

# *Meaning of Faith*



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# Discussion on Faith

## A. Faith Definitions

Religious people do not have exclusive rights to use of the word “faith”.

Webster Dictionary defines faith as :

“1 a : allegiance to duty or a person. b : fidelity to one’s promises 2 a : belief and trust in and loyalty to God b : firm belief in something for which there is no proof 3 : something that is believed especially with strong conviction”

Non-religious people have faith. For example, when approaching an oncoming car, every driver has faith that the other driver will remain in their lane and that you can pass each other safely.

Faith is one of the major themes of the Bible. It is far too deep and complex of a concept to be confined into a single word or definition. However, the Bible does give us a wonderful starting point :

*“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen”* Hebrews 11:1 (NAS)

The Bible’s combination of hope with faith is simply elegant as compared to all other definitions. Faith ties assurance and conviction together to give us hope and ultimately the yet unseen promises of the Bible.

What are some ways non-religious people use faith in their everyday lives?

Are there some ways that we exercise faith outside religious context? If yes, give examples.

What are some things non-religious people believe with strong conviction perhaps in the absence of proof?

Why do you think faith is a big part of everyone’s lives?

Name some of the things that Christians hope for.

Is Hebrews 11:1 a promise that we can be assured of any desire? Why or why not?

Name some hopes of which can we be assured according to the Bible?

How can conviction lead to the fulfillment of unseen hopes?

Why is faith the key to both hope and conviction?

## .B. Faith Leading to Eternal Life

One of the hopes Christians have is eternal life made possible by Christ's death on the cross in payment for their sins. The Greek word *pistis* is translated "faith". It is the noun form of the Greek word *pisteo* "to believe". Therefore, faith and belief are like two sides to the same coin. Both words are for more than an intellectual knowledge. Both words imply embracing God's plan for our eternal destiny and receiving the gift of eternal life based on Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes (has faith in) in Him shall have eternal life."* John 3:16

*"And this is the record, that God has given to us, eternal life. And this life is in His Son. He who has the Son of God has life. He who has not the Son, has not life. These things are written to you who believe in (have faith in) the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life."* I John 5:11-13

## .C. Faith versus Works

Since the very beginning of the church there has been debate about the relationship between faith and good works. Two scripture passages appear to contradict each other, until they are fully understood.

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should ."* Eph 2; 8-9

*"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."* James 2:17

This would be confusing, if the scripture stopped here. But, James continuing says "... *I will show you my faith by my works.*" v18 James is strongly making the point that faith that does not result in good works is not genuine faith. For example, a pile of leaves does not make a tree. But, a tree that doesn't produce leaves is probably a dead tree.

What does belief in Christ or faith in Christ mean?

Can you think of those who may have intellectual knowledge of Christ, but not the faith that results in eternal life?

How does a person come to this type of faith? Ref ( Rom 10:17)

Do you know of people or groups who seem to emphasize faith without many works?

Do you know of people or groups who seem heavy on works without much faith?

What does James mean by "*faith, if it has no works, is dead*"?

Why are both faith and works important to a growing Christian?

### **.D. Faith in the Old Testament**

Hebrews Chapter 11 has been called the “Faith Heros Hall of Fame.” Let’s please read the verses.

Many people wonder if the Old Testament men and women will have eternal life. After all, they did not know to believe in Jesus and His death on the cross as we do. However, scripture uses Abraham as an example of faith resulting in imputed righteousness.

*“And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”* Romans 4:3 and Genesis 15:6

The word righteousness does not mean you have lived perfectly. Rather Christ’s death on the cross paid for our sins leaving us blameless before God or having righteousness of Christ. Jesus died for Abraham’s sins just like He did for ours. Just as our faith in Christ results in righteousness allowing us to enter into heaven and God’s presence, likewise Abraham’s faith in God’s promise resulted in righteousness through Christ’s death.

Hebrews Chapter 11 also gives us more insight into the meaning of “faith”. Notice that all of the faith heros did something as a result of their faith. Remember James and the importance of works ? The faith of the Old Testament heros resulted in taking action.

### **.E. Faith Misdirected**

The Heavens Gate Cult in the 1980's all committed suicide believing that space aliens behind the Kohoutek Comet would take them away to a better life. Sadly as the comet passed, no aliens were evident. All faith is not good. What you place your faith in really matters.

Who might be your favorite among those in the Old Testament who acted by faith in God? Why?

Why do you think faith pleases God?

What does the word “righteousness” mean to you?

How does faith result in righteousness?

Did Abraham live perfectly? Give some examples of Abraham’s sins.

Will Abraham’s sins keep him out of heaven? Why not?

What did Abraham do that demonstrated his faith?

What sort of actions resulted from the faith of the Old Testament heros?

What are some actions that should result from our faith today?

Give some other examples of misdirected faith.

How are superstitions a type of misdirected faith?

What can be the result of misdirected faith?

Very religious well meaning people can also be the victims of misdirected faith. An accurate understanding of scripture is very important. (Drew will tell a true story about a snake handler here.)

Faith is not a license to believe whatever sounds good and appealing to us or to interpret the scriptures according to our own desires and values. Self interest at the expense of others is usually a good clue for us to question whether our faith is misdirected. Because, as Christians, we should be more concerned with the welfare of others than our own.

Satan may even tempt Christians appealing to their faith to take unnecessary risks. Read Luke 4:9-12. Jesus, who had perfect faith, did not succumb to demonstrating that faith in an uncalled for manner. Ultimately, Jesus made the greatest demonstration of faith by willingly dying for our sins.

However, God is very pleased when we act by faith on what is true and good. (Ref : Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 1:17) Faith that results in caring for or serving others is rarely misdirected.

Have you known anyone who made a terrible mistake thinking that they were demonstrating faith?

How can self interest lead us into misdirected faith?

What are some ways Satan might tempt us to take foolish risks?  
How can we know what spiritual things, aside from Christ Himself, are an appropriate demonstration of faith.

Give some examples of individuals who have demonstrated faith and been blessed with what could be called miracles.

Give some examples of faith exercised in serving others.