

Faith is a Choice

By Jim Fowler

A Christian leader was explaining how difficult it was for him to have faith. He seemed to view Christian faith as the necessity of mustering up sufficient human trust or reliance on God so that he could experience personal peace and confidence in his dependence upon God. Faith, in the mind of this dear brother, had become a work of human effort to bring sufficient assurance to his own mind and emotions that he was exerting the necessary commitment and dedication that would qualify him as a faithful believer.

The process never let up, for he could never quite convince himself his faith was sufficient. Christians have some strange ideas about faith! Some think that faith is the acquisition of enough *doctrinal knowledge* of the gospel, so that their rational belief and mental assent self-justifies a certainty of accurate acceptance of the gospel. For others, faith is regarded as more experiential. For them faith is an *inner feeling*, an inner tickle, a “burning bosom,” an existential “know-so” whereby their emotions provide testimony that convinces them of their connection with God.

Then there are others who pay no attention to the evaluation of their faith because they were told, “faith is the gift of God.” It is God’s

responsibility. I remember the look of shock on the aforementioned fellow’s face when I told him, “You are making faith too difficult. ***Faith is a simple human choice to be receptive to whatever God has for you.***”

Faith is not a human effort. Faith is the human response that God intended when he self-limited himself to allow human freedom of choice whereby a human individual can consent to God’s grace action as sufficient for his human need. *Faith is a choice* to be receptive to God’s grace activity in his Son, Jesus Christ, both in redemption and in the continuing restoration of humanity in the Christian life.

Faith is a choice of human receptivity of the divine activity of grace. Scottish preacher, William Barclay, pointed out, “the first element in faith is what we can only call receptivity...not receptivity of facts or the significance of the facts, ...but the receptivity of the Person of Jesus Christ (“The Mind of Saint Paul” page 112).

The reception of the gift of God is faith; ***faith DOES NOT MEAN doing something, but receiving something; faith DOES NOT MEAN earning a reward, but the acceptance of a gift.***

Christian faith is our receptivity to God’s activity in Jesus Christ. Initially we receive the presence of the risen and living Lord Jesus into

our spirit in regeneration. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

The apostle Paul wrote of “receiving the Spirit...by hearing through faith” (Galatians 3:2). The Christian life is subsequently the continuous receiving of the life and character of Jesus in our behavior. “As you received Christ Jesus, so walk in him ...established in your faith” (Colossians 2:6,7). Such a dynamic definition of Christian faith, “our receptivity of God’s activity,” disallows any charge of passivism, for inherent in the definition is the necessary consequence of God’s grace activity.

That is why the apostle James states, “Faith without works (without the consequential outworking of God’s activity) is useless...it is dead” (James 2:17, 20,26).

There is no Christian faith if the divine activity of Jesus Christ is not flowing forth in our lives by our faithful receptivity of his character. Faith is our privileged response-ability of receptivity to God’s grace activity in Jesus Christ. □

Jim Fowler is a theologian and author of several books, including The Issue Is Jesus, from which this article was excerpted.