, it was established that all men have not faith, II Thessalonians 3:2.

Before discussing the efficacy of saving faith as clearly set forth in the Holy Scriptures allow me to say a brief word about infants and certain special needs people. This is an extremely sensitive subject and one that is near and dear to my own heart since I lost a child at three and a half weeks. Nevertheless, the Scriptures do not address this subject and there are essentially only two passages that possibly give some insight on this topic. The first is Luke 1:44 where it is recorded that John the Baptist leaped for joy while in the womb of Elisabeth. Since joy is a fruit of the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:22) it is believed by some that John had divine life given to him while in his mother womb and, therefore, it is possible that the Lord continues to give life to some while in the womb today. The other classic passage in support of this is II Samuel 12:23 when the child of David by Bathsheba died. He said, “But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” Some interpret this to mean that the child was with the Lord and David will be with the child when he dies; others say this is only referring to death and that David is simply saying that he would go to be with the child in death. Books have been written about this subject and many have set forth their views as to whether all such persons will be with the Lord or not. I believe we can do no better than follow the wisdom of our forefathers when they addressed this matter in the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. In Article X, Section 3, they wrote the following: “Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth; so also are all elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.” To my knowledge, when Charles Spurgeon published this confession, he initiated the change of this article by omitting the word “elect” before “infants” to teach that all infants are regenerated and saved. This being said, we will now turn our attention to the “act of faith” as clearly presented in the Scriptures.

First, James 2:14-26 make it abundantly clear that true, biblical faith is not dead and inactive. Here it is obvious that if a person is truly born again by the Holy Spirit and given saving faith that faith will be manifested with good works. This passage makes it clear that a mere profession of doctrine without a clear and visible display of scriptural works is not enough. In fact, James tells us that if we believe there is only one God that this is not enough because devils equally believe this. It is a sad commentary on our society today because not only the world at large profess that there are many gods. There are some that

profess to be atheists and/or deny the true and living Jehovah of the Bible, but even many of them will ultimately admit there is a supreme originator of the universe. Sadly many professed Christians believe that there are many different ways to heaven, but that is a different topic and we need to limit our thoughts to the issue at hand; that is, true, biblical faith is alive and active. True faith expresses itself in a vital and living way. In other words, as James says, “faith without works is dead.”

Here we must also be careful and not seek to identify or define what works or how much works a Christian will do. Obviously, there are some basics, but even with the basics we must leave the evaluation to God. James makes it clear that if a fellow believer is in need and we know about it and do not “give them those things which are needful to the body” that our faith is dead. Clearly, one can give according to what he has (II Corinthians 8:12) because he cannot give if he does not have it to give. However, our study regarding faith at this time must be limited to the overall subject of justification and/or belief unto life. But our time is up for today, and the Lord willing, we will look at this more specifically in our next podcast. Farewell.