Does Everyone Have Faith?

A discussion of Romans 12: 3

This study is actually a couple of e-mails that were exchanged between a "free-willer" and myself. It concerns a statement by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12: 3. The issue here being addressed is primarily the issue of free will, and the question: "Does every man has "faith?"

As with any of this correspondence material, names and personal items have been changed or eliminated to protect peoples privacy.

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From:******
To: Pastor Earl Jackson
Subject: My thoughts on free will

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> ..."God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Romans 12:3
>
> According to this verse, God has given to every man the measure of
> faith. Everyone has faith. God has given it. Somewhere in each human
> heart, there is faith.
>
> This must apply to all men of all time. Even Old Testament Abraham
> exercised faith. Noah had faith. One must also say Adam had faith. God
> has built this potential inside everyone of us.
>
> But what happens to this faith. We obviously don?t see faith in people
> until they have an encounter with the living God. So either this faith
> is dead on the inside of us, or it has simply been suppressed. Maybe
> it is both. It seems that people have been given a measure of faith,
> but it is either dead or at least dormant.
>
> Now what is it specifically that prevents faith from rising up. Is it
> not our sin and unbelief? The bible is clear that whatsoever is not of
> faith is sin. Sin is the opposite of faith. Therefore sin must be the

> thing is countering the faith that God wants to rule in our hearts. In
> other words sin stops faith from happening. What other principle can
> be countering the faith that God has placed in each and every person
> born on earth? It has to be unbelief resulting in sin that prevents
> this faith from presenting itself.
>
> Where did this sin come from? The bible says we are responsible. Men
> are without excuse. (Rom 1:20) Man has made the choice to sin. And it
> is our will that keeps us in sin and thus prevents faith from becoming
> reality. In other words, if sin and unbelief is our responsibility,
> then our will must be in there somewhere. If our will is not in there
> when we talk about responsibility, then the responsibility lies
> outside of us. A force independent of us has invaded. We had nothing
> to do with it if our will was not involved. Does anyone really believe
> this in light of what scripture teaches about man?s responsibility?
>
> No! Man has willfully chosen sin. Otherwise the creator has chosen sin
> for us. This would mean that the One who gives faith to each one, also
> prevents faith from manifesting itself in our lives and therefore is
> responsible for this state we find ourselves in.
>
> So what do you think? Is it God's work? or is it man's unbelief and
> love of sin that prevents faith from taking root? Who is responsible
> for this suppression of faith, God or man?
>
> In order to be consistent, "sovereignty" people must say it is God
> that prevents faith from taking root. But taking this to it's logical
> conclusion, then God is responsible for our sin, since faith and sin
> are opposites.. Do these people want to take this position?
>
> I believe the bible is clear that man is responsible for his sin. It
> is our sin that keeps faith from manifesting itself in the human
> heart. The sin within each one has prevented this faith from
> manifesting itself. The faith God gave us is still there, but it is
> impotent and powerless because of us. Our unbelief and our love of sin
> keeps faith dormant.
>
> But praise God, when sinful man hears a message about Christ,
> something deep within is stirred. Something is coming to life. It is
> that faith that God has long ago planted on the inside of each of us.
> All along this faith has had the potential to spring to life and
> become effective. Once faith starts to be stirred up, it has the power
> to overcome our unbelief.
>
> We don't choose to stop our unbelief. We don't choose to stop sinning.

> The faith that God has put there has the power to put an end to
> unbelief and sin.
>
> Remember, the faith is still of God. It was and is God's faith. God is
> the author of our salvation. We cannot say it was our faith that saved
> us.
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> In conclusion, salvation is totally and completely of God. The bible
> is clear that he has provided the way. He has chosen us.
>
> Yet the bible says we are responsible for our sin and unbelief, which
> implies an act of our will. Therefore if we are in some way
> responsible for our sin, then consequently we are responsible to let
> the faith of God have its way with us.

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Date: ********
From: Earl Jackson
To: *********
Subject: An Answer to your email of **Date** concerning your thoughts on free will.

I found your thoughts on free will to be very interesting. Your viewpoint, if I were to hold it, would solve several theological problems for me. You pointed out some of the things that it would solve. It would solve the problem <u>human responsibility</u>. You put it this way, "if sin and unbelief is our responsibility, then our will must be in there somewhere. If our will is not in there when we talk about responsibility, then the responsibility lies outside of us. A force independent of us has invaded. We had nothing to do with it if our will was not involved. Does anyone really believe this in the light of what scripture teaches about man's responsibility?"

This clearly solves the problem of <u>free will</u>. Since man has faith, he can clearly operate either in positive volition, or negative volition toward God. Free will gives his choices validity. Free will keeps man responsible, and also makes mans decisions meaningful. If man did not have faith, he would be a robot, and would not be able to believe.

It would also solve the problem of the <u>Sovereignty of God.</u> as you pointed out, "In order to be consistent, 'sovereignty' people must say it is God that prevents faith from taking root. But taking this topic to it's logical conclusion, then God is responsible for our sin, since faith and sin are opposites. Do these people want to take this position?"

This concept, which you have proposed would also solve the problem of total depravity, because the presence of faith in every man would be like a little spark of divinity that could simply be fanned by the Holy Spirit at some point and man would be saved. You point out that; "God has built this potential inside everyone of us". "But praise God, when sinful man hears a message about Christ, something deep within is stirred. Something is coming to life. It is that faith that God has long ago planted on the inside of each of us. All along this faith has had the potential to spring to life and become effective. Once faith starts to be stirred up, it has the power to overcome our unbelief".

It would also solve the problem of the justice of God, because it is unfair for Him to judge men for something which it appears that He himself caused. This is what you are getting at when you say, "Man has willfully chosen sin. Otherwise the creator has chosen sin for us. This would mean that the One who gives faith to each one, also prevents faith from manifesting itself in our lives and is therefore responsible for the state we find ourselves in."

I can think of more problems that this concept would solve. It would solve the problem of evangelism, because "Everyone has faith. God has given it. Somewhere in each human heart there is faith". So there should be no need to evangelize because every man already has faith, and "This must apply to all men of all time".

It would also solve the problem of common grace because it adequately explains why God does good things for bad people…it is because they have faith buried deep down inside.

It would also explain the Love of God. We know that "God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son". Since He cannot tolerate sin in His presence, His love would be misplaced if men did not have faith. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin". God can love the world because "Everyone has faith. God has given it. Somewhere in each human heart, there is faith".

This solves the problem of the Atonement. We do not need to worry about the extent of the atonement…Limited? or Universal? because it can only be one thing…universal! The Atonement is for every man, because: "Everyone has faith. God has given it. Somewhere in each human heart, there is faith". So Christ died for everyone, because everyone has faith.

This solves the problem of hell.   God cannot send people with faith to hell. So there is no need for hell, at least as far as humans are concerned. This is really a wonderful problem to solve, because nobody wants to think about other people, especially loved ones, burning in hell throughout eternity. The idea of maximum human suffering and extreme torture at the hand of God is totally repugnant. This problem alone makes me want to embrace your concept immediately. I have always struggled with the idea that a just God would not create people to burn throughout eternity. So with this concept, He didn't do that, instead He simply gives everyone faith, and no one goes to hell. I like that.

It really makes sense. I can accept this concept very easily.

This concept also solves the problem of <u>predestination</u>. Man determines his own will. He chooses what he wants, and not what somebody else wants. He is self-determining, and since he has faith already, he doesn't need God to give it to him.

I can think of several other problems which your concept would solve. As we have seen, it solves Human Responsibility, Free Will, Divine Sovereignty, Total Depravity, Divine Justice, Evangelism, Common Grace, The Love of God, the Atonement, Hell and Predestination just to name a few. I could also add, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of sanctification, and the doctrine of the second coming of Christ.   Any doctrine which can solve so many problems, certainly sounds good to me. That is why I had to give it an honest hearing, and pay it a due consideration. It is one of the most appealing sounding concepts that I have ever heard. It is indeed a very nice doctrinal construction. Who would not want to embrace such a problem solving concept? Not only that, as you pointed out, It is Logical; whereas other systems when "taken to their logical conclusions" make God to be the author of sin. I am amazed at how many different doctrines are affected by your concept. Indeed, it involves almost every major doctrine of the Bible. This is one of the reasons I did not immediately respond to you. The concept here is so big, it affects our understanding of the entire Bible. But that is precisely why red flags went up the moment I read what you wrote. What you wrote is too good, because it solves too many theological problems, and that is exactly what is wrong with your doctrine.

What you have expressed is human viewpoint, and not divine viewpoint. Humanistically it is very good…very appealing…very easy to comprehend…very smooth to the human intellect…very soft to the human conscience…very respective of the human will. Humanly speaking it is about as good as it gets. With this doctrine, we can have our theological cake and eat it too. But it is humanism pure and simple, and that is what is wrong with it.

With that being said, I am somewhat at a loss of where to begin to address the validity of your system and your understanding of free will. If you indeed believe things the way that you have wrote them in this email, then you are going to have one difficult and painful struggle to clear your mind and relearn things the way that they really are in God's word. Because the truth is not so pleasant and soft as the doctrine which you have expressed. If you are indeed a truth seeker, as I believe that you are, you will have a lot of favorite concepts to unlearn. I know that this email, and my former email to you are all part of your process to come to the knowledge of the truth. It is really a good thing that you did not start "preaching" this stuff in a pulpit, because you would be leading people into grave error. It is the kind of error that can result in totally lost people thinking that they are saved, and ending up in the firey lake of brimstone. Let me show you why. (And please don't get offended and close your heart here. This is what you need to know).

I will try to follow along with what you wrote. That is the simplest way for me to address it.

"God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" Romans 12: 3.

On this verse you have constructed your entire theory of the notion that God has given faith to every man. You said "According to this verse, God has given to every man the measure of faith. Everyone has faith. God has given it. Somewhere in each human heart, there is faith". This is the foundation for your entire concept. But it is a very poor foundation to base such a far reaching, doctrinal concept upon. Your doctrine revamps almost every major doctrine of the Bible, through its notion that all men have faith because this verse says something similar to that. If people are supposed to believe what you are saying, then you have to find verses which do not contradict other verses in the Bible, and you have to find verses which are rock solid and which people can base their faith upon, without any doubt. The verse you have chosen is not that kind of a verse. I'll show you why.

The verse, if you read it in context, is talking about not thinking more highly about yourself then you should. We are told to have transformative thinking in verse 2. The first half of verse three, which you neglected to quote, speaks about "the grace that is given to every man which is among you". The "every-man" mentioned in the first half of the verse is the same as the "every man" in the second half of the verse. Who is it? It is "every man that is among you". They are the believers in the church at Rome. In fact the very next verse calls them many members in one Body. In fact, that is what this whole passage is talking about. The gifts which should function among the many members of the body of Christ. "Every man among you". That is the correct context and interpretation. "God has dealt to every man (among you), to every man (in the Body of Christ) a measure of faith".

If you simply read some of the other translations of this text it will be quite clear, because most of the translations of the second half of the verse correctly leave out the word "man" altogether, because the word "man" (anthropos) does not appear in the Greek. Most of the newer translations, which I'm sure you must have read (I'm confused as to why you decided to use the King James), translate the second half of the verse similar to the English Standard Version which reads, "each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned." Most of the modern translations simply say "each" not "every man". "Each" is correct, but even if you were to use "every man" you would not conclude that it is talking about every man who has ever lived, as you indicated, if you left the second part of the verse together with the first part of the verse and included the important connecting words (which you left out) "According as". So what you did here was, you removed a phrase out of it's context, you isolated it from the other half of it's verse. Then you chose a translation which supports your view, but which is really a poor translation of the text. Next you stretched the disjointed phrase all out of proportion and made it mean something to all men, of all time, in all places, without exception. That is requiring an awful lot of one little phrase taken out of context.

So what you should have done, when selecting your text, is look to find other verses which say the same thing. Perhaps you did that? I did, and I could not find a single verse anywhere else in the Bible that seemed to say, "God has given faith to every man", which is what you are asserting that Rom. 12: 3 is saying. Now if it were true that God had given faith to every man, in all time, don't you think He would have told us about it somewhere else in His book? This is such a radical and life changing doctrine that it seems to me that God would have annunciated it way back in Genesis rather than waiting 4,000 years for the apostle Paul to spell it out in a relatively obscure letter to a small bunch of Roman believers. Something is not right with this picture.

One of the fundamental laws of Biblical interpretation, which you need to know, especially if your going to become a pastor, is that you can never base a doctrine upon only one verse of scripture. It is an ancient principle that "At the mouth of two or three witnesses let every word be confirmed" (Matt. 18: 16; Numb. 35: 30; Deut 17: 16; 2Cor. 13: 1). One verse is simply not enough upon which to base a major doctrine. You need to verify this for yourself, however, and not take my word for it. There are no other verses in the Bible even remotely related to the idea that every person has faith. They simply are not there. I looked diligently for them, and could not find them. If I could find even one, I would concider your view wholeheartedly. But there are no verses to corroborate the idea that God has given faith to each and every man. And the verse which you did find, which seems at first glance to support your idea, is really saying nothing of the kind. It is a verse which simply says that God has given "each" believer a measure of faith. God is talking about His grace gifts to the Body of Christ, and talking about having the mind of Christ. He is not making an earth shattering statement about free will which contradicts other clear verses of scripture.

In your second paragraph you allude to faith and say: "God has built this <u>potential</u> inside everyone of us" Then toward the end you say." The faith God gave us is still there, but it is <u>impotent and powerless</u> because of us. Our unbelief and our love of sin keeps faith <u>dormant</u>". These statements show that you understand faith as something which is a potentiality, something that lays dormant for years, something which is in every man, but which in reality is impotent and powerless because of sin.   This does not match any definition of faith that I am aware of. The basic definition in Hebrews 11:1 is "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". All Bible scholars seem to be in complete agreement that this is a simple and true definition of faith. But it talks about "Substance", it talks about "Evidence". It does not talk about latent potential, or buried dormant spiritual treasures, it doesn't say that faith is impotent or powerless, it says that faith is "Substance" and "Evidence". The entire chapter illustrates this. God show us people from every age who had faith, and not one of them had "dormant" faith or "dead" faith, or "impotent" faith, or "powerless" faith. Hebrews 11, which is the great faith chapter is all about living faith, powerful faith, life-changing faith, real faith, faith with "substance" and faith with "evidence". James talks about your kind of dormant, lifeless faith: Jas 2:17 "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone". Non-working faith is dead faith, and dead faith is no faith at all. "Faith without works is dead"

Jas 2: 20.

In the next paragraph or so, you talk about this dormant faith, springing to life when something deep inside sinful man is stirred. "Something is coming to life. It is that faith that God has long ago planted on the inside of each of us. All along this faith has had the potential to spring up to life and become effective. Once faith starts to be stirred up, it has the power to overcome unbelief". What you are saying is that God planted the seed of faith in each heart at birth (or conception) or something like that. But the Bible has clear teachings about the seed of faith, when it is planted and how it is planted. It does not agree with your view. "The seed is the word of God" Lk. 8: 11. "The sower soweth the word" Mk. 4: 14. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" 1Pet. 1: 23. The seed is only planted when the word of God is heard. The seed is the word. So faith springs from an incorruptible seed...The word of God. To speak of God sowing something other than His word to produce faith is not correct.   Faith is not a nebulous indefinable something like ether or a vapor which is mystically transferred into the human at birth. The Bible does not speak of faith like that. Faith is the result of hearing the word. Rom.10: 17 "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". There is no faith without doctrine in the soul. There is no faith before hearing the gospel.   "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures", Jas 1: 18.

The Bible gives clear portraits of man before faith comes to him, and these views do not agree with your idea that men have free will and live with latent faith in their heart. I cannot spend too much more time on this, but let me direct you to the following verses: Psalm 58:3. "*The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*"? Romans 5:18. *"By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.*" These verse show that all men are condemned and do not have faith from birth. You said in your email that the opposite of faith is sin. This is incorrect. The opposite of faith is no faith. Jesus described a "Faithless and perverse generation" "Faithless" means No Faith.(Matt 17: 17; Mk. 9: 19; Lk 9: 41). How could you reconcile Jesus saying these people were "Faithless" with your statement that God has given faith to everyone. Everyone has faith? It doesn't appear that everyone has faith in Genesis 6 when God sees the thoughts and intents of mens hearts that they are only "evil continually". I cannot see any faith in that. When we were not believers, before we had faith, God says: "When we were in the flesh, sinful passions wrought in our members" Rom.7: 5. "Faithless" is a powerful word which Jesus used. It means without faith, unbelieving, disbelieving. He says to Thomas, "Be not faithless, but believing," (John 20:27); the Revised Version (British and American) adds, "If we are faithless," instead of "believe not" (2Ti_2:13); compare 1Co_7:12-15; 1Co_10:27; 1Co_14:22, 1Co_14:24, etc.; Tit_1:15. In Luk_12:46 *apistos* has the sense of "unfaithful," so the Revised Version (British and American); perhaps also Rev_21:8, "unbelieving."

I know that you are trying hard to learn all of the wonderful truths of God's word. And you are learning them, but it is not an instant process. It requires years of hard work and study, and it is a work and study which God rewards in ways other than monetary. The

<u>hardest part of learning is unlearning.</u> I have been through it, and I have seen it over and over again in my lifetime. We all have unscriptural baggage that we have picked up along the journey of life. We must get rid of it, if we are to move forward and upward in our self-edification. But it is very difficult from a human way of speaking. I know that I have spent many days crying out to God to show me the truth, and even now, I regularly have to unlearn something which I believed to be true, but it isn't. Last week I learned that I had a false view on one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. I had to unlearn the falsehood, before I could learn the truth. It happens all the time. This is not a process that will ever cease in this world, because here we know in part. Our dimension is one of imperfect knowledge at best. So we have to keep discarding the things that are wrong. If you want to do an interesting study, Look up all the verses which tell believers to "Put off" certain things, and to "Put on" certain other things.   You will see that we are to continually "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. And run with patience the race that is set before us". That is to be our occupation throughout the rest of this sojourn. Not easy at all. But necessary. Don't get discouraged. You'll work through all this stuff. God wants you to figure these things out before you start taking your place in a pulpit. One who stands before others, has to "give an account" for the souls whom he shepherds. Think about that. That is some really serious stuff. It's not just a matter of getting up and delivering a bunch of nice sounding words. A pastor has to "Give an account".

Every week I pray that God will deliver me from preaching that is incorrect, because I am supposed bring light and not darkness to the people who listen to me. I also pray that He will keep me from presenting the truth in a false way. This is a big problem I struggle with every week. I don't want to be too far over peoples heads, nor do I want to insult their intelligence. It is a real struggle to hit the mark, and present God's truth, in God's way.   You have pointed out that sometimes I sound arrogant or boastful. That is not right. I don't want that. That is of the Devil. I am supposed to deliver God's word, God's way. And that makes pride in the pulpit a grave sin. I ask God every week to deliver me from that. It is part of the territory. By the same token, if God is trying to teach you something, and you willingly harden your heart to it (like pharaoh did), that is sinful pride of the worst sort also. We must be very careful how we tread both in the learning and in the proclamation of His truth. Christianity's neglected word today is "submission". We do not want to submit. The very notion of submission to God, in everything, terrifies us, because it forces us to relinquish control. But that is exactly what He wants from us. That's what I try to do in my life…submit. Everything to me seems to boil down to that. If he tells me to evangelize…I'm to submit. If he tells me to feed a hungry beggar…I am to submit. If He tells me I am being proud and boastful… I am to submit. If He tells me I'm not praying enough…I am to submit. He recently told me to quit smoking…I am to submit. Whatever it is. To me, it all boils down to submission. There is nothing hard about it, but it is the most difficult thing in the universe.

I hope you can find something here that will be useful for you for years to come. I hope you read it without offense, because I tried very hard to stick to the subject without giving you a lot of my opinions. <u>You have definitely got to come to a decision</u> about what you

are going to believe about the doctrine of free will. The opinion which you expressed in your email, would be a very popular opinion, because it allows men to stay in their comfort zone. Even though it is clearly in disagreement with scripture, it would be the easiest view for you to hold. I'm sure you could build a large church and have a tremendous following teaching like that. But it would not be of God. It would be simply of man.

Humanism, is as old as the hills, and even though it wears many disguises, it is still the same old basic doctrine that Lucifer whispered to Eve in the Garden. It has never changed, despite all the different language it has been clothed with over the ages. My advice to you would be to finish reading Luther's book, then read C. H. Spurgeon's little sermon on Free-Will a Slave.   Then when you are ready, I have a book or two I can loan you, if you need more proof that man does not have a free will. I will do whatever you want to help you in your decision making process. I am urging you to use your will, as God intended for you to do, and to make a decision that will honor Him and not yourself or any teaching of any man. God Bless you. I pray for you daily. Earl