

Faith

By Dave DeWitt

Where would you put your faith, on a scale of: 0 to 100%?

I believe:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ~My children will be obedient. | ~The roof will not cave in on me. |
| ~We will win the game. | ~The airplane will get me there safely. |
| ~The Bible is true. | ~My spouse loves me. |
| ~I'm going to heaven. | ~My social security # is..... |
| ~Barack Obama loves America. | ~I'll be home for dinner. |

Faith is not a tangible thing. It's not detectable through our senses. Like hope and love, you can't see it, smell it, touch it, hear it, or taste it. So, for example, the animals have no awareness of it. Yet it's everywhere. Faith is like morality in that we (humans) all have it. We are incapable of not having it. We are stuck with it. I may have no faith in some things and much faith in other things, but I must have some faith in some things.

Spiritual creatures cannot, operate without faith. That's because we cannot escape thoughts about our future, our short-term plans, and long-term destiny. We do not simply wander aimlessly in life responding to our instincts (hopefully). We get up in the morning and have plans for our day. So we make a decision to trust our breakfast not to poison us, our car not to break down, our house or school or workplace not to fall in on us, our computers, cell phones, and various machines to work, all based upon evidence but without 100% certainty. So the questions about faith do not have to do with whether we have faith, or should have faith, or need faith. Faith is simply unavoidable. Its existence is obvious. The questions which are not obvious are:

- What it is? Can we arrive at a useful definition of faith?
- Where did it come from? What happens inside me to cause me to believe?
- When is it good or bad? When is faith helpful or destructive?
- How is it increased or decreased? How do I get more faith, and what causes it to dwindle?

Faith As Defined In The Dictionary

In English, the words "faith" and "belief" are exactly the same. Our language just happens to have two words for the same thing. In the dictionary, one will often be used to define the other, but that is an illegitimate definition because it tells us nothing at all. Faith and belief are not just synonyms, they express the exact same idea. Therefore, it is illegitimate to use one word to define the other. It is like saying $x=x$. So what! It tells me nothing. Sorry, but I'm an old mathematician, and it's just meaningless to use the word we are defining in our definition. So the dictionary is no help.

Faith As Described in Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:1 says, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* That tells me what faith does. Hebrews 11 says that faith, once I have it, gives me *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* This tells me that faith, once I have it, allows me to live with that assurance. The word for *assurance* is ὑπόστασις (*hupostasis*). It means the

essence of my hope. Once I have faith, it gives me the essence of my hope. So faith is definitely tied to hope. But how do I get that faith in the first place?

Faith Comes From God

Of course, our faith is in the sovereign plan of God the Father (Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 1:3-11; 2:8-10), paid for by God the Son (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 John 2:2), and it is offered to us by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 22:14; Romans 8:9-16; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:13; 5:5). Whatever God's part is in predetermining our faith and offering us faith, it is up to Him. It is not something I can manipulate or arrange. Therefore, it is not something I am accountable for. What I am concerned about is what I **am** accountable for. So what I am discussing here is what **we** do when we make a decision to believe.

It is a personal free-will decision we make, which we are held accountable for. We know it is therefore (somehow) not manipulated by God, because it is judged by God. If it all just came from God, then God would be judging Himself. So faith is 100% from the sovereignty of God and 100% from the free will of man. But I want to talk about our 100%.

A General Working Definition

Next, I want to give you my general definition of faith. Then I will tell you how I got there and why I think it's important.

FAITH IS TRUST WITHOUT CERTAINTY

Or to flesh that out a bit:

FAITH IS A DECISION TO TRUST THE EVIDENCE WITHOUT 100% CERTAINTY

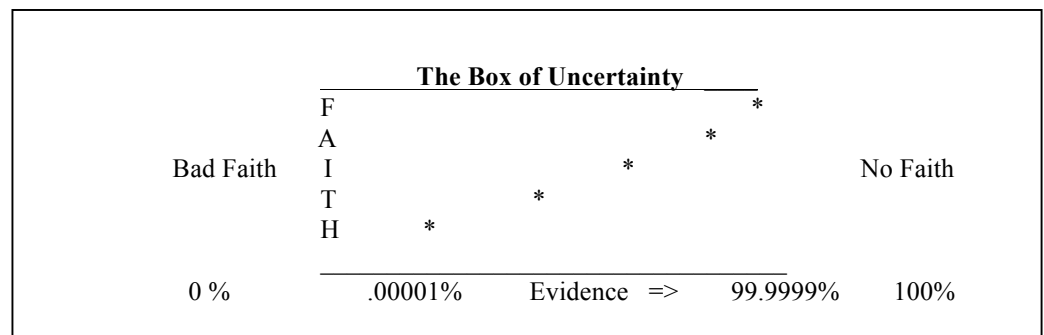
I think that it is most helpful to discuss this definition from right to left as I have written it. So

- I will begin with the concept of **uncertainty**
- Then I will discuss **trusting the evidence**
- Finally, I will talk about what is involved in the **decision to trust**

Faith Is When There Is Less Than 100% Certainty

Faith is operative when confidence is less than 100%. Consider the list I began with. I will have a different amount of confidence about different items on the list above. I may have more confidence in my knowledge of my social security number than that we will win the game. But none are at 100%. The more confidence I have, the more faith I have, until that reaches 100%. At that point faith ends.

100% assurance is certainty. And faith is antithetical to certainty. The two cannot exist together. For example, we never hear of the faith of Jesus. God cannot



have faith because He has certainty about everything. Adam did not have faith in God when He talked with Him in the Garden of Eden. But Adam did need to have faith that he would die if he ate the forbidden fruit. Abraham did not have to believe in God when He talked to him in Ur and Haran and in the land (Genesis 15:7). But then one night God *took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”* **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness** (Genesis 15:5-6). Abraham did not need to believe in God, he was standing there talking to Him. But Abraham did need to believe God that his descendants would be uncountably numerous. That was not what Abraham could ever know with certainty. *Genesis 15:7 And He said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”*

But for us, it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). So we can never have 100% certainty about God, Jesus, or salvation this side of heaven. If we do, then we do not have faith, and it's impossible for us to please God. We can have very good assurance. We can have enough confidence so that we can say we know that we have eternal life (Roman 8:16; 1 John 5:13), but that knowledge can never give us 100% certainty or faith would be eliminated.

I suggest there are only three things I can be certain of:

1. I exist. [Since I have to exist to deny my existence, my existence is undeniable.]
2. The universe exists. [I cannot be certain of the nature of the universe, but since I really exist, I must exist in some real place, so that place must really exist.]
3. Reason must be used to determine reality. [That does not mean my reason will always lead me to truth, but reason is the only means of finding truth. If I say reason does not lead to reality, you can ask me if that is a reasonable statement about reality, if not, there is no reason to believe it.]

Everything else requires faith. So faith is involved in every predictive action. Since no one but God can be certain about the future.

Faith Follows the Evidence

Let's go back to our definition of faith.

FAITH IS A DECISION TO TRUST THE EVIDENCE WITHOUT 100% CERTAINTY

We have discussed the far right side of the definition—**certainty**. Now I'd like to talk about the middle—**trusting the evidence**. Going back to Abraham, he believed God because he had the evidence that God had spoken to him with a verbal audible message, and God's word had come true. Actually, God offered Abraham that as evidence for his faith. God said: *“I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it”* (Genesis 15:7). Abraham was asked to put his trust in the direction of the evidence, not to believe without evidence or to believe before there was evidence.

There are three ways (at least I am only aware of three ways) to deal with evidence with respect to faith. I will call them **Secular Faith**, **Religious Faith**, and **Biblical Faith**. [Obviously, I am claiming the first two are false views and the third is the correct view.]

Secular Faith — Trust Without Evidence

Secular (worldly, non-Christian) faith is imagination-based trust in someone or something by departing from reason applied to the real world. To the secularist, faith in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and God are all the same—a departure from reason applied to observations in the real world. Secular faith is an aspect of creative imagination, or “thinking outside the box.” So, for example, Steven Spielberg said it was healthy for children to see the “Star Wars” movies because it taught them about faith (from my memory, not a direct quote). So the secularist thinks it is healthy to lie to your kids about Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy because it allows children to practice having faith (imagination-based trust in someone or something by departing from reason applied to the real world). The secular view of religious faith is the same. So they view Christianity the same way. Near as I can tell, all religions, except biblical Christianity and some forms of Judaism, are based on this (secular) kind of faith. For example, Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon and Mohammed’s Koran were supposedly revealed by an angel who nobody else ever saw or heard. **The same number of people witnessed “the angel Gabriel” revealing the Koran to Mohammed, and the “angel Moroni” revealing the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith, as witnessed Santa Claus going from chimney to chimney.**

Religious Faith — Trust Precedes Evidence

Religious faith is faith-ism, technically known as “fideism.” It says that everybody must ultimately base their ideas on faith. Fideism says ultimately there is no evidence for anything. For example, Muslims accept the Koran by faith, Christians accept the Bible by faith, Hindus accept the Gita by faith, evolutionists accept evolution by faith, creationists accept creation by faith, etc. Fideism claims that to admit one’s own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is, therefore, to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, circular reasoning. Christian fideists claim that faith alone is the way to God. Examples of Christian fideism include sayings like, “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it,” “Only believe, only believe, all things are possible, only believe,” and “Some may doubt that God’s Word is true, I’ve chosen to believe it, how about you?”

But there are serious problems with fideism. A fideist must be asked if there is a justification for his faith. If no reason is given, then there is no reason to believe it. On-the-other-hand, if someone makes a justification and offers a reason to believe it (which they often do), then they are not fideists. For example, to say “the reason to believe in fideism is because presuppositions are unavoidable” is a rational, not a fideist, argument. Whenever I give reasons for my faith, my faith is based on reason, not on faith. There is no such thing as a “faith” argument. The two words contradict each other. The fideist must deny his fideism to make a case for it. So either it offers no reasons at all or it offers self-defeating ones. [Keep in mind that I am here defining faith as they do—trust precedes evidence. In other words, I must first trust something, like, say, the Bible, then I can understand things based upon that trust.]

If we can simply believe without justification, then so can any idiotic or insane person believe in nonsense. Also, one is faced with contradictions being true. If the Bible is true because it is believed, then so are the Koran and the Gita. If truth is determined by faith, then there is no difference between sense and nonsense, sanity and insanity, or reality and mythology.

Fideism fails to distinguish between a belief “in” and a belief “that.” Faith is not the way to know God. It is impossible to have an intelligent belief **in** God unless one first has some way to know **that** there is a God in whom to believe. Certainly believing opens the door for more understanding (John

6:69), and that increased understanding can lead to more faith. But the faith is based on the understanding. The understanding comes before and is the foundation of the faith. Jesus said: *And the one on whom seed was sown on **the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty***” (Matthew 13:23). Through Isaiah, God said: *An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master’s manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand* (Isaiah 1:3).

In the Bible, faith is not a blind leap. Faith is a rational decision which extends beyond what is observed but not in contradiction to it (John 1:12). It’s going out on a limb but not going in some direction other than that of the limb.

Biblical Faith (Good or Ideal Faith) — Trust in the Evidence

“Secular faith” says that faith is removed from evidence. “Religious faith” says that faith comes before we consider the evidence. Biblical faith says faith comes after an understanding of the evidence. Hebrews 11:1 says: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. Notice this is a generic or general description of faith. The Bible does not describe some special kind of faith, it tells us what any and all good faith actually is. Hebrews 11:1 tells us faith is connected to assurance and conviction, not imagination that departs from reality.

Paul told Timothy to *have nothing to do with worldly fables* (1 Timothy 4:7) like say, Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, Joseph Smith or Mohammed getting words from an angel who nobody else ever saw or heard. Paul told Timothy to have nothing to do with faith that is without reason applied to real observations in the real world. For example, when Paul quoted Habakkuk to the Romans, he said: *the righteous man shall live by faith* (Romans 1:17; Habakkuk 2:4). But then he followed that with 15 verses of evidence for the faith of *the righteous man*. So the righteous man is one who makes a rational decision to trust the objectively verifiable evidence.

When Peter and John were arrested in Jerusalem, the officials told them to stop speaking about Christ. Their response was interesting. We read:

But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.” And when they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened (Acts 4:19-21).

The reason Peter and John gave for proclaiming the Gospel was not that they had some new religion to promote or some blind faith for people to accept, rather they said, *we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard*. And the reason the people believed their message was not because the people were accepting a blind faith but *because they were all glorifying God for what had happened*. The faith of both the apostles and the people was based on trusting the publically verifiable evidence that they *have seen and heard* and the rationally verifiable evidence of *what had happened*.

Later, Peter wrote:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Peter told us that his faith is not without evidence, *we did not follow cleverly devised tales*. Nor did Peter's faith create the evidence. The evidence was *we were eyewitnesses of His majesty*. His faith was based in the evidence *we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven*. So for Peter, faith in Christ meant a rational decision to trust the objectively verifiable evidence they had observed in the real world.

Faith and Wisdom

There is a lot of overlap between faith and wisdom. Both are connected to the evidence. The difference between wisdom and faith is that wisdom is an understanding of what usually happens most of the time. Wisdom is about regular things, not just evidential things. Wisdom is a firm grasp of the obvious. It looks at the evidence and determines what usually happens most of the time. So it is foolish to be lazy and wise to work hard. It's foolish to borrow and wise to save. But it would not be wise to believe someone who claimed he would raise from the dead. Because the resurrection from the dead is not a regular event. But faith would act on the truth of an unusual event if there was objective verifiable evidence for it. Wisdom would never be based on miracles because by definition miracles are unusual events. Faith might, however, be based on miracles, if there was good evidence for them.

Bad Faith

We know it's bad to place faith in a bad object. It's bad to place faith in a cult leader, skate out on thin ice, or plan to get rich from the lottery. Cult leaders, thin ice, and lottery tickets are a poor object for faith. But what makes them a bad object for faith? I suggest what makes them bad is the faith in them is not close to the evidence. The evidence tells us that cult leaders, thin ice, and lottery tickets are not reliable.

But it is not bad to trust leaders, ice, and tickets. Suppose there is objective verifiable evidence that a certain leader, some call a cultist, is actually a teacher of truth. What if there is objective verifiable evidence that the ice is thick enough for skating? What if there is objective verifiable evidence that this is the winning ticket? Then the faith changes from bad to good. So the quality of faith goes up and down with the evidence. The greater the evidence (reason applied to reality), the better (more reliable) the faith. The more disconnected it is from the evidence, the worse (more dangerous) the faith.

Which of these would you consider to be good faith and bad faith?

- I believe in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- I believe God told me to witness to you.
- I believe God told me to marry you.
- I believe God will make me wealthy if I buy this business.
- I believe in Santa Claus.
- I believe I am going to heaven.
- I believe God will give me a parking place.
- I believe Allah revealed the Koran to Mohammed.
- I believe all believers in all religions go to heaven.
- I believe in my lucky shirt.
- I believe God speaks to me through my circumstances.
- I believe God wants all Christians to be rich and healthy.
- I believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God.
- I believe I don't have to go for cancer treatments because God will heal me.

Some of these you would say are good to believe and some not. But in all cases, **the ones you consider to be bad faith should be those for which there is not objective verifiable evidence.** For example, there is good objective verifiable evidence for the infallibility of the Bible, but not for believers of all religions going to heaven. There is objective verifiable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, but not that God will make me wealthy.

But what about personal convictions? I may believe God put something into the circumstances of my life to turn me in a certain direction, but what is the objectively verifiable evidence for that? If it cannot be objectively verified by credible evidence outside of my personal convictions, then to believe it is bad faith. As mentioned above, this is why (what I have called) religious faith and secular faith is always bad. They are both a departure from verifiable evidence.

Little Faith

Weak faith or what Christ called “little faith” is a little good faith. It is only trusting the evidence a little. It is good faith in that it is based in evidence, but it holds back in a decision to trust that evidence. Bad faith may be great or small, but it is separated from the evidence. Good faith may be great or small, but it is connected to the evidence. For example:

- Matthew 6:30 *“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of **little faith!**”*
This is looking at the objectively verifiable evidence that God takes care of nature but only believing to some extent that He will take care of me.
- Matthew 8:26 *He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men **of little faith?**” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.*
They believed based on verifiable evidence that Jesus was the Messiah but did not have enough trust in that evidence to believe that He could calm the sea.
- Matthew 14:31 *Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of **little faith,** why did you doubt?”*
Peter had enough evidence to trust Jesus when He got out of the boat because Jesus was walking on the water. And that was objectively verifiable because all of them saw it. But then Peter began to look at the waves, and his trust dwindled.
- Matthew 16:8 *But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of **little faith,** why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?”*
There was objectively verifiable evidence that Jesus could create bread. The disciples believed that but not in this situation. They had good faith but only a little of it.

Faith Is a Decision

There is a third element in faith. First, we have talked about faith existing where there is less than 100% certainty. Second, we determined that faith follows the evidence. But there is a third crucial element—faith is also a decision. John 1:12 says:

*But as many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe** in His name.*

So “believe” is described with the word “receive.” And receiving involves some sort of a decision. In order to receive something, I have to make some sort of decision. To be given something is not the same as receiving it. A man might give a girl an engagement ring, but she isn’t engaged until she makes the decision to receive it. All day long I make decisions to believe. I decide to trust my breakfast, my coffee, my car, my computer, and so forth, as mentioned before. But that trust is always a decision. What makes me decide to trust those things or people?

Our faith is based in who we are, and it is what we are judged for. It cannot be completely analyzed, so I shall call it our **desires**. Why did the Pharisees not believe in Jesus, when the apostles did? Both had basically the same evidence for His being the Messiah, but the Pharisees thought He was demonic. As I study the Pharisees, it seems to me the difference was that the Pharisees had a lot to lose if they accepted Jesus as the Christ. They had a lifestyle, a system of governing, a source of power and authority, all based in the rabbinic traditions, which they would have to give up if they believed in Jesus. They did not accept Jesus as the Christ because they didn't want to.

In James 2:19, it says that demons also believe what the Christians believe about the unity of God, but they do not have works (*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*) In other words, demons have much of the same evidence we have, yet they do not believe in the sense of receiving Christ. Why not? Why did they choose to follow Satan? Apparently, it was because they wanted to. They liked Satan's idea of being *like the Most High*. Desire was a factor in their faith.

For years, John Madden was a football coach and commentator for the NFL. Although he traveled the length and width of the country every week, he refused to fly on airplanes. Instead, he traveled the country in his personal bus. I am sure if you laid out the facts about the relative safety of flying, Madden would agree. Madden is no idiot. He understands the evidence about the safety of airplanes. But he is not about to get on one. He chooses to not have faith in airplanes because his desires are contrary to the evidence.

So there is another element in faith beyond the evidence—desire to act in accordance with that evidence. When our desires are contrary to the evidence, we have bad faith, or at least we refuse to have good faith. So we can add this to our understanding of good faith.

Good faith occurs when we our desires are placed in the direction of the evidence.

So there is both an objective and subjective element in faith.

- The **objective element** is the verifiable evidence.
- The **subjective element** is an inward desire.

Good faith is turning our subjective desires in the direction of the objective evidence.

Going back to our definition of good faith. Remember:

FAITH IS TRUST WITHOUT CERTAINTY

In other words:

FAITH IS A DECISION TO TRUST THE EVIDENCE WITHOUT 100% CERTAINTY

The element of personal desire tells us more about the first aspect of the definition. The application decision in good faith will be made in part (the subjective part) based upon placing our desire in the direction of the evidence. The conversion of the Apostle Paul was a change in his desires. In Acts 9:1-2, we read:

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

So the chapter begins with Paul's desires focused on persecuting Christians. He did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. But then new evidence appeared. Let's read verses 3 and 4:

And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..."

Paul was blinded and led into the city. Then God sent Paul a vision that a man named *Ananias* would restore his sight. After *Ananias* came, Paul received his sight, was baptized, and we read in verse 20: *immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."* So Paul changed his desires when the evidence changed. When he misunderstood the evidence, his faith decision was wrong. When he received verifiable evidence, he placed his desire in the direction indicated by the evidence, and began proclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God. His desires were so radically changed that he could later say: *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). But as we begin to explore the area of desire, we began to bridge the gap between faith and hope, because we know the two are connected. *Faith is the evidence [or essence] of things hoped for.* But before we leave the subject of faith, we need to explore a few other areas.

Trials and Faith

There is nothing in the Bible to confirm the common idea that "trials strengthen our faith." And that's important because that very common idea leads people to the wrong source for strengthening their faith. Let's take a look at some examples. Just what can *trials* do, and not do?

Jesus told Peter:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32).

So if Peter's faith didn't fail, he would be better able to **strengthen his brothers**. But we read nothing about the trial strengthening his faith (as with 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Quite the contrary. His faith might fail. His faith was being tested, not strengthened. If his faith was strong enough going into the trial, he would be able to strengthen his brothers.

Peter wrote this:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

So the testing of a believer's faith may **result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ**. But the text says nothing about trials resulting in more faith. Trials prove your faith (one way or the other), but they do not strengthen your faith.

James said we should:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

So James said we should rejoice in trials because **they produces endurance** and the completion of maturity. But that is true if and only if we have good faith going into the trial. James said that, if you have good faith, you can rejoice about trials because

Faith + Trials = Maturity
Not Faith → Maturity

James says nothing about trials producing more faith or improving our faith.

We can, therefore, see that:

- Trials can improve our capacity for ministry (Luke 22:32), but they not improve our faith.
- Trials can result in greater rewards in heaven (1 Peter 1:6-7), but they cannot create faith.
- Trials can produce endurance (James 1:2-4), but they cannot produce more or better faith.

Trials **prove** our faith but do **not improve** our faith. Trials are like tests in school, they test our knowledge, but their purpose is not to give us more knowledge. As a result of being tested, we may be qualified for a better job or position, but the test was never about giving us more or better knowledge. In the same way, tests of our faith are not about giving us more faith. Faithful people have trials and come out stronger and more mature. Weak-faith people have trials and doubt their faith. Atheists have trials and say: “ See, if there was a God He would not have allowed this.”

Of course, those of us who have taken a lot of tests over the years understand that we can learn something from the test itself. That’s true, but that’s not the purpose of the test, and it’s true of any experience. True, we can learn more about life and acquire new understanding from trials. Then we have new verifiable evidence which we should decide to trust. In that case, trials can improve our faith. But so might pleasures. So might exciting things and boring things, tedious things and new things. So might almost anything. It has nothing to do with trials per se. Once we believe, it brings us to a new level of awareness that opens the windows of new understanding and hence the possibility of more faith. As Peter said in John 6:69, *And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.* But there is nothing particularly faith-building about trials.

It is as if a first-time flyer and an airline pilot are both passengers on a flight from (say) Chicago to LA. In route, there is a lot of turbulence. The airline pilot (mildly irritated because he spilled his drink) has faith in the airplane. The first-time flyer (gripping the seat handles and gritting his teeth) does not. When the airplane reaches LA, the airline pilot says, “See I knew these planes could be trusted.” The first-time flyer says: “See I told you these planes were not to be trusted.” The faith going into the turbulent flight determined the outcome for each of them and created faith in neither.

The Source of Faith

There is only one thing that creates and improves faith—**revelation**, the disclosure of information not previously known. The reason the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles were willing to die for their faith was that they had direct revelation from God. We don’t have that, but we do have a record of that—in the Bible. If you want to strengthen your faith, read and study the Word of God, because *faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17).

That’s true in every aspect of faith. It is true of my faith in God, but it is also true of my faith in airplanes, computers, medicine, everywhere I must make applications without certainty. The more I know, the more faith I can have. In these cases, knowledge is a form of revelation. That’s why some trials seem to produce faith, because they (like much of life) lead to a better understanding.

The Results of Faith

There is no inconsistency between our faith and our lifestyle. Faith comes from revelation. Good faith comes from objectively verifiable revelation. The amount of faith we have increases with our revelation. We all have different amounts of faith, but whatever faith we have, it is increased by revelation and decreased by ignoring revelation. But how do I know if I have good faith? Both Christ

and James seem to say that you can look at your works, that is, your obedience to Christ. There is no inconsistency between our works and our faith.

Jesus said there is no such thing as a good person who does bad works and a bad person who does good works. The tree and the fruit are consistent.

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit (Matthew 7:16-18).

James said there is no inconsistency between your works and your faith.

But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" (James 2:18-21).

The Effects of Faith

Biblical faith allows us to do anything we believe in. The result of good, true, biblically-defined faith is that I can do anything that is consistent with the rationally verifiable evidence. When that rationally-verifiable evidence points to what God is doing, then I can do that. Twice Jesus said if you had faith you could throw a mountain into the sea.

- *Matthew 17:20* And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.
- *Matthew 21:21* And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.

During the same incident Jesus said:

- *Mark 9:23* All things are possible to him who believes."
- *Mark 9:24* Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

Nobody actually ever cast a mountain into the sea. Moses came close. He parted the sea. But, of course, Jesus is using a hyperbolic statement to make a point. Jesus' point is not that anybody, who believes they can do it, can cast a mountain into the sea. Nor is He saying that the one who believes can accomplish whatever he wants. Insane and foolish people believe stuff like that all the time. The classic example is the Jim Jones' cult who drank the poisoned Kool-Aid. They're great faith only accomplished their death. The same goes for people who refuse medical treatment, believing God will heal them, and Muslim suicide bombers.

The faith Jesus was talking about is an accomplishment of rational people who have made a decision to trust real evidence, even if that trust is (hyperbolically speaking) as small as a mustard seed. All I need is enough trust to get on an airplane in order for the airplane to get me there. But all the trust in the world in a cardboard box with a propeller on the front won't get me there. The faith of a mustard seed is enough, if it defines trust in rationally verifiable evidence. *All things are possible to him who believes* in rational verifiable evidence which tells *him who believes* what God is doing. In Mark 9, Jesus helped the boy's father's unbelief by healing the boy. That gave the father rationally verifiable evidence to trust in Jesus.

When that real verifiable evidence points to what God is doing, and we put our trust in that, then faith allows us to participate in what God is doing. Let's go back to Moses. When he parted the Red Sea, he did it as a rational person who made a reasonable decision to trust the verifiable evidence (God's voice from a burning bush and ten plagues in Egypt) to accomplish the will of God. For Moses, it was an act of faith because he could not be 100% certain the Red Sea would part until after it parted. But his faith (even if it was as small as a mustard seed) moved the water of the Red Sea because it was in the will of God to do that. Moses could not have moved an Egyptian Pyramid, nor parted the water of the Nile, no matter how much faith he had that he could do it. Because that's not what God was doing. The reason Jesus could do what He did [calming the Sea of Galilee, and raising Himself and others from the dead, are comparable or greater than casting a mountain into the sea] is because what He did was perfectly in the will of God.