

you ask about...

# FAITH



*Questions  
Teens are  
asking*

by Tim  
**Pauls**





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For my parents, Gerald and Anna Pauls, who brought their children to the baptismal font at the earliest of ages so we might be given faith, and then hauled us to church pert-near every Sunday so we could hear the faith and grow in faith. You're God's instruments. Thank you.

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# **Table of Contents**

**Two Things to Get Started (8)**

**Q&A You Ask . . . (6)**

**Section One: The Faith (32)**

**Q&A You Ask . . . (59)**

**Section Two: The Basics of Faith (78)**

**Q&A You Ask . . . (93)**

**Section Three: What Faith isn't (108)**

**Q&A You Ask . . . (129)**

**Section Four: Faith and Good Works (150)**  
**Q&A You Ask . . . (158)**

**Section Five: Faith and Worship (172)**  
**Q&A You Ask . . . (199)**

**Section Six: Faith and Prayer (222)**  
**Q&A You Ask . . . (246)**

**Section Seven: Faith and Miracles (260)**  
**Q&A You Ask . . . (285)**

**A Parting Truth:**  
**it's All about Jesus (298)**



# Two Things to Get Started

Before we get into the body of this book, there are two things we have to get straight.

## **1. This Book is about both Faith and the Faith**

When we talk about *faith*, we're going to use the term to refer to two different things. I'm not making up a new definition: if you check any dictionary, you'll find that *faith* has more than one meaning.

For one thing, *faith* can mean trust, belief,

you ask about . . . FAITH

## GETTING STARTED

confidence, and so forth—as in “I have faith in God.” In this case, *faith* is trust. It’s sometimes called “personal faith.”

On the other hand, *faith* can also refer to a religion or a body of beliefs, as in “I am part of the Christian faith,” or “the Holy Spirit . . . keeps us in the one true faith.” In that case, *faith* is what you trust in.

The Bible uses *faith* both ways:

\* Faith as trust: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

\* Faith as what you trust in: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Therefore, as Christians, we have faith in the faith: we believe what God says.

If you’re into Latin—which seems to be making a comeback these days—or you just want to impress your pastor next Sunday, these are often discussed with the following terms: faith which believes is called *fides qua creditur*. Add an “e” to your “qua” (which is legal in most states) and you get *fides quae creditur*, which is the phrase for the faith which you believe. Neither of these is *fides quack creditor*, which sounds like it means, “You’d better believe you owe the duck money.” I don’t think it means

that, though. Alas, I digress.

In any given Bible text, how can you tell which one the Bible is talking about? Sometimes, the grammar helps: *the faith* will mean “what you believe in.” A lot of the time, it’s context. Sometimes, it may not be completely clear—because *faith* and *the faith* go together. Without the faith, you have nothing to have faith in. Without faith, you can’t believe the faith. Get it? (Just in case you didn’t, what I meant to say was that without the Word of God, you have nothing to believe in; and without faith, you can’t believe the Word of God.) We’ll take a look at some of these Scripture passages along the way.

10

For now, I just want to make sure you’re in tune with the idea that *faith* will refer to two different—yet very-much connected—things in this book, just as it does in the Bible.

Which brings us to the second important point of this little introduction.

## 2. God’s Word is the Source of Christian Faith

If you want to know about Christian doctrine, the Bible is the source. It’s God’s Word. Sure, it was written down by men, but it’s still God’s Word. It’s without error, so it’s the final



**16**

## **How do we know that the Bible really is God's Word?**

The answer sounds strange at first, but here it is: the Bible says so with verses like 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." In other words, the Bible is self-authenticating: it's God's Word because it says so, and we believe it.

The first reaction often is, "That's no proof. In this world, self-authentication doesn't work. We need proof and witnesses. I mean, if I say I'm Spider-Man, you're not going to believe

**you ask about . . . FAITH**

me.” At this point, I try to be helpful by saying something like, “Of course not, because we can’t both be Spider-Man.” Actually, a more helpful response is this: it’s true that in this world, we want additional proof. When I write a check at a store, I need to show some ID to prove who I am. I can’t vouch for me. But here’s the thing: whether or not I show the ID—and whether or not people believe me, I am Tim Pauls. My identity doesn’t depend on who people think I am. Thanks be to God for that!

You and I are conditioned to demand proof. We want proof that people are who they claim to be, because people are sinful and often lie. We want proof because we’re used to courtroom scenes where guilt must be established by evidence beyond reasonable doubt. And we want proof because we live in a very scientific world, where things must be proven repeatedly in order to be accepted as true. (Well, except for evolution, which usually gets a free pass, a bouquet of flowers, and a weekend trip to a spa just for being so ridiculous.) But God isn’t a liar, a criminal, or a science project. He’s God, and we shouldn’t try to submit Him to our tests for things of this world. (We talked about this quite a bit in the first book of this series, *You Ask about Life*, so I won’t go into much more detail here.) Instead, we take God at His

## Section Two: The Basics of Faith

The first time I was teaching youth about faith, I thought an illustration would help. I decided to draw what faith looked like. So I mustered all of my artistic skills, took a deep breath, and drew.

Of the students in class, one of them coughed. Another rolled her eyes. A third said, in a disturbed sort of way, “That looks like a stick figure with a funnel stuck in his head.”

I wasn’t sure what to think. On the one hand, I was disappointed by the overall lack

of appreciation. On the other hand, I was relieved—I'm not much of an artist, but at least one of them actually recognized that I was trying to draw a stick figure with a funnel stuck in his head.

Still, it was a silly little picture; and now, after years of being a pastor, I wouldn't use it again. No, instead I would draw a stick figure with a funnel that had hands reaching up, and it would be stuck in his ear. I'm just not sure I could ever pull off an illustration that complex. I just tried it, and the dog yelped and ran into her crate. For the sake of us all, I'm glad there's a shredder nearby.

"A funnel with hands reaching up, stuck in someone's ear?" you ask politely, as you wonder if you still have the receipt for this book.

"Oui," I respond, trying to sound all French and cultured. Perhaps I'd best explain. This chapter will introduce you to two really big, important truths about faith—and give you one important verse to remember for each one.

## **Two Big Truths about Faith**


### **1. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Faith is a gift that God gives to you. Here's



**You quoted Ephesians 2:8–9,  
“For by grace you have been saved  
through faith. . . . it is the gift of God.”  
So which one is the gift of God—grace,  
faith, or salvation?**

It’s a package deal. If you have forgiveness, you have salvation, right? Is it possible to be forgiven and not be saved? No, thanks be to God; that would put us all in doubt of our salvation. Can you have forgiveness without faith? No! No one can say, “I don’t believe in Jesus, but He forgives me.” And seeing as how you’re



Deadguy, both faith and forgiveness must be gifts God gives to save you.

**instead of a funnel with hands  
reaching out, why wouldn't you draw a  
funnel with tentacles?**

Because that would just be creepy.

**My friend says i have to accept Jesus  
as my personal Savior and Lord to be  
saved. What does this mean?**

94

Remember that quick discussion of Luther, Calvin, and Arminius in the previous chapter? Your friend is interpreting Scripture like Arminius. Sometimes this is called *decision theology*, which teaches that you have to decide to follow Jesus in order to be forgiven. This is popular in a lot of churches today. You might hear it in words such as, “Jesus wants to forgive you—if you just ask Him to,” or something as cornball as “Jesus and the devil have each cast a vote for your soul, and it’s up to you to cast the deciding vote!” Churches that promote this theology often have an “altar call” during the service so people can “make a decision” for Jesus.

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