

# Moving in Faith

*Making happen what God wants to happen*

## THE FAITH QUESTION

### Provocative yet profound

Faith is very much the 'F-word' in our society. It is challenging for two quite different reasons:

- For many 'faith' stands in opposition to 'reason', we even have the phrase 'blind faith'. It is seen as irrational, moving outside the realm of logic and science. But without empirical verification how can 'faith' ever be connected with truth?
- For others 'faith' is a shorthand word for 'religion', belief in God' or 'gods', creed, dogma and certainty. But with so many different 'faiths' how can 'faith' ever be connected to 'truth'?

### Exploring faith

In its most basic form 'faith' is the ability to have confidence in something. To have faith is to believe that something is trustworthy. A firm conviction that an action will succeed or an event will happen:

- It may be based on instinct, reason or experience
- We simply cannot function as a living being without it
- It has nothing whatever to do with religious belief

This is the rock-bottom starting point in understanding faith; it is part of the most basic fabric of existence. It is the capacity to act with some confidence in an unpredictable world.

This is the foundation upon which a biblical understanding of faith builds.

### Biblical faith

The biblical understanding of 'faith' represents God's most desired response from people - the natural world already demonstrates it:

'And without faith it is impossible to please God'  
(Heb 11:6)

In Hebrew:

- **emun** – has the idea of 'firmness', 'reliability' and 'faithfulness'; you demonstrate that you have 'faith' by your 'faithfulness'
- **amen** – is well known as a liturgical phrase, it has the basic sense of 'so it is' or 'steadfast'; but it has the strong sense of 'that which is true and reliable'. It makes a firm link between 'faith' (*emun*) and 'truth' (*emeth*).



In Greek:

- **pistis** – has the idea of ‘worthy of trust’, ‘reliable’, ‘certain’ and ‘strong conviction’.

The first problem that the word ‘faith’ presents us with is that, like so many biblical words, different writers in different context use ‘faith’ in different ways:

- It can refer to that basic sense of ‘trust’ and ‘confidence’ in God like ‘a rock’, or a ‘betrothal’ (Hos 2:20), that solid foundation upon which we stand:

‘Those of a steadfast mind you keep in peace  
in peace because they trust in you.  
Trust in the Lord forever  
For in the Lord God you have a steadfast rock’  
(Isa 26:3-4)

We see an interesting response with Jesus:

‘Many believed in him ....  
but he did not trust himself to them’  
(John 2:23-24)

- It can refer to the whole framework of Christian teaching, ‘the Faith’ which our hearts and minds believe, ‘the Faith’; the message which the apostles and evangelists proclaimed (Acts 6:7, 14:2, Gal. 1:23, Eph 4:5, 13, 1 Tim 4:1, Jude 3, 20, Rev 2:13)
- It can refer to a sense of confident hope in that which is, as yet, still unrealized (cf Rm 4:18-22); in fact ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ can often seem interchangeable in some of Paul’s writings

However, the primary sense of the word ‘faith’ is very practical; into which the other all dimensions and concepts blend. As we shall see ‘faith’ is not essentially a ‘future’ word, but rather a ‘now’ word; both ethereal and pragmatic.

### **Personal pilgrimage**

‘And now faith, hope, and love remain ...’  
(1Cor 13:13)

The most significant moment in my (Noel Moules) personal journey of understanding the nature of faith was one, very hot, summer afternoon in 1967. I was with a group of students on the cliffs between Dawlish and Teignmouth in Devon, when one of them observed, “Do you realise that we shall always live by faith, even into eternity?” This comment was based upon a meditation of the phrase in 1Corinthians 13:13, ‘And now faith, hope and love, these three things remain ...’ On reflection his observation seemed obvious, and yet I found it disturbed me, excited me and began to change my whole understanding of faith.



No child could have grown up in a more 'faith-orientated' atmosphere. A child of missionaries in an interdenominational 'faith mission' I had seen total dependence upon God to provide. And yet when it came to understanding the nature, character and operation of faith I had little genuine biblical insight. Though I now realise I was far from alone! Though never thought through or articulated I had assumed faith was some sort of 'spiritual consciousness'; a level of spiritual existence that was the fruit of discipline, sacrifice and 'fine tuning'. Like some Hindu *sanyasin* (holy-man) walking barefoot over living coals of fire!

Like most people my experience of faith was largely a 'hit and miss' affair. There were the glorious moments when 'attune' with God amazing things happened, but just as quickly there were times when everything seemed to drop 'like a brick budgie'! I seemed to be tossed about by every wind (Jas 1:6).

It is essential that we stop and consider what 'faith' really is; and knowledge, emotion and experience together and place everything on a right footing.

### **Dynamic faith**

The most concise biblical statement on faith is that classical verse in Hebrews 11:1. While well known, it requires reconsideration for a moment:

'Faith is the substance (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for,  
the conviction (*eleuchos*) of things not seen'.<sup>1</sup>

#### □ **Hypostasis**

Faith is to do with 'substance'<sup>2</sup>, and 'real essence'. It is used of Jesus in Hebrews 1:3 where it is said that he is the 'very image of God's substance'<sup>3</sup>. By the exercise of faith things which in themselves have no existence become real and substantial. It can also have the sense of 'first-fruits' or 'title deeds'.

#### □ **Eleuchos**

Faith is to do with 'conviction' and 'proof'. The eye is the organ of the body which enables us to be convinced by providing evidence of visible things. Faith responds to reality in the same way that the eye does, giving evidence of the invisible order.

Of course, like so many key verses, there are a number of shades that can be given to the translation; however, it is quite legitimate to give this verse real force:

'Faith gives *reality* to things hoped for, it is a *demonstration* of things not seen'.

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<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew poetry one of the patterns is to say the same thing twice in different ways to strengthen emphasis

<sup>2</sup> In Clarence Jordon's 'Cotton Patch' version of the New Testament it is translated 'turning dreams into deeds'

<sup>3</sup> In the same way that God's substance, which is invisible, is made both tangible and visible in Jesus as the image of God, so faith makes the invisible both visible and tangible

Faith is the function of bringing into present reality the things the human heart longs for and which God's heart longs to give. In simple practical terms the best definition of faith is:

**'Faith is making happen what God wants to happen'.**

Faith is the means by which the will of God is born into reality. As Matthew 6:10, when defining the nature of the kingdom of God, says 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. This is faith pure and simple. The remarkable fact is that every moment of Jesus' life was lived by faith, and his explanation is disturbingly simple,

'... the Son can do nothing of his own accord,  
but only what he sees the Father doing;  
for whatever he does, the Son does likewise'  
(Jn 5:19; cf 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10)

### **Faith and reality**

Before we look more closely at exactly how faith works, we need to remove a basic and frequent obstacle to faith by asking, "What is reality?"

Christian vocabulary frequently involves the use of a thoroughly unbiblical phrase, the word '**supernatural**'<sup>4</sup> They use it to explain anything that God does which appears to be out of the ordinary and remarkable; different from the normal. To challenge the Christian use of the word 'supernatural' is not being pedantic, as some might imagine; the use of this word subtly perpetrates a major flaw in much of our thinking that directly inhibits our understanding and exercise of faith. The fact that it is a clearly non-biblical way of speaking is shown by the Christians who describe themselves by using the ridiculous phrase 'being supernaturally natural', to redress the balance. Clumsy evangelical shorthand is probably here to stay, but let us recognise it for what it is and don't let it blind us to truth.

People who believe in the 'supernatural' are the ultimate humanists; defining reality in terms of *themselves*. They live and see things within a two-tier universe. To reject the 'supernatural', as every Christian should do, affirms the wholeness of all things, the integration of everything in a vision and understanding of 'shalom'.

The truth is that the only fundamental 'reality' that exists, in any form, is rooted in God. God's dimension and perspective on things is the only real one. The only things in the universe that are 'truly natural' are rooted in God; everything else is an illusion, a distortion and a false horizon. The human experience of 'relativity' and 'scientific hypothesis' highlight this. Christians frequently contrast the 'natural' with the 'supernatural'. The Bible does not do this, it contrasts the 'natural / spiritual' with the 'unnatural'.

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<sup>4</sup> The only time I have come across the word properly used was as the name of a whole food restaurant in Newcastle-upon-Tyne!

People speak of 'miracles' as though they were actions that contravened the laws of nature; in fact most of the 'fundamental laws of nature' have almost certainly not even been discovered yet for they are rooted in God himself! Scientific theory is always changing. The fact that God's actions are always taking us by surprise is nothing more than a demonstration of human ignorance, and our attempts to explain them away; a demonstration of people's arrogance and blindness. To primal peoples early aircraft flight was seen as a 'miracle' - yet it is the interaction of laws. To describe something as 'supernatural' is to define the boundaries of human understanding at a given moment and says nothing at all about reality and truth.

We shall see below that, 'to live by faith' is to do none other than 'to live in reality'. To live in a place where the barrier between heaven and earth is non-existent. Jesus makes this clear in his profound statement to Nathaniel in John 1:51:

“Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened  
and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”.

It could be argued that Nathaniel never saw this promise specifically fulfilled. Of course he saw it fulfilled every day that he was with Jesus. Here was a person in whom the barrier between heaven and earth were completely removed; bringing into every day reality the essence of Jacob's dream (Gen 28:10-17), which is surely everybody's dream. To live 'by faith' is therefore to live 'naturally', in the fundamental understanding of that word. It is to begin to live freely and openly with the barriers between heaven and earth removed. In Jesus we see the first truly 'natural' person.

The Bible never speaks of God acting 'supernaturally', but rather of his doing 'powerful', 'mighty' acts (Gk: *dunamis*) 'showing signs' (Gk: *semeon*).<sup>5</sup> The world may interpret these act and signs as they will; but we need to recognise them as reality breaking into unreality, a demonstration of the 'real world'.

## Faith and practice

Let us now look more closely at how faith actually works in life. As we do this we must keep remembering that the practical level faith is simply 'making happen what God wants to happen'. It is probably most helpful to imagine that learning to move in faith takes place in three clear steps:

### □ **Step one: demonstrating you are faithful**

The foundation upon which all moving in faith must be built is, simple practical obedience to what we know God wants us to do. It can involve the most

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<sup>5</sup> Cf the following scriptures:

- 2Cor 12:12 'signs, wonders and powerful works'
- Lk. 5:17 'the power of the Lord was with him to heal'
- Lk. 19:37 'praise ... for all the mighty works they had seen'
- Lk. 11:20 'if by the finger of God I cast out demons ...'
- Jn. 6:2 'they saw the signs which he did'
- Jn. 20:30 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples'



simple and mundane issues of everyday life. Moving in faith is simply 'getting it right'. Faith is nothing less than faithfulness. It is interesting that the famous verse in Habakkuk 2:4 'The righteous (just) shall live by faith' should be more correctly translated, '... by their faithfulness'. To live obediently in the ordinary issues of life is to live by faith, so that our will becomes the most natural expression of the will of God himself. Without this foundation of faithfulness in our character and lifestyle we cannot expect to advance further in moving in faith. God can only use people who display his character to make happen what he wants to happen. God also wants people he can trust. We have to learn how to love others before we can hope to walk on water!

#### □ **Step two: declaring the invisible**

The words of Hebrews 11:1 show that faith has further dimensions to it, that are built on obedience and faithfulness, but are still very practical. The second step in moving in faith is beginning to bring into concrete reality the things which are as yet unseen, but which God wants to happen. As 'children of God' we are 'eternal', all unnatural barriers and false horizons with which the world surrounds us need have no limitation upon us. God wants us to begin to reach into realms that appear 'invisible' [and even impossible] from the mere human perspective, and to pull these things of heaven into this world. In us God wants heaven to begin to break into this age. We, as individuals and as the Church, are to stand as a Colossus between the two realms. The key will be being able to hear God telling us what he wants to do.

#### □ **Step three: developing spiritual muscle**

The third step in the practice of moving in faith builds on and develops the previous two. It is also the dynamic one that pushes us forward and deeper into the things of God; and matures us in the process. There are of course always things in God, which at this moment are clearly beyond our reach. When we see them, excitement, hope and fear rise in our hearts. We quicken our pace; we strain to get our hands on them. Then when we finally grasp one, another remains just a little beyond our fingers - and so it will continue to be. As a consequence we are always moving further and further into the invisible, and drawing more and more into tangible and physical visibility. At this point the balance between 'evidence' and 'expectation' may at times be finely poised. As we have seen, and will see again, 'hope' is an important element in faith. Here the quality of our character and its harmony with that of God is all-important. All the time these three elements of faith should be working together, a constant 'tension' and yet 'peace', a constant 'amazement' and yet 'certainty'.

### **Faith and truth**

God does not want us to move in faith, and 'make happen what he wants to happen', simply to build our relationship with him. He also wants us to grow in our ability to move in faith as an important demonstration of 'truth' to a sceptical world. We live in a world, which has understandable doubts about the reality of spirituality. Moving in faith gives them evidence and confidence with which to believe.



God's desire to give people 'signs' as a stimulus to faith is seen throughout Jesus' public ministry in his working of miracles. He did not always give people the signs they wanted! But he always gave them enough evidence to move forward with. The tangible evidence always pointed to spiritual dimensions and truth beyond the act or event itself.

Let us demonstrate this by the story in Mark 2:1-12, where Jesus heals the paralyzed man in Capernaum; whose friends had let him down through the roof of the house because the crowd at the doors was too great. Before physically healing the man Jesus declares that his sins are forgiven, uproar is the result:

- Jesus is challenged over his right to forgive sins (an act which appears blasphemous and cannot be seen by the human eye)
- Jesus replies to this criticism by healing the man's paralysis (an act which was both miraculous and visible to the eye)
- Jesus demonstrated the truth of what could not be seen by his power in what could be seen

So as we, following Jesus, powerfully and practically demonstrate the works of God in reality to the world 'by faith', this in itself will create a firm platform for their confidence in the things we proclaim which as yet remain unseen, though we know will happen. Faith authenticates truth.

With one hand we pull the things of heaven into this world as a demonstration of what is true, and with the other hand we point forward into the invisible and to the things which remain unseen and proclaim what is to come.

Jesus made it very clear to the people of his day that if they couldn't, or wouldn't, believe his words they should look closely at his actions that authenticated his message:

“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the father.”  
(Jn 10:37-38)

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.”  
(Jn 14:11)

If people don't like our words they should have the evidence for them in our actions. Moving in faith incarnates truth and gives people reasons to believe.

## THE FAITH EQUATION

It is important that we present the practical principles of moving in faith in some kind of clear framework. We intend to do this by using the analogy of the mathematical equation; ' a formula for affirming the equivalence of two



expressions using the sign = ', or more simply asking the question, "What does faith equal?" This will: -

- Help to 'crystallize' everything that we have been discussing so far
- Help to 'visualize' the factors that are at work in faith
- Help to 'identify' areas that become dislocated and inhibit the activity of faith

Let us then examine, in practical terms, what exactly 'faith equals':

### **Faith equals God**

#### **□ God**

- All faith is rooted in God
- All faith is initiated by God
- All faith originates wholly with God, never with us
- We move into the realm of faith by virtue of our relationship with God
- We simply move in response to what he has already started
- Scripture speaks of 'the faith of God'

#### **□ God speaks**

- Faith is born out of the stirrings of God's heart
- Faith begins to become active as God voices his heart in speech

#### **□ God's word**

- God's word is the agent of his activity, and extension of himself
- '... faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God' (Rm 10:17)
- creation is faith in action, it is brought about by God's word
- '... and God said, 'Let there be ... and it was so' (Gen 1:3)
- '... upholding the universe by his word of power' (Heb 1:3)
- The title 'Logos' used for Jesus in John 1:1-14 was used by Greeks to describe the 'reason' they believed held the universe together
- God's word will bring all things to a final conclusion Revelation 19:11-16, (especially v 13 '... the name by which he is called is the Word of God')

### **Plus Hearing**

#### **□ Hearing**

- This is the first place where we become actively involved with faith
- This is the first place where breakdown can occur in the activity of faith
- Our spirits must be 'tuned' to become 'active' at God's voice - our spirits must be pitched at the same frequency as his spirit





- If we are not progressing in faith we are perhaps not hearing God, or not hearing him clearly
- We cannot 'do what the Father tells us', as Jesus did, if we do not hear
- We need to be trained to hear God, and so act alight, as the Messianic servant in Isaiah 50:4-5 '... morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious...'
- Develop an ear / heart / spirit that receives from God

#### □ **Vision**

- When we hear God's word an explosion takes place in our spirits
- A 'word' is simply a 'sound' from the mouth of one person that brings into being a 'picture' in the mind of another. If communication is taking place then the picture in the minds of both should be the same; if I say 'banana' then what do you see! Stories told on radio are much more powerful than those on television, because the pictures are better!
- God's word exploding within our spirits should give birth to a vision in harmony with the one already in God's heart
- It is so easy to 'see' and yet not to see at all: a landscape view, a puzzle, a person etc
- '... I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind' (Jn 9:39)
- If we don't hear we don't see, if we don't see we are blind

#### □ **Hope with zeal**

- Vision gives birth to 'hope' our spirits are stirred by the 'word' and 'vision' God has given us
- 'Hope' expresses itself with 'excitement' and 'zeal', we are eager to press forward into what God has said
- With rising of 'hope' with 'zeal' faith has begun to flex its muscles

### **Plus obedience**

#### □ **Obedience**

- His is the second place where breakdown can occur in the activity of faith
- We can be fired with zeal by the word of God; then we come face to face with the full implications of what he is saying
- God's word demands 'obedience' and our 'will' is challenged

#### □ **Decision**

- We have to freely decide to move in harmony with what God has spoken



- It may mean 'not doing' what we want to do: 'the Magnus Magnusson principle in sin'; "I've started so I'll finish". Or, "it is easier to get forgiveness than permission"!
- It may mean 'doing' what we would rather not, 'dying and stepping out' going beyond the point of no return, 'fools for Christ's sake' (1Cor 4:10)

#### □ **Courage and character**

- Faith is not simply 'making happen what God wants to happen', it is also 'shaping character that is in harmony with God's character', making us the kind of people who are like God.. The more we reach out to take from God the more we become like him
- The only limit to how much we can receive from God is the extent to which our characters are unable to cope with what is required to hold it
- It is 'boldness / courage' that will push forward the frontiers of faith and put us in the positions where our characters can be shaped
- Acting in obedience to God's word in the face of difficult and maybe impossible circumstances 'tests' our faith which shapes our characters and increases our capacity to receive from God
- '... the testing of your faith produces steadfastness ... that you may be perfect and complete' (Ja 1:3)
- '... you may have to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith ...tested by fire, may resound to praise, glory and honour' (1Pt 1:6-7)
- Many people expect miracles to be sovereign inexplicable acts of God with which we have little to do; however, the reality is clear that 'miracles come from hard work'<sup>6</sup>

#### □ **Hope with patience**

- Faith does not always reach 'fulfilment' immediately; this can often be a major pitfall to many
- This can often be part of God's testing of our characters; he not only uses 'circumstances', but also 'delays' in faith coming to fulfilment
- Sometimes God can speak to us about a situation, which is not yet ready for action. We 'know' but we have to wait. We have the privilege of standing with God, waiting until the situation 'matures'; then we shall see its fulfilment. This was the experience of many Hebrew prophets

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<sup>6</sup>See Rene Laurentin '*Miracles in El Paso?*' Servant Publications 1982, which tells the story of the most astonishing miracles among a Catholic community working among the poor who live on the rubbish dumps in El Paso-Juarez in Mexico. Although they have seen the miraculous multiplication of food to feed the poor happen many times the lady in charge of the distribution has a simple maxim, "We work hard all week to collect enough food for the poor and on Thursday's God always makes sure there is enough"!

- God wants 'friends' that he can share his secrets with and who will wait with him until the time of fulfilment is right
- Sometimes we are just a link in a chain of faith; fulfilment may depend upon the obedience of many, either in number, or in sequence of time. We may never actually see the fulfilment of some of the words God speaks, yet our patient obedience to them are vital for their ultimate fulfilment
- 'These all died in faith, not having seen what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar' (Heb 11:13)
- 'For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it' (Lk 10:24)
- An Irish missionary to Iran in the 19th Century, Robert Bruce, wrote, "I am not reaping the harvest; I can scarcely claim to be sowing the seed; am hardly ploughing the soil; but I am gathering out the stones"
- A missionary in the Chad never saw any conversions during his whole life; but the day he died a revival broke out that swept the area. Both his faithfulness and his death together were catalysts for God

## **Plus substance**

### **□ Glory to God**

- As faith comes to fulfilment God gets the glory, not the person involved; '... no flesh shall glory in his sight' (1Cor 1:29)
- The word 'glory' is 'the manifest weight of the presence of God', so faith, in giving 'substance' to the desires of God, displays God's presence upon earth. He is the focus of attention not his fellow workers
- It is said that after a meal in a good restaurant you should not be able to identify precisely which waiter served you; they should do their job well but unobtrusively. The same principle applies in moving in faith; the glory goes to another
- Therefore, God getting the glory, is the first hallmark of faith reaching fulfilment

### **□ Good**

- As at Creation, what faith brings into being receives God's stamp of approval 'it is good'. It accords perfectly with what was originally in God's mind
- People who see the results of faith will be struck with the fact that it is 'good' and 'wholesome'
- The servant who is instrumental in faith coming to fullness will receive the commendation "Well done"

### **□ Truth**

- Every stage of faith coming to fulfilment is 'shot through' with truth; it is the third but vital hallmark of the genuine fruit of faith



- Truth is the 'compass' that directs it; it is the protection from error; it gives it its quality at every stage
- Truth is 'ultimate reality expressed in action', truth is something to be done, not merely thought or believed
- A spirit that is 'right' and 'true' is the only one that can lead to the final conclusion 'it is good'

'Seeing may be believing,  
but believing is seeing'

## Questions

1. What reasons would you give to explain the fact that very many Christians misunderstand the nature and function of faith? Identify the major misconceptions.
2. What are the barriers that prevent you from moving more powerfully in faith?
3. How would you help someone who was finding problems in moving in faith?
4. Everyone has to have faith simply to function as a human being. Can you give three examples that would suggest that this is true? What is the basis of this everyday faith? A biblical understanding of faith builds on this experience but takes it very much further. What do you think is important for something to be a truly spiritual expression of faith? We have described faith, as 'making happen what God wants to happen.' What do you think of this definition?

## Reading & Resources

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