

Faith Alone: A Gift from God, Not Manufactured by Man

Faith is a central pillar of the Christian life. But what is faith? Where does it come from? Is it something we muster up within ourselves, or is it a gift from God? Many Christians live with the assumption that faith is their responsibility, a virtue they must maintain through sheer willpower. However, scripture reveals a different reality—faith is not something humans can manufacture; it is a divine gift, a result of God's grace and mercy.

This study will explore the doctrine of "faith alone," examining its biblical foundations and demonstrating how it serves as a gift from God. By the end, we will see that faith is not a work of human effort but an act of divine grace. This understanding aligns with good theology, which consistently holds to the truths of scripture and emphasizes God's sovereignty in all matters of salvation.

The Nature of Faith

Ephesians 2:8-9

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle Paul offers one of the clearest statements about the nature of faith. He presents salvation as a gift from God, received through faith, which is also described as a gift. The Greek word for "grace" is *charis*, meaning unmerited favor. This grace is given freely by God to those who are utterly undeserving. Paul insists that salvation is "not your own doing," meaning human effort has no role in it. This includes the faith that we exercise to receive salvation.

The phrase "not a result of works" drives home the point that salvation cannot be earned. Whether by moral deeds, religious observances, or even personal faithfulness, no human effort can secure salvation. It is entirely a gift from God. This is why no one can boast. Faith, then, is not an innate human quality or an achievement. It is God's gift, given according to His sovereign will.

What does it mean for believers to realize that faith is a gift from God? First, it removes any sense of pride. If faith were something we could generate, we might have reason to boast. But knowing that faith is a gift humbles us, placing all glory for our salvation on God. Second, it assures us that our salvation is secure. If faith comes from God, then we can trust that He will sustain it in us. Our faith does not rest on our weak, fluctuating abilities but on the unshakable foundation of God's promise.

Faith in Good Theology

Romans 10:17

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Faith comes not from within but from without—it is initiated by the Word of God. Romans 10:17 is clear that faith is a result of hearing the gospel. The Word of Christ, when preached or read, is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of those who hear it.

In good theology, faith is not seen as a human work or an effort of the will. Instead, it is understood as something granted by God through the proclamation of the gospel. Faith is created in the heart of the believer when the Spirit, through the Word, illuminates the truth of Christ's saving work.

This realization should stir us to a deeper appreciation for the power of the gospel. Faith is not a human reaction to convincing arguments or emotional appeals—it is the supernatural result of the Word at work in us. Therefore, we should be diligent in hearing and sharing the gospel, knowing that it is God's ordained means of creating and strengthening faith.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Faith

Philippians 1:29

"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake."

Paul's letter to the Philippians provides a rich insight into the nature of faith. Here, he explains that belief in Christ is something "granted" to us. This reinforces the idea that faith is not a human work but a divine gift. Paul even places belief alongside suffering as something that God graciously grants to the believer. Both are part of the Christian life, ordained by God for the sake of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings about this faith in the hearts of God's people. Jesus teaches in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Without the Spirit's work of drawing us to Christ, we would remain in unbelief, unable to come to Him.

This truth should humble us and fill us with gratitude. The fact that we believe in Christ is not due to any merit or effort on our part. It is entirely a work of the Spirit. This knowledge should encourage us to rely not on ourselves but on the Holy Spirit, who began this work of faith in us and will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).

Faith vs. Works

Romans 4:1-5

"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?

'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."

Romans 4 is a pivotal chapter in understanding the relationship between faith and works. Paul uses Abraham as an example to show that justification comes by faith, not by works. Abraham believed God, and that

belief—his faith—was credited to him as righteousness. This demonstrates that faith is not a work; it is a trust in the work of another—God.

Paul further clarifies that if salvation were by works, then it would no longer be a gift. Rather, it would be something owed, like wages. But salvation is not a wage—it is a gift. Faith, then, is the means by which we receive this gift, not a work that earns it.

Understanding the distinction between faith and works is crucial to maintaining the gospel's purity. We must resist the temptation to add human effort to the equation of salvation. Faith alone is the means by which we are justified, and even this faith is God's gracious gift. This should lead us to rest in God's finished work, not in our own striving.

The Relationship Between Faith and Assurance

Hebrews 11:1

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Biblical faith, as described in Hebrews 11:1, is characterized by two key elements: assurance and conviction. Faith is not simply a vague hope or wishful thinking. It is a confident trust in the promises of God, based on His character and His Word. Faith gives believers the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things that are unseen. This is crucial because it shows that faith is grounded in God's trustworthiness, not in our subjective experiences or feelings.

Assurance, in the biblical sense, is the settled confidence that God will fulfill His promises, even when circumstances seem contrary to that belief. Conviction refers to the inner certainty that comes from trusting in what God has revealed, even when it cannot be observed with physical senses. True faith is not dependent on what we can see or understand fully in the moment. It is grounded in God's promises, which transcend our temporary realities.

Hebrews 11 goes on to illustrate faith through examples of biblical figures like Noah, Abraham, and Moses, who acted on God's promises without seeing their fulfillment in their lifetime. These acts of obedience demonstrate that faith, though a gift from God, is not passive. It moves the believer to trust God and act according to His Word, even when the outcome is unseen or uncertain.

This kind of faith is a direct result of God's work in the believer's heart. We cannot generate this level of trust and conviction in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit who provides the assurance that the promises of God are true and will come to pass, even in the face of doubt and trials.

The assurance that comes with faith should bring profound comfort to believers. If our faith is a gift from God, then so is the assurance that accompanies it. We do not have to live in fear or uncertainty about our salvation, because the same God who granted us faith will sustain us until the end. This assurance frees us to live boldly for Christ, knowing that our faith is not based on our feelings or circumstances but on the unchanging Word of God.

Faith Alone and Union with Christ

Titus 3:4-7

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Titus 3:4-7 gives us a beautiful summary of the gospel, highlighting the interconnected roles of grace, faith, and union with Christ. Salvation is presented as entirely a work of God, accomplished through His mercy, apart from any human works or righteousness. It is through the "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" that believers are brought into a new relationship with God, united with Christ by faith.

This regeneration is not something that occurs naturally within us; it is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who renews and transforms us. This passage emphasizes that all of these blessings—justification, regeneration, renewal—come to us through Jesus Christ. It is by being united with Christ that we receive these gifts. Faith is the means by which we are united with Him, but it is God who gives us this faith through His Spirit.

Union with Christ is at the heart of the Christian life. By faith, we are united with Him in His death and resurrection. This means that all the benefits of Christ's saving work—His perfect righteousness, His atoning sacrifice, His victory over death—are counted as ours through faith. This union is not something we achieve through our own efforts. It is something God grants us through the gift of faith.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." This verse captures the reality of what it means to be united with Christ by faith. Our old self, with its sin and condemnation, has been crucified with Christ, and now, by faith, we live a new life in Him.

Understanding that faith unites us with Christ should lead us to a deeper appreciation of our salvation. It is not something that we merely possess in isolation; it is a living relationship with Jesus, who has accomplished everything for us. This union with Christ should shape our daily lives, encouraging us to live in a way that reflects the reality of His life within us. We should seek to walk in the Spirit, knowing that our faith is sustained and empowered by Him.

The Evidence of Faith in the Life of a Believer

James 2:14-26

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

The epistle of James often causes confusion for believers who are firmly rooted in the doctrine of "faith alone." However, James 2:14-26 does not contradict the teaching that we are saved by faith alone. Rather, it complements it by showing that true saving faith will inevitably result in good works. James' point is not that works are necessary for salvation, but that works are the natural outflow of genuine faith.

A faith that does not produce works, James argues, is "dead." It is not living, active faith, but an empty profession. Faith that is alive will naturally result in acts of love, mercy, and justice because it reflects the character of the God who gives it. Good theology teaches that while we are justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies is never alone—it is always accompanied by good works.

James provides practical examples to illustrate his point. If a believer sees someone in need and merely offers words of comfort without addressing their physical needs, their faith is empty. Similarly, if someone claims to have faith but their life shows no evidence of transformation, their faith is dead. Genuine faith will always lead to a changed life, one that reflects the love and mercy of Christ.

James is not suggesting that works contribute to our salvation. Rather, he is emphasizing that works are the evidence of a living faith. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, so a believer is known by the good works that flow from their faith. These works do not save us, but they do demonstrate that our faith is real and alive.

This passage challenges us to examine our own lives. Is our faith merely an intellectual assent to certain doctrines, or is it a living, active trust in Christ that produces good works? While works are not the means of our salvation, they are the fruit that proves our faith is genuine. As believers, we should seek to live out our faith in tangible ways, showing the love of Christ to those around us through acts of service and compassion.

Faith as a Gift of Sovereign Grace

John 3:5-8

"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"

In John 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus the necessity of being "born again" to enter the kingdom of God. This new birth is a work of the Holy Spirit, and it is by this work that we are granted faith. Just as physical birth is something we do not control, spiritual birth—regeneration—is a sovereign work of God. Faith is a result of this new birth, not the cause of it.

Jesus' analogy of the wind highlights the mystery of the Spirit's work in regeneration. We cannot predict or control when or how the Spirit moves, but we can see the evidence of His work in the transformed lives of those who believe. The new birth produces faith, which is the means by which we enter into a relationship with Christ and receive the gift of eternal life.

Faith is not something that arises from within us naturally. It is not a decision we make on our own, apart from God's intervention. Instead, it is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in regenerating our hearts, enabling us to believe. Without this work of the Spirit, we would remain in spiritual darkness, unable to come to Christ. But in His mercy, God grants us new life through the Spirit, and with that new life comes the gift of faith.

This understanding of faith as a gift of sovereign grace should humble us and fill us with gratitude. It should also lead us to depend more fully on God for every aspect of our salvation. Knowing that our faith is not something we conjured up ourselves but a gift given by God should inspire deep humility and thanksgiving. It should also change the way we pray for others—asking God to open their hearts and grant them the gift of faith, just as He did for us.

Finally, recognizing that faith is entirely a work of God's sovereign grace should bring peace and assurance to our souls. Since God is the one who gives faith, He is also the one who sustains it. We do not need to worry that our faith will fail because it rests on the unshakable foundation of God's grace, not on our own efforts or strength.

This study has explored the depths of what it means to believe in "faith alone," focusing on the truth that faith is not something we can manufacture within ourselves—it is a gift from God. Through the lens of good theology and scriptural exposition, we have seen that faith is entirely a work of divine grace, initiated and sustained by God's Spirit. Here are the key takeaways:

- Faith is a Gift: Faith is not something we generate by our own efforts. It is a supernatural gift given by God, rooted in His grace and mercy.
- Faith is the Means of Salvation: While our works cannot save us, faith is the means by which we receive the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of His atoning work. It is through faith that we are united with Christ and justified before God.
- Faith Produces Good Works: Genuine faith will always result in a transformed life. Though works do not contribute to our salvation, they are the evidence that our faith is real and alive.
- God Sustains Our Faith: Because faith is a gift from God, we can trust that He will sustain and preserve it throughout our lives. We do not need to fear that our faith will fail because it rests on the solid foundation of God's grace.

As believers, our faith should lead us to live lives of gratitude, humility, and service. We are called to rest in the finished work of Christ, trusting that the same God who granted us faith will carry us through until the day of Christ's return. Let us also continue to pray for those who have not yet come to faith, asking God to graciously open their hearts and grant them the same gift of faith that He has given us.