

What Does it Mean to Live by Faith?

“The ‘justified’ will live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

Since only those who live by faith during this life will be in heaven, it is essential that you know the answer to this question, “What does it mean to live by faith?” Though this is so important, I suspect that, if asked, most Christians would not be able to explain what it means to live by faith. Could you?

Many people falsely assume that if they hold to a set of essential Christian beliefs, they are heaven-bound. Every Sunday, millions of Christians recite the Apostle’s Creed¹ as if they are in full agreement of it. But if a person gives assent to the Apostle’s Creed, does this mean that he lives by faith? There are millions of people who give assent to the Apostle’s Creed who do not live by faith and they will be surprised to hear Jesus say to them at the judgment, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.” There is a difference between living by faith and merely holding to a set of beliefs, no matter how sound those beliefs might be.

Living by faith requires that a person believes that God is sovereign over all of his circumstances. In other words, it requires that we believe He is working in all things to accomplish His good and perfect purposes for us as individuals. In essence, faith is “believing God.” God has revealed many things about Himself and has made promises that He wants us to believe. In other words, He wants us to trust Him and take Him at His Word. The only way we can really know if we have genuine faith is if we trust Him when “bad things” are happening to us. If we get angry when something “bad” happens to us, this suggests that we really do not believe that God is working all things together for our good as Romans 8:28 says. *“We know that for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, He is working all things together for good” (Romans 8:28).* If we get angry when “bad things” happen, we are subconsciously thinking that He is either being mean to us or simply does not know what He is doing. Our attitude certainly suggests that we are not really believing Romans 8:28. I believe that all Christians have gone through situations that have tested our resolve to keep believing Romans 8:28. Though we may struggle at times, we keep trusting Him in those difficult times by God’s grace. As we keep trusting Him like this, we prove ourselves to be people who “live by faith,” no matter what we are going through. When we are struggling to trust Him in the difficult time, we ask Him to give us the grace we need to continue trusting Him.

But there are some “Christians” who do not seem to struggle in the same way because of distorted theology. These people simply disassociate God from the “bad” things altogether by assuming He is not sovereign over it. They might wrongly think that Satan did it and God has nothing to do with it. Such thought patterns prove that the one thinking them is not living by faith. Living by faith requires a person to look at every single circumstance as having been ordained by God for his good. If a person is living any other way, he is living as an unbeliever (a natural man).

For a person to live by faith, he must believe in **God**. In order to believe in **God**, a person must believe in “the Sovereign Creator and Lord of heaven and earth.” The Bible portrays **God** as being sovereign over all things. In other words, God is in control of all things and everything occurs according to His purposes and design. This includes calamities that happen throughout the world which cause death and destruction. And it also includes both big and small calamities that happen in the life of every single individual. *“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and I create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).* *“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (Amos 3:6).*

For many people, this idea conflicts with their view of God. (These are typically people who do not read their Bibles through once each year and therefore do not know the Bible sufficiently.) The Bible clearly teaches that God ordains all things that come to pass in accordance with His grand design. Yes, though He is righteous and never sins, God is sovereign

¹ **The Apostle’s Creed:** I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in an holy universal church; the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. (Note that the original version of this creed says “I believe in an holy “catholic” church. In this context, “catholic means “universal.” It does not refer to what is known as the Roman Catholic Church.)

even over the sins of other created beings that impact us. God is also sovereign over everything that Satan does. Everything is orchestrated by God.²

There is a story that illustrates this at the end of the book of Genesis. Joseph's brothers betrayed him deeply by selling him to men that took him down into Egypt and then sold him as a slave. After suffering deep emotional pain from such a betrayal, Joseph suffered mistreatment for years while in Egypt. But God ultimately raised Joseph up to a position of great power second in line to the king. After several years, Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt to purchase food because there was a famine in their own country. Eventually, Joseph made himself known to his brothers and they became frightened, wondering if Joseph would put them to death. But Joseph told them something that illustrates how God is sovereign even over the sins that other people commit against us. He told them, *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good"* (Genesis 50:21-22).

So, whether it is a tsunami that kills 250,000 people, a terrorist that kills 200 people, or a loved one that causes deep emotional pain, God has orchestrated it all for His grand purpose for good. This is why Paul could say, *"We know that for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, He is working all things together for good"* (Romans 8:28).

If anyone claiming to be a Christian balks at this, he is in great spiritual danger because in order to live by faith, a person must place his trust in God's providential, purposeful care of them in every single circumstance. If a person disassociates God from the "bad things" that happen in his life, he is not living by faith and therefore will not be in heaven. Such a person is an illegitimate child according to Hebrews chapter 12.

The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were being severely persecuted. Unbelievers, under the influence of Satan, were doing "bad" things to them. So, the author wrote this book to warn and encourage the Christians to continue holding fast to Jesus. In chapter 11, he lists many saints who, in spite of suffering horrific things at the hands of evil people, continued to trust God. The author points to their endurance under such trials as proof that they live by faith. Then, in chapter 12, the author instructs the Christians to follow the example of those saints and *"run with endurance the race that is set before us."* (See Hebrews 12:1.)

Then, beginning in verse 12:5, the author connects God directly to the trials that they, and in fact all Christians face. God is said to be the Father that is purposely orchestrating all of the "bad" things that occur in the lives of His children. His reason: So that they become partakers of His holiness. (See Hebrews 12:10.) The "bad" things are actually intended for good because without them, a person's faith cannot be proven as genuine. Hebrews chapter 12 portrays God as the Father who is training His children by directly orchestrating difficult circumstances to arise in their lives. While other created beings may play a role in creating the difficulties, God is clearly seen as the One who orchestrated them all in order to child-train His children.

If a person does not view the mistreatment of others and Satan as if God is not orchestrating it, that person is an illegitimate child. He is not one of those who live by faith. Those who live by faith recognize that God is working all things together for their good. So, no matter how difficult, they keep trusting God who orchestrated the "bad" things for their good. Thus, they prove themselves to be people who genuinely live by faith. They trust the One who they know orchestrates all of their circumstances, no matter how difficult or unjust. These are the people who believe that, *"no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"* (Hebrews 12:11). They do not disassociate God from the painful injustice as if He is not directly involved. No, they believe that He orchestrated it all, even the sins of the ungodly, so that they might become partakers of His holiness. (Note: To read the Hebrews 12 passage that describes God's direct involvement and purpose for the "bad" things that happen to us, see Appendix 2.)

Appendix 1: God's dominion over Satan and his forces.

God's involvement and control over these things cannot be fully understood by the human mind. But the Bible indicates that other powerful, spiritual forces are always involved in calamities but all under complete dominion of God.

Satan is fully under God's control: The first two chapters of the book of Job provides very important information about Satan. From the first two chapters of Job, we see how God brought about His ultimate purposes in Job and used Satan in

² To read how Satan's evil deeds accomplish God's ultimate purposes, see Appendix 1; **God's dominion over Satan and his forces.**

the process. We get a glimpse of Satan's great power, including the creation and control of a tornado. But we also learn that he can do absolutely nothing without prior approval from God. In other words, he is on an unbreakable leash. Though Satan's intentions are always and only evil, he is actually nothing but an agent that carries out God's divine purposes.

There is another event worth noting that has similarities to **the COVID 19 crisis**. In the latter years of David's life, the Bible says that God moved David to sin by taking a census of the armed forces in Israel. (The Law prohibited kings from taking a census of their armies.) *Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah"* (II Samuel 24:1). On the surface, this seems odd in light of James 1:13b: *"God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."* But I Chronicles helps us understand how God's will was accomplished. The II Samuel passage says that God moved David to number Israel. But I Chronicles 21:1 says, *"Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel."* For reasons we cannot begin to fully understand, God had purposed to bring about the destruction of 70,000 Israelites and accomplish it through David's sin. The record of this historical event does not specify how all these Israelites died but there is no indication of bloodshed. This may have been accomplished by a virus such as COVID 19.

We know that God is righteous and does not sin. But He uses Satan to bring about His ultimate purposes. The story of David's sin and the story of Joseph has a similar ring to it. Joseph's brothers committed great evil against Joseph by selling him into slavery. (Though it does not say, Satan was undoubtedly at work behind the scenes.) Near the end of the story, Joseph's brothers told him that Jacob, their father, wanted Joseph to forgive them. Joseph had already forgiven them but he assured him with the following statement. *"You meant it for evil....but God meant it for good"* (Genesis 50:20). So, we see this dynamic at work. God, who is righteous and never sins, is working all things together (including the sins of humans and evil forces) to accomplish His good and righteous purposes.

God uses the sins of humans and Satan to accomplish His grand purposes. When we factor in Satan's evil intentions with God's divine and ultimately good purposes, we can better understand verses like Isaiah 45:7: *"I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things."* The King James Version uses the word "evil" in place of calamity.

Several years ago, a tsunami killed about a quarter million people living on the coast of the Indian ocean. Many people said in response, "If God is good and sovereign over all things, how could He let this happen?" One thing we can suggest is that Satan was involved and his intentions were evil. He wanted to kill as many people as possible. But God is good and He has purposes for everything. Nothing is happening outside His control.

Someone might ask, "What can He possibly accomplish that is good by arranging for such a horrific event?" Isaiah 26:9 tells us of at least one purpose: *"When Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."* Unless the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness, they will perish and spend eternity in hell.

The second chapter of Peter's second epistle says that the great flood and the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah teach mankind that *"the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment"* (II Peter 2:9). To summarize, Satan desires to kill and destroy. He is extremely powerful but fully under God's control. Satan's intentions are always evil but God is accomplishing His good and righteous purposes through it all. Below, other information from the Bible is provided which teaches us about Satan's involvement under God's sovereign control.

Some of Satan's tactics: He blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they end up in hell.³ He snatches the Word of God from the hearts so that they end up in hell.⁴ He is always whispering into people's minds that judgment is not coming and that God does not really care about sin.⁵ Being called the tempter, he is always tempting us to disobey God and renounce

³ The *"god of this age has blinded those who do not believe"* (II Corinthians 4:4a).

⁴ *"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart"* (Matthew 13:19).

⁵ *"Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:4-5).

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our allegiance to Jesus. He often transforms himself into an “angel of light” in the form of false teachers in order to deceive them.⁶

Satan is given authority to cause us harm when we harbor pride and sin: On the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus told Peter that Satan had demanded to sift him as wheat.⁷ We read in the context that Peter was harboring pride. The Apostles were arguing with each other as to which one of them was the greatest. Also, Peter boasted that he would never forsake Jesus. It seems from Luke 22:31 that due to Peter’s pride, Satan had some sort of legal standing to demand or request permission to sift him as wheat. Pride attracts Satan and his demons because all pride is aligned with the kingdom of darkness. All presumptuous sin has its root in pride since the individual asserts himself as boss in his heart. Pride and sin always gives Satan an opening for attack. This is why we read, “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6 NASB).

Appendix 2: “Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the child-training of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He child-trains, And scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure child-training, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not child-train? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:3-11).

Thomas Bear, May 28, 2020

Οὐαὶ μοί ἐστιν ἂν μὴ εὐαγγελίζωμαι (Προς Κορινθίους Α 9:16)

⁶ “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

⁷ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31).