

Is Faith A Gift From God Or A Human Exercise?

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The function of faith in salvation is an important theological issue. Since faith is essential for salvation, what is faith's origin? Does God give sinners faith,¹ since they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1)? If not, does that mean a person exercises faith in order to receive eternal life? And if so, is this a meritorious work?

To avoid viewing faith as a work of merit, many evangelicals say faith is a gift of God. In addition they say faith is a gift because people are unable to believe.² Therefore an individual, it is argued, must be regenerated *before* he or she can believe. This is the Reformed view that regeneration precedes faith.³

Viewing faith as a gift is used to judge whether a person is a genuine believer or merely professing to be saved. That is, if God endows a person with faith to believe, it logically follows that God will also bestow and guarantee repentance, submission, and commitment, thus enabling that person to persevere the rest of his or her life.⁴ A person's works then become a barometer by which to validate his or her salvation.

The Controversy: Is Faith A Gift?

As noted, some writers reason that God bestows faith as a gift that enables a person to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.⁵ God's granting of faith thus excludes any human work or pride that might derive from the exercise of personal faith. On the other hand others maintain that God does not infuse personal faith but that individuals exercise this prerogative.

Advocates Of The View That Faith Is A Gift

Various passages are used to support the view that God imparts faith to unresponsive people, including John 6:28–29, 44–45; Romans 12:3; Acts 3:16; Philippians 1:29; and 2 Peter 1:1, but the major passage used for support is Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace you have been saved thro...

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