DOES GOD HAVE FAITH?

The God kind of faith
On the March 19, 2008 Today’s Word posted on the website of a very popular Christian minister reads:

“There’s a difference between having faith in God and having the faith of God. When you open your heart to the God kind of faith, you’re actually allowing Him to believe through you. The God kind of faith will cause you to believe for things when you don’t even know how they’ll happen. And it probably won’t make sense in your mind, but you have to allow your spirit to rise higher than your thinking. Don’t talk yourself out of believing. Don’t focus on all the reasons why not, instead allow God’s faith to rise up within you.”

On the same page, Galatians 2:20 is quoted as:

“…the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God…”

From what English translation was this verse found, with “of” inserted before Son of God? Galatians 2:20 is translated as “in the Son of God” in all of the following English Bible versions: NIV, NASB, NKJV, Amplified, NLT, ESV, ASV, and TNIV. Did this ministry find something missed by all the Greek scholars who produced these other translations? For the record, the intent here is not to criticize this minister who seems to be a sincere, genuinely nice guy, and his messages have many valuable points. But, there are other instances of this same teaching.

Charles Capps wrote, “God is a faith God. God released His faith in words … God created the universe by the methods which you have just put into motion by the words of your mouth. God released His faith in words. Man is created in the image of God, therefore man releases his faith in words.”

Kenneth Hagin stated, “The God kind of faith . . . is the kind of faith that spoke the world into existence . . . God created the universe with words.”

E. W. Kenyon wrote, “Faith is the creative force in man. Faith is the creative force in the Creator.”

Kenneth Copeland stated, “The world and the physical forces governing it were created by the power of faith – a spiritual force. God, a Spirit, created all matter and he created it with the force of faith.” And, Charles Capps promulgated the notion that, “God created the universe by the methods which you have just put into motion by the words of your mouth. God released His faith in words.”

Where is “the God kind of faith” found in the Bible?
There are two verses in the Bible used to support this teaching: Mark 11:22 and Hebrews 11:3. In the first verse, which is the primary text for this doctrine, Jesus tells His disciples to “Have faith in God” (all of the above-mentioned English translations). Those who subscribe to this teaching translate the verse as, “Have the God kind of faith”, signifying that God has faith and humans are being directed by Jesus to have the same kind of faith that God possesses.

In the second instance, the writer of Hebrews states, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” Some teach that this verse should read that the worlds were prepared “by faith by the word of God”, indicating that God used faith to create the worlds. But, as context is crucial in Biblical interpretation, what is the context in Hebrews 11? The second verse indicates this as “men of old”, then goes on to list the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and so on. All of those individuals mentioned in Hebrews 11 had faith in God. To allege that the third verse describes God as having faith does not fit the context of the chapter or the entirety of scripture.

Grammatical structure of the Greek
The Greek words used in Mark 11:22 are “echete pistin theou”. The word for God (theou) was written in the genitive case and has been understood as an objective genitive. This means that
God is the object of the verb echete or “have” and Jesus is directing people to have faith with God as the object or have faith directed toward God. If the subjective genitive had been used, then God would be the one who has or possesses the faith. All major English translations, made by well-qualified Greek scholars, translate this verse as “Have faith in God”. The distinction between objective and subjective genitive is determined by usage and context. Grammatically, it may be possible to designate theou as a subjective genitive; however, that is not indicated in the context and is not recognized as the proper translation by all translators of the major English versions. Furthermore, in the numerous other Biblical passages concerning faith, all usages direct humans to have faith. Nowhere else in the Bible is there an indication that God possesses or uses faith. To translate this verse as “faith of God” violates the most fundamental rules of hermeneutics: Scripture interprets scripture and less clear passages are interpreted in light of clear passages.

The same Greek structure is used in Romans 3:22 (pisteos Iesou), with Jesus (Iesou) in the genitive case, rendered in the vast majority of English translations as “faith in Jesus”. Have those who believe God has faith translated this verse as “faith of Jesus”? In Romans 3:18, translated as “fear of God”, the word for God is in the genitive case, and no one would accept the notion that God has fear. Translating these verses one way and Mark 11:22 differently is inconsistent. To build an entire doctrine around one questionably translated word in Mark 11:22 is not sound Biblical exegesis.

A rebuttal
Some would argue that there are principles that God is required to follow, such as “God cannot lie” (Titus 1:2) and “God cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13). This demonstrates that there are constraints on God’s actions and ability. One could probably also state that God cannot stop loving, cease being merciful or stop being holy, and these would be valid statements. However, these verses refer to God’s character, not universal constraints on His ability to act. The Lord chooses to not lie or be tempted by evil by His own free will. He also chooses to love and show mercy, not because an outside, external force constrains Him to do so. Those who would require God to use faith as a necessity impose an external requirement on Him. There is no valid Biblical warrant to argue that God was ever faced with the choice of believing or not believing in His own capabilities. He simply knew He could do whatever He wanted. Humans, on the other hand, need to choose whether or not to believe in God.

Some would make the point that faith means “a firm persuasion or assurance” and that would be accurate. And, as Hebrews 11:1 informs us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for”, God is certainly assured and persuaded that what He speaks will happen. Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary defines pistis (Strong 4102) as “firm persuasion,” a conviction based upon hearing ..., is used in the NT always of “faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual”.

However, if God is all powerful and all knowing, does He need to be persuaded of what He is capable of doing? Doesn’t God simply know what He can do? There never has been any possibility of doubt with God, so He never needed to be assured or persuaded. Humans, on the other hand, are capable of doubt, therefore need to be assured and have faith.

What’s the big deal?
One might ask why this issue is a concern. Does it really matter if Christians use the phrase “the God kind of faith”? Taken in an isolated, singular sense, this teaching does not appear to be serious; however, the concern here involves the theological underpinnings that form the
basis of the surrounding doctrine. To claim that God uses faith in the same manner as humans is to diminish God. To say that God, in a sense, plugs into the force of faith when He acts reduces His omnipotence. God is now not capable of accomplishing His desires without tapping into this external force.

The second problem with this teaching is not a minor issue. If it was necessary for God to use faith and words to accomplish his desires, and we are to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1), then by necessity, believers also are required to use faith and words in living the Christian life. We must be careful to not reduce Christian living to a formula: believe + speak = receive. Believing and speaking are not formulaic requirements, but are steps of obedience. By far, the most important ingredient is our relationship to God. We believe because we have a relationship with God, we know Him, and we trust Him. Christians do not plug into the force of faith as one would plug a lamp into an electrical outlet.

**How did God create?**

When creating the heavens and the earth, did God have a “firm persuasion” that what He spoke would come into existence? Of course He did. The second variation in meaning used in the Bible with the word pistis is “faith in God or Christ”. When God was creating, did He have faith in Himself? That sounds ridiculous and it should. There was no reason for the creator to have faith in anything; His capability to create the universe was never in question. God simply created without the need to meet any additional requirement, whether to have faith or to speak. If He needed to use faith or words – and could not have created without this formula – then other external principles exist in the universe that are more powerful than God.

Very closely related to this issue is God’s use of words. Was it necessary for God to speak for the heavens and earth to exist? What if, instead of speaking words, God chose to snap His fingers to initiate the creation? Did God speak the worlds into existence before creating air? Again, this sounds ridiculous, but the point is, when we assert that God is required to use a certain principle, then the principle surpasses His omnipotence. If God could not have created anything without using the force of faith and words - and we can use the same principles to create - then God is no more than a glorified human, which sounds a lot more like Mormonism than Biblical Christianity. Furthermore, if we can use the same formula as God to accomplish our desires, do we even need God? As a final note, the above information is not intended as a criticism, rather an attempt to reach an accurate understanding of this issue. Also, this issue is not crucial to salvation: Those who believe differently remain brothers and sisters in Christ.

(Biblical references are from the NASB version.)

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1 Joel Osteen Ministries, Today’s Word, http://joelosteen.lakewood.cc/site/MessageViewer?em_id=11881.0&printer_friendly=1&s_displayDate=03/19/2008
3 Hagin, Kenneth, New Thresholds of Faith (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1989), 74-76