

Faith

Introduction

In the Old Testament (KJV), the word 'faith' occurs only twice (Deut 32:20 and Hab 2:4). These are in the verb form "to believe". This is far from the common appearing that is less than 30 times. What we find in the O.T is not so much a doctrine of faith, as examples of it. The word itself occurs rarely and even then only occasionally conveys the familiar idea of trust. However many words express the idea, including 'believe', 'trust' and 'hope'. In Ps 26:1, for example, the writer declares his trust in God, using his integrity as evidence of it. The O.T does have the basic demand for a right attitude of faith in God similar to the N.T, even though it expresses it in terms of an upright life, for example (Ps 37:3, Pro 3:5). Trust in one's own righteousness (Ezk 32:13), in idols (Is 42:17) and in human strength (Jer 17:5) is denounced. People recognised God 'the rock' as worthy of trust, for example (Ps 18:2) and Abraham's faith, which was 'reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6); which became a model for N.T writers to develop.

New Testament

The word in various forms occurs over 300 times and the emphasis on faith is to be seen against the background of the saving work of God in Christ. Faith is the attitude whereby a person abandons all reliance of his own efforts to obtain salvation and relies on Christ alone for all that salvation means (John 3:16, Acts 16:30). Sometimes faith is followed by 'that', indicating it is concerned with facts, for example (Mat 21:32, John 5:24), a genuine belief that what God has revealed is true, will lead to true faith. The characteristic construction for saving faith is to 'believe in' (literally into) Christ. The believer cleaves to Christ with all his or her heart and so 'abides in Him' (John 15:4). Often, however, the verb is used alone 'many believed' (John 4:41) and

Christians are called simply 'believers'. The noun sometimes also refers to the body of Christian belief, for example (Col 2:7).

In the synoptic gospels, faith is often associated with healing, but the faith is always in Jesus personally. In the fourth gospel, however the verb is used 98 times and the emphasis is on believing in Christ or His name (that is, believing all that He is, essentially in Himself, life). Such faith gives the believer eternal life now (John 3:36). For Paul, faith is the typical Christian attitude. There is no substitute for it. Faith alone enables a person to receive God's saving power (Rom 1:16).

Paul insists that we can do nothing at all to bring about our salvation. The doctrine of justification by faith lies at the heart of Paul's teaching (Rom 5:1). This is a trustful acceptance of God's gift in Christ. Paul also connects the Holy Spirit with faith. He said the indwelling Spirit is God's mark of ownership given to people only because they believe (Eph 1:13), The indwelling of the Spirit can also be seen as a 'down-payment'; which guarantees that eternal life in the full sense of faithfulness and infallibly promises.

The writer to the Hebrews in some ways was concerned with showing the contrast between faith and 'sight', in what we can call the classic passage (ch 11). The people that the writer mentions had now outward evidence, only God's promises to support them. The letter of James appears at first, to contradict the rest of the N.T, when he says: "A man is justified by works and not by faith alone". (James 2:24). The faith that he opposes is not warm personal trust in a living Saviour; but an intellectual assent to truth not backed up by a life lived in accordance with them (James 2:15-19). Faith is clearly one of the most important concepts in the N.T. It implies complete reliance upon God, whom we cannot please without it (Heb 11:16). These and others will be pointed out in more depth in the following paragraphs.

Types of Faith

Historical Faith: Detached acceptance as one accepts an event having occurred in history.

Miraculous Faith: Persuasion that one will perform a miracle, or a miracle on their behalf.

Temporal Faith: Mere stirrings of conscience.

Implicit Faith: Belief in what one's church believes, without insight or knowledge.

Said Faith: Hypocritical faith.

Saving Faith: Genuine faith in Christ as redeemer, or genuine faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Objects of Faith

General Faith: Faith in the revelation of scripture.

Special Faith: Faith in Christ and His work.

Kinds of Faith

Dead Faith: Non-salvific faith (e.g. said faith).

Temporary Faith: Sincere faith not grounded in regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Matt 13:20-21).

The Definitions of Faith

Being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see.

Sure

What are you 'sure' of?

Are you sure that you'll wake up in the morning in good health, in a home with a secure roof over your head?

Are you sure that your next trip in a car will be a safe one?

Can you really be sure of anything?

Hope

What do you hope for?

Do you hope that you will live a long and prosperous life?

Do you hope you will have good health all your life?

Do you hope that you will not go bankrupt and live a life filled without pain and suffering?

Is hope always positive?

Certain

Certainty is similar to being sure of things your hope for.

Faith

As already indicated, conversion consists in repentance and faith; so that faith is really a part of conversion. We should distinguish that there are two kinds of faith here, two kinds of true faith. Each one has a distinct objective:

A recognition of the truth of God's revelation of redemption, not merely in a detached, historical sense; but in such a way that is recognised as a reality that cannot be ignored with impunity, because it affects life in a vital way.

A recognition and acceptance of the salvation offered in Jesus Christ; which is saving faith in the proper sense of the word. Now there is no doubt that faith in the former sense is present at once in conversion. The Holy Spirit causes the sinner to see the truth as it applies to his own life, so that he comes under 'conviction' and thus becomes conscious of his sin. He may remain in this stage for some time, so it is hard to say how far saving faith, that is, trust in Christ unto salvation, is at once included in conviction. There is no doubt that, logically, repentance and the knowledge of sin proceeds the faith that yields to Christ in trusting love.

This is what is called in the Doctrine of Soteriology “ Unbelief or lack of faith in the Christian gospel. The demands for faith in Jesus, as the Redeemer, promise and hoped for, appeared as something characteristic of the new age. “To believe” means to become a Christian. In the Acts of the Apostles, faith is required in the same general sense. “To believe” by the preaching of the Apostles, men were brought to the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ. Acts uses (“To believe”) to refer to conversion to the Christian faith. When it is said in Acts 13:12 that the proconsul “began to believe”, it means that upon seeing the blinding of Barjesus, he became a believer and was converted to the Christian faith. It is interesting to note that his baptism is not mentioned, although it is almost always connected with conversion (Acts 8:12-13, 11:16-17, 16:15 & 31-33, 18:8, 19:4-5. Acts 2:38 & 41, 22:16).

Acts very closely connects faith in Christ, or “in His name” (Acts 3:16, 11:17, 16:31, 20:21) with repentance. This is not surprising, since in Acts the call to repentance is an essential element in proclaiming the gospel. Thus after we read in Acts 11:17 that the Gentiles believed in God, in the next verse we learn that it is through Christ that the Gentiles were “granted repentance that leads to life”. Acts 6:7 says that those who became believers become “obedient to the faith” (this faith refers to the content of Christian belief and life). When we highlight Luke’s faith (Acts) it is always more than an assent to a set of doctrines. Having faith means that one needs to live, as God would have one to live.

This is a very important theme that the Gentiles believe in Jesus Christ and thus become apart of the people of God (the Church as Israel), as we see various places in Acts, such as Acts 13:8 & 12 & 39 & 41 & 43; also Acts 14:1 & 9:22-23); which says that God opened a “door of faith” to the Gentiles. This is the first proof that we have in the Bible of Gentiles becoming believers; but we are not to assume that for the first time in Acts, Gentiles have become believers (see the conversion of the eunuch in Acts 8 and Cornelius in Acts 10:7). It is rather a summary statement of what has happened. The phrase “door of faith” is ambiguous (against Haenchen, 437); but the act of believing and the subsequent lifestyle. Though it is impossible to be precise, the expression implies that a way; into faith has been possible for the Gentiles through Christ.

Hebrews

In Hebrews, the core issue is whether the group being addressed has already departed or may in the future depart from Christian commitment. Hebrews 4:2 tells us about a message that comes from God; but does not help since it is not united with the recipients' faith; however, those who "inherit the promises" are those that characterised by faith and endurance (Heb 6:12). We can see that the Hebrews faith does indicate confident trust in God (especially in Heb 11), it carries with it strong overtones of faithfulness and far more than in Paul, it is a human response rather than a divine gift, for example (Heb 10:39). Works therefore are not ignored in the context; but since even faith takes effort. God will not forget the deeds of the addressees; which is one reason why the writer is confident of their salvation (Heb 11). In Hebrews 10:24 the author exhorts his readers to practice good deeds, although in Heb 13:21 it is Jesus who will work in them to produce God's will. Finally in Heb 11 the virtue of faith, a kin to endurance, normally produces so clear action in the person, even if the action is not called a work. In Hebrews, salvation clearly is through faith in Jesus Christ; but this is a faith that calls for persevering faithfulness, and a mark of this faithfulness is the good deeds that are produced in the believer.

Peter and Jude.

1 Peter: the author is encouraging a group of communities in the face of unofficial persecution, the stress therefore is on faith as commitment to God. It is faith that brings divine protection and receives a reward (1 Peter 1:5,9). Works are also relevant, for the Father will judge each person's works which should mean that despite the security of faith the believer's lifestyle will be one lived in the light of a healthy respect of judgement (1 Peter 1:17). When it comes to the situation of persecution, the good works of the Christian, should be such that God will be glorified by the persecutors concerning the areas of life, about which slander commonly circulated in the pagan community. Turning to 2 Peter and Jude, we will discover that in a context in which the communities are threatened by heterodox groups (whether originating within or without the community), faith is presented as something received from God (2 Peter 1:1) which needs to be protected or supported by appropriate character and works (2 Peter 1:5). The faith must be actively maintained ("Fought for", Jude 3) and also one should exert effort to build oneself up in it (Jude 20). Works are significant, for in the end of the age all

deeds will be exposed and judged (2 Peter 3:16, Jude 15). The emphasis in this literature is clearly on works, for it is effort that must be expended to protect “the faith” and maintain one’s relationship with God.

The epistles of John mentions the noun faith only once (1 John 5:4) and there it is an active agent that conquers “the world” (1 John 5:5). The author clearly prefers the verbal form believe (Pisteuo) to the noun faith (Pistis), for it is through believing in Jesus, that one knows that he or she has eternal life (1 John 5:1, 10, 13). The author also sees believing as an act of obedience, in response to a command (1 John 3:23). All three letters are full of commands, particularly the command to love one another and the warning that sinning is a mark of not knowing God. Thus there is no sense in the epistles, that one could believe correctly (or “walk in the truth”) and consistently act wrongly (“continue in sin” or do evil deeds, or hate one’s fellow believer). The two are so intertwined, that to do right is to show that one has life or knows God (1 John 3:7, 10, 14); which the elder also attributed to right belief.

Faith and works

James

James emphasises that faith must be accompanied by works, whereas Paul says that one is saved by faith apart from works (Rom 9:32-33). James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:17)). James has not misunderstood Paul. Sanders, who compares James to Romans 3-4, fails to take into account not only other Pauline letters, but even the evidence of Romans itself. James is arguing that faith calls for works that is doing the will of God; which includes kindness to the poor. A person, he says, is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24). Yet there is no dichotomy between James and Paul. It is a matter of different but mutually compatible perspectives. Paul insists on the necessity of works in the believer’s life (Gal 5:6; 6:40), but because of his focus on justification by faith, he emphasises that it is faith that saves. For James the works that must accompany faith are in focus. James’ emphasis can easily be accounted for by positing that some people were saying that belief was enough and they did not want to be concerned about such things as charity, or that the church was courting the rich by not insisting on good works from them.

There is also a significant point of contact between James and Paul that should not be ignored. Throughout the Pauline corpus, we see that Paul believes that God makes possible the good works that believers do. This, although it is not emphasised. It also appears in James. In James 1:5 he says that if anyone desires wisdom from God, God will give it to him or her. In James 3:17 the wisdom that comes from above is said to consist of, amongst other things, “mercy and good fruits”. The works that are to accompany faith find their ultimate origin in God (see also James 4:6 “he gives more grace”). So we see with Paul and James the demand for Christian works is predicted upon one’s experience of grace.

Conclusion

In concluding, we can see “faith” is one of the most important theological concepts of the N.T; although when we think of faith, the story of Abraham (Genesis 12-25:6) most readily comes to mind. When one speaks of faith, the concept is no less important in the N.T reading Hebrews 11. It reminds us of the fact, “faith” and its cognates are used in a variety of ways in the later N.T; the word is used to refer to religious faith (belief and trust in God, or Christ) or trust in the Christian faith itself, or in something that functions as a proof, to those who are faithful and to that which is certain or unailing.

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