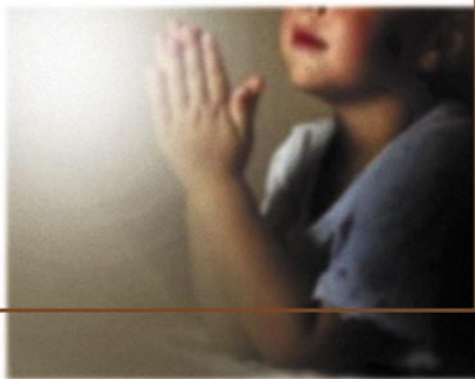


FAITH
True or False?



by Rev (Dr) Timothy Tow

“Faith” is one topic we often hear discussed, though we are living in a materialistic world. It is a topic we enter into when we are perplexed by life’s many problems. Faith in God seems to be a logical solution to our problems after all!

The text of this message: “Faith—True or False,” is found in Hebrews 6:4-9 as follows:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.”

The Scripture we have read describes the character of a false faith. By showing us what is false, we see the true faith more clearly. Now,

there are those who go to church week after week. But it is God from above who can look into our hearts, and it is He who will divide us into those who have the true faith, and those who have the false faith. The Apostle likens the two types of faith to two types of earth. The preaching of the Word of God is like rain that comes down on earth. The good earth produces good fruit. In our church compound, we have planted some Pisang Rajah. Because the earth is good it brings forth very sweet fruit. But then we have also very poor soil, where the fruit it produces is sour. Here is a picture of true faith and of false faith.

TRUE FAITH VS. UNFOUNDED FAITH

Now let us consider some aspects of the false faith. First, the false faith may be called an "unfounded faith". When you get into trouble, some rich old lady might try to comfort you thus, "It will be alright so long as you have faith." What faith? "So long as you have that feeling, you know, that faith in you!" "Whether you have faith in Kwan Yin, or faith in Mohammed, or faith in yourself, so long as you have got that faith, you'll be alright!" This sort of faith is like a ship carrying an anchor, but with a six-foot chain. In time of trouble, you cast the

anchor to find it dangling in the air! There is no foundation. This is a false faith.

The Apostle Paul says, "Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Your faith must have a foundation, and that foundation is the Rock Jesus Christ. Is your faith anchored in Jesus Christ? Anything less is a false faith.

Perhaps you are a free-thinker. Realise that you have an unfounded faith in yourself that will never bring you salvation, except you come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says that whoever will hear His words and do them will be like building his house upon a rock. That Rock, let me say it again, is Jesus Christ. Whatever trouble that comes into our lives can never shake us. A free-thinker can no more be confident in himself when trouble comes!

TRUE FAITH VS. IMPLICIT FAITH

The second type of false faith is known as "implicit faith". This is a Roman Catholic term. The word "implicit" comes from the Latin word meaning "to fold". It is a blind faith. "You cannot have understanding in matters of faith," that is what the Roman Catholic Church says. "You can, only implicitly. You must rely entirely on us, the priests, who have studied the Scriptures.

We are the ones to tell you what to believe and what not to believe." So, in earlier days, for anyone to read the Bible or expound the Bible, there would be the risk of being burned at the stake. Implicit faith is blind faith. A false faith, my Roman Catholic reader!

A fellow pastor told me that when he went to Medan, he found the Church there has degenerated. The people have the Bible, but they never open it. When he quoted the most famous verse in the Bible, and asked them if they knew it, they replied, "Where is it?" They have never heard nor read John 3:16. These inside the established Church of the Bataks have also been led by blind pastors. "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Luke 6:39). The true faith is not the implicit faith, the faith that is folded up, the faith that is blind. The true faith is founded on knowledge. The true faith is explicit faith. That is the open faith, unfolded faith, when it is declared to you by the preaching of the Bible.

The Bible is an open Book. When it is well explained to us, we say, "This is logical faith, this is founded on fact." Now, we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter. Did He not show Himself ten times to the Apostles in order to establish the fact that He is risen from

the dead? Therefore, He is able to save us to the uttermost! Ours is an open faith, and not a blind, “implicit” faith. Do you have it?

TRUE FAITH VS. RITUALISTIC FAITH

Thirdly, the false faith is a “ritualistic faith”. For example, the doctrine of baptismal regeneration: Except it is sprinkled with the holy water by the priest of the Roman Catholic Church, they declare, every unbaptised baby, when it dies, goes to hell! Every baptised adult, if he has committed a mortal sin and has not made confession, when he dies, he goes to hell! This kind of ritualistic faith is a false faith.

Jesus says, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, which is corroborated by Paul in I Corinthians 12:13, he cannot be saved. Not the ritualistic faith of man-made holy water, but rather, the Spirit-baptised faith. You must be born again by the water of the Spirit. Can you say that?

The saving work of the Holy Spirit is like rain. It may come in a storm, or it may come in a drizzle. Nevertheless, the rain comes to revive our hearts so parched and dried up by sin. I

pray that you may have a Spirit-baptised faith, not ritualistic faith, as you read on.

TRUE FAITH VS. UNDIGESTED FAITH

The false faith is that faith called “undigested faith”. “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8). They come to church and they sing hymns, they read in the responsive reading, but their thoughts are far away from God. Their hearts are never touched. Calvin says those who have Christ on their lips and Christ in their minds can merely give mental assent to the truth. This is not saving faith.

You were brought up in the church. You do not have idols. And you say, “Our parents were Christians but we don’t go to church now,” “Do you believe the Bible?” “Yes, every word.” “Who is Jesus Christ?” “He is the Saviour of the world.” “But is He your Saviour?” You cannot say! Undigested faith, mere mental assent, is a faith that is false. True faith must be absorbed into your innermost being. True faith is digested faith.

Once I went to hospital to baptise a 12-year old Sunday School student of Life Church. This young boy was dying of a heart disease.

He knew that his days were numbered. After I baptised him, he died within one week. Now, when I baptised him with a borrowed bowl from the nurse, a bowl full of water, he looked with sparkling eyes, "Pastor, need I also drink the water?" This shows a faith that reaches down to the stomach! Jesus says, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53). That's it! It must go into the whole system, it must be a digested faith. You have eaten Jesus!

The Jews could not understand: "What, He's teaching cannibalism? Eating somebody's flesh?" The Lord did not mean it literally, but spiritually. "You must have a part with Me, that My death and sufferings on the cross become as food received into your body." Do you receive Jesus with joy and gladness as you eat a hearty meal? I thank God He died on the cross for my sins, and by believing all my sins are forgiven, I am on my way to heaven. As simple as that. "If you will" - as simple as that - "if you will take it." You see, the trouble with us is like some patients when they go to see a doctor. They take the medicine home but put it on the shelf after only one sip. They have no faith in the doctor. "Undigested faith" is false faith! O may you receive Christ fully and heartily now!

TRUE FAITH VS. SELF-DELUDING FAITH

Then, there is that false faith called “self-deluding faith”. False, deceiving faith. You think that you believe but you don’t. In the last verse of the second chapter of John, when Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem and did many miracles, the crowds believed on Him for the miracles they had seen. But Jesus did not believe them. Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew them through and through.

When the Lord Jesus Christ fed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fishes, all of them applauded, “Marvellous, marvellous!” One of them was Judas. “Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,” he yelled. He believed Jesus for the things that are of the flesh. Some people come to church because there are some advantages to be gained. Do you believe Jesus for some of these advantages?

Now when Jesus repudiated the five thousand who came the next day for material gain, we see Judas’ faith turn sour. “Self-deluding faith”. As for Peter, he said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68, 69). So when Peter was professing his faith with burning

heart to Jesus, there walked away old Judas, sulking. Judas was deluded in the first instance. Self-deluding faith is not the true faith.

Self-deluding believers! When testing comes, will you say to the pastor, "God doesn't answer my prayer, why should I attend your church?" We can never come to God like this. We can only kowtow before Him confessing our sins. We are beggars, not choosers. Beware of self-deluding faith!

TRUE FAITH VS. SELF-PRESERVING FAITH

Finally, but by no means exhaustive, is the "self-preserving faith". What is the self-preserving faith? That is taught again by the Roman Catholic Church. If you don't work your salvation well enough, you cannot go to heaven. You need the merits of saints and martyrs, of Mary and Jesus to help you to go to heaven. Salvation depends on your works! That is the saddest news of the Gospel that can ever be preached to me, if going to heaven depends on the good I have done. Spurgeon says, "If my garment of salvation needs but one stitch from me, I'm lost." This self-preserving faith is a false faith. The true faith is the God-persevering faith in me that saves. It is the Spirit of God working within us, persevering in us, that is the

true faith. The God-persevering faith is the faith that will carry us to heaven, that gives us peace and security, that gives us assurance of life everlasting. Jesus says, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28, 29).

Praise God for this hymn, "He will hold me fast: for my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast." So Paul can say, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). That is the Protestant faith and the true faith. That is the reason why when other people are crying and upset, we can remain calm, for we know that, come what may, the Lord will never let us down. Come what may, He is going to persevere in me to see me through. Once saved, praise the Lord, He will not allow me to be lost. Once saved, always saved!

I may stray from Him, but He will not let me for long. He will always bring me back to Himself. Praise the Lord, salvation is not what we can do. Salvation is all in Him, but we need more faith!

What is the work of God that we must do? Jesus says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29). Some of you have come from a background of implicit faith, of a ritualistic faith, of an undigested faith, of a self-deluding faith or self-preserving faith. Let go, and let Jesus take over! This is the true faith! This is the saving faith. This is the faith that saves you now, and forever. Amen.

Rev Dr Timothy Tow is the Principal of the Far Eastern Bible College and the Pastor of True Life B-P Church.

Far Eastern Bible College

9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063

True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church

P. O. Box 141, Newton Post Office, Singapore 912205.

Sunday Service at RELC Auditorium, 10:30 am

30 Orange Grove Road. Tel: 6254-1287

E-mail: febc@pacific.net.sg Website: www.febc.edu.sg