

Faith 1

We now come to the last three 'Gifts of the Spirit'. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 12: 8-10**, '*To one is given through the Spirit.....faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the One Spirit, to another the working of miracles.*' These three gifts are often referred to as the 'Power Gifts' because they are gifts of power enabling action to take place. Even though they are three separate gifts they usually work together because the Gift of Faith is needed for healing or a miracle to occur.

In a similar way to the other Gifts of the Spirit, the Gift of Faith is a supernatural gift given to an individual by God when He chooses to do so. We cannot earn or acquire this gift by ourselves. There are however, different kinds of faith that are not this special Gift of Faith referred to by Paul.

Natural Faith

All of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, have a natural faith. We have faith that it will be light during the day and dark at night. We have the faith that flowers will appear in the garden when we have set seeds. This sort of faith is based on what we normally see happening in our natural world.

Saving Faith

This is the faith that is necessary for salvation. It is received by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. When a person believes the gospel and accepts Jesus into his heart, then he/she is saved; this is often known as 'Saving faith'. We are not saved until the gospel has been accepted into our hearts so it is possible for people to hear the gospel, but not actually accept it as they lack this saving faith. In **Romans 10: 17** Paul writes, '*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*' It is the preaching of the Word that causes faith to arise in a person's heart. This is not the special faith to which Paul refers in Corinthians, nevertheless, it is given to us by God to enable us to believe and accept the gospel.

Other people and events

There are often other people or events that fuel the desire to hear the gospel, such as the witness of a friend or relative, an example of good living by a Christian, a hymn that is heard or seeing a healing take place. These things are all good and are part of God's nudges towards salvation, but, these things alone will not cause a person to be saved. It is **ONLY** by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ in some way that causes saving faith to enter into the heart of an individual.

On the day of Pentecost, that we can read about in **Acts 2**, the people heard the followers of Jesus speaking in other languages and this stirred up a desire within them to want to hear the gospel. Even though they were amazed by what was happening, it was not until **AFTER** they had heard Peter preach the gospel that saving faith enabled them to accept Jesus into their hearts.

In **Acts 16** we can read how Paul and Silas had been beaten, put into prison and were praying and singing hymns. God stepped into the situation and opened the prison doors. When the jailer saw what had happened and that the prisoners had not escaped, a desire came into his heart and he asked, '*What must I do to be saved?*' He had received saving faith. He invited Paul into his house to preach to himself and his family and opened up his heart to receive the good news of Jesus.

It is never too late to accept Jesus into our hearts. The thief dying on the cross at the side of Jesus had saving faith and was told by Jesus, ***Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.***

(Luke 23: 43) Many people have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ in the last few minutes of their lives, regardless of their position in life, financial status or the sort of life they have lived; it just took saving faith.

General Faith

This is the faith that all Christian believers have. Again, it is not the special faith as mentioned by Paul in Corinthians. General faith is something that grows during the believer's life. As we pray and read God's Word on a regular basis our faith becomes stronger. Each day as we live our lives and experience different circumstances, we learn to increasingly put our faith in God. We trust that He is always there to listen to us, to help us, to strengthen us when we are struggling and can be relied in whatever life throws at us. By faith we have the assurance that God loves us and wants the very best for each one of us. In **Romans 8:28** Paul writes, ***'We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.'*** We learn to trust Him even at times when events do not seem to tally with a loving God. It is our general faith that helps us to know that ultimately He is the One who is in charge of our lives.

Sadly there are times when a person gradually slows down from praying and reading the Bible and his general faith no longer seems to be as strong as it once was. There can be a number of reasons for this, such as bereavement, ill health or circumstances that have been experienced. One reason also why this can happen is because the person professed to believe in Jesus, but in fact, did not actually have saving faith. An example of this is Judas, one of the twelve disciples. He seemed and acted as if he was a believer but had never really had saving faith in the first instance.

As we exercise our general faith we receive answers to prayers as we fully put our trust in God, even though this means that He does not always answer in the way we have asked or expect or may not give us an answer for some time. Faith is one of the things mentioned as a fruit of the Spirit and as this fruit of faithfulness ripens in our lives we become more dependable and can be relied on to do what we say we will do. This sort of faith also enables us to become calmer and less flustered, helps us not to lose our tempers so easily and equips us to become less anxious or worried about things that crop up in our lives.

General Faith and the Special supernatural 'Gift of Faith'

Generally God's special 'Gift of Faith' will be given to those who are constantly making an effort to deepen their relationship with Him. The time that they spend in prayer and reading God's Word means that they will be better equipped in their general faith to recognize when God is speaking to them. Their dependability will make them more reliable to act on whatever God asks and they will be wiser and calmer in the way that they might approach any given situation. Regardless of the level of their general faith, God does not give a special 'Gift of Faith' to everyone. It is totally His choice and this does not prevent each one of us from being absolutely open to however He chooses to use us in the various 'Gifts of the Spirit' in building up and equipping the body of Christ.

Growing Strong 17 - God's special 'Gift of Faith'.