



"The man that believes will obey; failure to obey is convincing proof that there is no true faith present. To attempt the impossible God must give faith or there will be none, and He gives faith to the obedient heart only."

—A.W. Tozer

15-Jul-11

How Can We Measure Our Faith?

[II Corinthians 13:5](#) instructs us, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the [faith](#). Test yourselves." How do we obey this call to test ourselves, to know whether we are in the faith? In a classroom, we take a test, and the grade we receive measures the level of our success or the lack of it. What method of measurement can we use to test our faith to see where we stand?

A good place to start is to see how [God](#) measures faith. There is no better example than that of Abraham, the "Father of the Faithful" ([Romans 4:11](#), 16). Notice his defining moment shown in [Genesis 22:12](#), "And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for *now* **I know** that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'" (emphasis ours throughout). How did God measure Abraham's faith? By his obedience. As [Genesis 22:18](#) notes, all the blessings that followed were "because you have obeyed My voice." Abraham proved his faith by obedience.

God measures our faith based on what we do—our obedience—not by our feelings, the emotions we express, or our words. So, just as God knew the depth of Abraham's faith by his obedience, we can know the depth of our faith by the level of our obedience.

In nominal Christianity, many think that all one needs to do for salvation is to believe—"eternal security" is the name of this doctrine. Many scriptures *seem* to support this idea (e.g., [Mark 9:23](#); John 3:16, 36; 6:40, 47; 8:24; 11:25; 20:31; [Acts 10:43](#); [13:48](#); [16:31](#); [Romans 1:16](#); [10:9](#); [1 Corinthians 1:21](#)). However, notice the Greek word for "believe" in each of these verses, *psiteuo* (*Strong's* #4100). This same word appears in [1 Peter 2:7](#): "Therefore, to you who *believe*, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.'"

By the use of "but" in this verse, Peter makes a strong contrast between belief and disobedience. He is showing us that the opposite of belief is disobedience, implying that those who believe are obedient and those who disbelieve are disobedient. Belief leads to obedience and disbelief leads to disobedience. So, as in Abraham's case, obedience is the test we can use to measure our faith—our belief.

We see this same idea in James: "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" ([James 2:22](#)). The apostle suggests that doing what God commands—works—is the evidence of the right kind of faith. Faith that does not lead to obedience is not perfect faith, which is in keeping with [1 Peter 2:7](#), that believers are obedient and disbelievers are disobedient. Therefore, New Testament belief is not just a feeling but also a deep commitment to God evidenced by obedience. To emphasize belief and exclude its required result, obedience, is to leave belief a hollow shell, so that it has no life or saving power.

To reinforce the point that belief/faith and obedience are directly connected, notice the Greek word *apeitheo* (*Strong's* #544). The *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* defines it as "not to believe, to disbelieve implying disobedience." To illustrate this, the epistle of Romans in the King James Version shows that, in terms of this word, "disbelief" and "disobedience" are interchangeable. In [Romans 2:8](#) and 10:21, *apeitheo* is translated "do not

obey" and "disobedience," respectively. While in [Romans 11:31](#) and 15:31, this *same* word is rendered "not believed" and "them that do not believe," respectively.

It is also interesting to note that in [Hebrews 3:18](#), the King James Version translates the phrase in which this Greek word appears as "to them that believed not," yet the New King James Version renders it as "to those who did not obey." The translators see the terms "disbelief" and "disobedience" as synonymous. Together Peter, Paul, and James show that a true Christian cannot have one (true faith/belief) without the other (works/obedience).

While [Romans 4:1-8](#) shows that obedience itself does not save, Scripture reveals that obedience *is the evidence* that we have the right kind of belief that does save. An analysis of the underlying Greek words and the use of them by the Bible's writers and translators provide us with a more complete understanding for the word "believe." Therefore, when we see it in the New Testament, in our minds we should read it as "believe and obey." [John 3:16](#) is a good example: "For God so loved [the world](#) that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him [and obeys] should not perish but have everlasting life." When fully understood, this promise of everlasting life is not to those who hear and believe but rather to the doers, to those who also obey ([Romans 2:13](#); [James 1:22](#)).

In introducing the book of James, William Barclay says the following about the only proof that shows we have saving faith:

To Paul Abraham was justified by faith ([Romans 4:1-12](#)); to James Abraham was justified by works ([James 2:21](#)). But Paul and James are not really at variance. They are not saying contradictory things; they are saying complementary things. It has been well put this way: "A man is not saved *by* works, but he is saved *for* works." No man can earn the [love](#) of God, but once a man knows through faith that God loves him, he knows, or he knows nothing of the meaning of Christianity, that he must spend all his life trying to live a life that is worthy of that love. We are not saved by works; but the only proof that we are saved is that we live a life a little more like that of our Saviour and our Lord.

His translation of [James 2:20-26](#) does a good job of summarizing this subject:

You poor fool! Do you want proof that faith is useless without action? Take the case of our ancestor Abraham. Was it not because of his actions that he was accepted by God as a good man? Was it not in fact by his action in offering [Isaac](#) on the altar! It must be obvious to you that his faith and his actions combined to act together, and that his faith was completed by his actions. So the passage of scripture which says: "Abraham had faith in God, and that faith made him accepted by God as a good man" came true, and he was called God's friend. It must be clear to you that *it is in consequence of his actions that God reckons a man to be a good man*, and not only in consequence of faith. In the same way, was it not as a consequence of her actions that the prostitute Rahab was reckoned to be good? Was it not because she welcomed the Jewish messengers, and helped them to escape by a different route? The body is dead when there is no breath in it, and faith is dead when it has no actions to accompany it.

Because "it is in consequence of his actions that God reckons a man to be a good man," then our level of obedience is for us—and for God—the test that measures the state of our faith (see [Isaiah 66:2](#)).

- Pat Higgins

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by Martin G. Collins

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by Pat Higgins

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