

## FAITH AS ASSENT, ATTITUDE, ACTION AND ASSURANCE

By Rick McKinney, 2025

Scripture references and quotations are from the New Revised Standard Catholic Edition

Faith as used in the Sacred Scriptures appears to contain various elements, including an assent of one's mind to certain ideas about God's reality; an attitude in one's heart trusting in the God who is good, powerful and wise towards His own; actions with one's body and tongue arising from ones will that is obedient to what is perceived as God's will, and an assurance in one's spirit that God is real and worthy of trustful obedience. These four elements are often intertwined when the word faith or believe is used in the Scriptures, but sometimes the emphasis is primarily on only one or two elements.

For instance, in the epistle of St. James he notes that even the demons believe and give assent to the fact that "God is one" but shudder at the thought (Jm. 2:19). Similarly, in the gospels when Jesus encounters demons they sometimes make fear-filled but truthful claims of assent that he is "the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24, Lk. 4:34) or the Christ, "the Son of God" (Lk 4:41). St. James insists that true faith is made evident and complete by loving obedience and trustful works or actions of faith as Abraham did when he obediently and trustfully offered up his son Isaac in sacrifice (Jm. 2:21-24, see also Heb. 11:17-19). St. James seems to place the emphasis of his understanding of faith on one's willingness to lovingly and obediently do works of mercy, rather than give mere intellectual or verbal assent to propositions of faith. Similarly, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Lk. 7:21).

St. Paul, on the other hand, often appears to place the emphasis of his understanding of faith in Jesus Christ as an attitude of surrendered trust in one's heart as well as an assent in one's mind to the truth about Jesus, the Son of God. He writes that Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised, and that, "he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness . . . and to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rm. 4:3-5). But here, St. Paul was contrasting "works of the law," like circumcision, with a saving faith and not on works of loving mercy in one's walk of faith. In the same letter, he states, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Rm. 6:17-18). Here there is an implied note of mindful assent, trustful attitude, and obedient action. Paul also speaks of the "obedience of faith" (Rm. 1:5, 16:26) as well as the

preeminence of loving action in his classic description of love in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

In the interworking of faith and works, St. Paul states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). Here St. Paul calls faith a gift, and this appears related to having a personal assurance in one’s spirit of God’s loving reality, mercy, hope, power and wisdom towards oneself and others (Heb. 11:1). It is a saving faith, surely deposited at one’s baptism (Rm. 6:3-4, 1 Cor. 12:13), but also made alive in a personal encounter with Christ (Ac. 9:4-5, Lk. 3:16). For no one can say, with full assurance, that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

In a more-narrow sense, the gift of faith is also spoken by St. Paul as one of the nine gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-10) operating in the Church. This gift appears to be an assurance in a specific situation that God desires something and will act in power, such as when Peter and John, were moved in their spirit to “know” that God wanted to heal a crippled man that was begging for alms (not healing) before the temple of Jerusalem at the “Beautiful Gate” and they just proclaimed and acted upon it with an assured faith (Ac. 3:1-10).

In St. Peter’s classic proclamation, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus states that this was revealed to him by “my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 16:16-17). Here Peter bears forth a definitive statement about Jesus with a revealed assurance in his spirit, a full assent in his mind; an active willed proclamation with his lips and no doubt a trusting devoted attitude in his heart toward the person who has become his teacher, his Lord, and his God.