

WHEN IS FAITH NO LONGER FAITH?

We cannot exercise our faith beyond what we believe to be possible – John G. Lake

(1) **Faith is no longer faith when it becomes religious ideas and doctrines.** Faith is not religion. Many times people say "We have our faith". What they really mean is this: "We have our religious ideas and doctrines, our traditions, and our ways of doing things - so don't try to change them." This is not the Biblical idea of **faith**. True faith is not a religious exercise or an ideological or philosophical view. And it definitely isn't a formula! The 'Faith Movement' often gave the impression that faith was a technique used to get what you want. However, the danger with any such system or procedure is that man, and not God, is usually in control - making it a religious practice.

(2) **Faith is no longer faith when it becomes mental assent.** Faith is not agreeing with your intellect - being able to say, "Yes, I understand that to be the truth." Many professing Christians believe mentally that the Bible is the Word of God, but this kind of faith doesn't change or effect the way they live. It isn't a **faith** that has the power to heal, set free or deliver (*James 2:14*). Even demons have that kind of faith. They know and believe that God exists (*James 2:19*), and tremble at the thought, but they have no loving relationship with God.

With mental assent you believe something in your head. You then agree, approve and confirm that it is right, proper and godly. It carries your unwavering endorsement. You may not talk about it, but it bears your personal seal of approval.

The problem is that you probably don't even realise that you are not fulfilling it. You think it, but don't actually do it. Why? It is because with mental assent you believe it in your head but not in your heart. If you truly believe something in your heart, you will speak it aloud and then put it into practice. You only "believe" God's Word as far as you obey and *act on it*. As true believers, we need to change from mental assent to real Bible **faith**. Real Bible faith is always of the **heart**, not the head; and it engages your spirit, rather than just your mind.

(3) **Faith is no longer faith when it's being used to manipulate God.** It is not a power by which we make God do what we want - when otherwise He would be unwilling to do it. Faith is not a kind of magic through which we turn God into our servant! Some people believe that we can cause God to do things purely by confession. If we 'say' it then we will have it! Although speaking it out is 'faith in action', alone it has no power to move God. This theology is a misinterpretation of *Mark 11:22-24*. It causes one to see God as a genie who has to do what we 'say'. Never mind that the Bible declares that we have to pray according to the **will of God** (*1 John 5:14-15*).

As Christians we must realise that our **faith** is totally pointed to God. We have no power to do anything of our own strength. God is sovereign, therefore, we cannot make Him do anything because of our confession. We are to put our faith in God and in Christ through *knowledge* of His Word. We are to trust God to take care of us and to provide for us. However, we should not think that a mere activity, such as confession, would make God do anything - because it won't. God's **will** is still supreme.

(4) **Faith is no longer faith when it becomes hope without confidence.** Hope is good, as it relates to the future. Faith, however, takes the promise as having been done 'now'. Many people have hope, and are anxiously expecting results, but they lack the settled confidence and present assurance which faith possesses. Hope, says the dictionary, is about our *desires*. **Faith**, on the other hand, is about our **confidence**.

Faith therefore is its own evidence, and it is sufficient as the very proof of what we believe and what we are *hoping* for in order to see a desired result. Never-the-less, faith is not a blind force based on an empty hope; rather, faith is based on something totally reliable, unfading and secure. That security and certainty is simply, **a promise from God** (Who is totally trustworthy). Activated and owned in the now, a promise of God makes the future '*present*' to us. If we believe a promise then we have something to look forward to and something to live for. This is the substance of *hope*; it makes what is yet to come *present* to us. And this is why you can't have hope without confidence! Or faith without the assurance of hope!

(5) **Faith is no longer faith when it rests on feelings.** Your feelings should never contradict God's promises. Each person mentioned in *Hebrews 11*, believed God and His word and chose to be obedient - regardless of circumstances, and despite arguments of logic and reason. Regardless of how he or she felt, they did not listen to their feelings, but rather, took God at His word. Many professing Christians claim that the way we feel about God is far more important than how we think about God. But many other Christians say feelings are altogether unreliable and unimportant.

They say the way we feel doesn't matter; what really matters is how we think. The truth is, God wants us to avoid both extremes. God wants His people to enjoy their relationship to Him in the way they think and feel. When you think rightly about God, it helps you feel rightly for God. But the reverse is also true: when you feel rightly for God, it also helps you to think rightly about God. True feelings inform true thoughts just as true thoughts inform true feelings. Nevertheless, **faith** in God is far more than just feelings or thoughts. There is a huge difference between emotionalism and God-centred emotion. Possessing genuine faith will make you feel good because your life is focused on God, and God alone. But remember, your feelings should never become the measure of your faith.

(6) **Faith is not faith when it becomes denial.** Denial is; “failure to acknowledge an unacceptable truth (or emotion) or to admit it into your consciousness.” And it is mostly used as a defence mechanism. Benny Hinn said, “*Faith does not ignore the facts, it ignores the power of the facts.*” As a person of faith, I am offended when people blame their denial on faith. A preacher once said, “Let's not get it twisted.” Having faith is not a letter of admission to the school of stupidity.

Did you hear the one about the Christian who couldn't swim and decided to test God by jumping into the ocean? Almost immediately, two men in a row boat came by and offered to save him. “No, I have faith,” said the Christian. “God will save me.” Not long after the two men rowed away, a speed boat happened upon the man. “Come on, get in our boat. We're here to save you,” said the young couple in the speed boat. “No!” The Christian replied. “I have faith. God will save me.” As soon as the speed boat was out of sight, a cruise ship came along. Seeing a man in distress in the middle of the ocean, the captain of the ship sent a rescue crew to save the man. Once again the Christian refused help. Reluctantly the cruise ship went on its way and the Christian drowned. When the Christian got to heaven, he berated God. “Lord, I was a good Christian. I had faith,” he said. “Why didn't you save me?” God looked the Christian in the eyes and said. I sent you three boats. What else did you want me to do?

One of the ways we might be lead down the path of denial is fear - fear of failure! Fear that God isn't going to do what he said He was! Peter saw God's plan falling apart when Jesus was arrested. The result... Denial! Lost faith, weakened faith, or tried faith, may all cause you to deny the plan of God in your life. So guard yourself against such things.

(7) **Faith is no longer faith when it becomes foolish-ness.** Today, many believers step out ‘in foolishness’ and expect God to rescue them. What's more they pass the buck of their foolishness to God. Think about this... Why do we always struggle with what God is saying and find it easier to run with what our selfish desires dictate to us? It's always the things of the spirit that we struggle and wrestle with. If we're not careful, we seem to quickly gravitate towards the things of the flesh. So next time, before you step out to take a step of faith, ask yourself; *Is it of God? - Did God build the foundation of my dream? Or, Am I simply seeking to create one to make a name for myself?* Could it be that it is just convenient for you to do so?

Many of the things we launch out to do and are tagged “taking a step of faith” are the majority of the time mere *foolishness*.

(8) **Faith is no longer faith when it turns into presumption.** I have always considered it to be presumptuous on my part to constantly want to take a step of faith when God has not instructed me to do so. Too often we believe that we can *pursue*, *overtake* or *recover* in all circumstances without giving a thought to God's opinion about the situation. Even king David had to inquire before God before he pursued, overtook

and recovered! In *1 Samuel 30:8*, David inquired of the Lord, "*Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them? Pursue them, He answered, for you will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.*"

Presumption is considered to be a vice opposed to the virtues of **hope** and **faith**. It may also be regarded as a product of pride. It's defined as the condition of the soul which, because of a badly regulated reliance on God's grace, expects the desired results without doing anything to deserve them. Or, for the pardon of one's sins without repenting of them. Much of the time, presumption is behaviour or an attitude that is boldly arrogant or offensive (both to God and man). It has serious consequences where faith is concerned.

(9) **Faith is no longer faith when expectation is lost.** Expectation is a vital component of faith. In your own personal life your expectations concerning your loved ones, friends, colleagues and even your own future all tend to come true. Confident expectations exert a powerful influence on people and future events, for good or for ill.

So you need to be very cautious with regards to the direction your **expectations** are being guided. Whatever direction your faith is taking, so too should your expectations be. They have the power to produce of their own kind. Essentially, good expectations produce good results and bad expectations bring about bad results. It is the attitude of their source that determines the outcome. Therefore, whatever you expect with confidence becomes your own self-fulfilling prophecy.

What you confidently expect, from both people and situations, will determine your attitude toward them more than any other factor. However, when your expectations are from God you can anticipate the best in every situation and expect the best from every person. This will result in people reciprocating and giving you their best in return. Note, your faith is guided by your expectations - whether it be for people or situations.

(10) **Faith is no longer faith when trust in God is lost.** William Sloan Coffin said, "*Faith isn't believing without proof – it is trusting without reservation.*" My definition of faith lines up with this, it is; "complete and absolute trust in the faithfulness of God." Your faith is lost every time you let go of your trust in God. When we realise that God has all power to do anything He wants, and that He always uses it for the good of humanity, then we can have absolute confidence that we are in good hands. He has both the ability and the stated purpose to work all things together for our good. And in this regard, He is completely trustworthy - worthy of our trust.

When you are in the midst of trials, sickness, suffering or distress, you can be confident that God is still with you - that He cares for you, that He has everything under His control. It may not look like it, and you certainly may not feel in control, but you should

be **confident** that God is never caught off guard. He can and does redeem any situation, any misfortune, for your good. So **trust** in God's trustworthiness!

“Now, faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). This is such a great verse. It is easy to memorise and contains so much truth within a single sentence. Sometimes when you feel like you're swimming upstream, let this scripture remind you to turn around and head downstream. In other words, you need to go with the flow. **Trust** - let go and let God! This is faith in action!