

A SHORT STORY OF THE LIFE OF FAITH

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INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to give a definition of faith, or to explain what it is. For example, Hebrews 11:1 says it is ‘the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’. Yet this description—with others—is difficult to understand unless we trace the history and action of faith. Then the above—and other—definitions can be understood. Nevertheless, we can state here that faith is seeing God as He is and what He is doing, and so trusting and obeying Him. Faith is comprised of elements of knowing the true facts, seeing these as related to God, and so trusting Him. God with the facts being dynamic actually grips us, so that we then obey Him, as He is, and in accordance with these facts and acts. Yet, as we have indicated, this description will not be wholly intelligible until we have seen the history of faith.

THE HISTORY OF FAITH

By the history of faith we do not simply mean an account of men and acts of faith, but the history which is God and His action, especially as He has involved men of faith—

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His people—in those actions. A glance at Hebrews 11:4–39 will explain this point. However, more particularly, we mean that the history of faith is that course of action of God which issues out of His nature, being and plan, which can be recognised by faith, but from which men of faith cannot stand apart, since faith is both a personal union with the living God, and obedience to His will.

For this reason we develop our history, although not exhaustively, on the following lines. Whilst we give the general trend of the history, our actual treatment of it will need to have many appended notes, so that this study will not keep strictly to the headings given here.

HISTORY OF FAITH

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- (c) Jesus and the Completion of the Plan
- (d) The Faithful People of God

We now proceed to examine the history of faith.

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Creation: The Faith of Man

Man, made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26ff.; 1 Cor. 11:7), must have had complete affinity with God, as a man may. Hence he knew God. The gift of creation was sufficient to see God as ‘a faithful Creator’ (1 Pet. 4:19) and a faithful God (2 Cor. 1:18), but such trust was not tested until Satan’s seduction of Eve. Man chose not to trust God; for example, the statement that he would die if he disobeyed (Gen. 2:17), that is, he refused to fear Him in reverence and so to obey Him. Hence what trust he had turned to slavish fear when he sinned (Gen. 3:19ff.). Two Corinthians 5:15 infers that Man lives to himself, that is, he trusts only himself. It also infers that he died to God.

The Fall: Loss of Faith

Romans 1:19ff. accords closely with Genesis 3:1–6. When Man rejects the nature of God as He is, he also rejects his own nature and the nature of the universe. He is reduced to idols—the objects of his self-projected trust—but fears life and death. He lives in the context of fate since his world is not God’s true world. God, to him, is not a faithful Creator nor a faithful God, but is his Enemy, that is, Man is in conflict with creation because of his own rebellion. He refuses to obey, essentially, the authorities which operate as part of the God-created universe. Hence he sees God as alien, hostile, uncaring. He sees no great destiny for himself. In other words, he is out of faith! Man cannot be sure of himself, since he is not a faithful and obedient existent in the harmonious creation of God. He does not know what God is about: hence he cannot discern the true nature of God. He is dead to God. He does not

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wish to retain God in his memory. To know God is to accede to the demand for godly obedience.

Abel: The First in Faith; Others

Abel is the first in the list of the faithful (Heb. 11:4). He believed God. Hence, as a person, he was justified. He knew the nature of God and offered his gifts (sacrifices) accordingly. The promise of Genesis 3:15 was known. He knew God would triumph over evil, redeem Man, and vindicate Himself. *Enoch* also pleased God, being a man of faith. Either because he believed he would be taken up, or because he saw this was God's purpose, Enoch was translated. *Noah's* faith expressed itself in obedience (as doubtless that of Abel and Enoch) by building an ark. This was because he knew and believed God about the judgment of the Flood. We can begin to adduce the principle that these men knew what God was about, as also they knew Him as He is.

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

It is not only to the above men of faith, or others of their time, that God gives the covenant of grace. This covenant is to prove universal, and the people of God are to spring from the faith of this man, Abraham. His faith is described well in Romans 4:16–22. The essence of this passage is: Abraham is the father of many nations because he believed God in what He promised, as also in His ability to fulfil what He promised. This belief did not spring out of the natural things of creation, since Abraham was over 110 years in age, and his wife Sarah was both barren and old. He believed in the God *'who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not*

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exist, and in his belief, ‘No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God . . . fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised’. All this is in contrast to Romans 1:19–32 where the God-rejecters are called ‘foolish, faithless’, amongst other similar things. Galatians 3:8–9 clarifies the principle we have been seeing: ‘And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, *preached the gospel beforehand* to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are *men of faith* are blessed with Abraham who had faith.’

Abraham, as a man of faith, knew who God is, what He was (is) about, and was one with Him in His plan, and obedient to it. This is seen clearly in Genesis 26:1–5, where Isaac is told that God will fulfil His covenantal oath promised to Abraham, and that Isaac will share in it. He says He has given it to Abraham, ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’. We see from this that *there is no such thing as faith without obedience*. Hence Jesus denies the claim of certain Jews to be the (true) children of Abraham, for they do not do as Abraham did (John 8:37–44).

Israel: The Fruit of Faith

Whatever Jacob’s faults were, he nevertheless highly prized the family birthright and the covenantal blessing. Hence his own blessing of his children (given in Gen. 49) is deeply significant and mostly because it indicates he knew what God was about, particularly in the case of Judah: ‘The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until *he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall*

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be the obedience of the peoples' (cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

To trace the history of faith in Israel, in all its aspects, would be an enormous task. We are referred to detailed study for this. However, some points emerge clearly: (i) God's revelation to Moses as the I AM WHO I AM was a revelation of the nature of God; (ii) this revelation is expressed in the *acts of God* in delivering His people from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness and bringing them into the promised land; and (iii) the prophets continually revealed the will of God by the Word of God. It then remains to see what is the response of the people.

The Covenant People

Israel, in receiving the covenant of law (in fact, grace), promised to obey: 'Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances: and the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do . . . All that the LORD has spoken we will do and we will be obedient"' (Exod. 24:1–8). Deuteronomy is mainly concerned with telling the people what the Lord requires, and its latter chapters tell of judgments which will come upon the people if they break the covenant. Failure to live at covenant level is covered by the offering of the various sacrifices, but flagrant rebellion (e.g. idolatry) will bring judgments, and their being taken to alien lands and peoples. Israel, from time to time, reverted to idolatry, and so came under judgment.

The Covenant Breaker

The writers of the Old Testament understood the history of faith and disobedience as follows:

(a) *Creation to Abraham*

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(b) *Israel and the Covenant*

(c) *Israel Breaks the Covenant and Is Chastised*

It reveals the fact that from Solomon's reign onwards Israel dabbled in idolatry, rebellion and apostasy. Yet they could not understand the judgments of God. This was often when the Book of the Law was lost or hidden. To have faith in God is to obey His laws (cf. Isa. 5:8–30) and to disobey is not to have faith, and to receive judgment—'Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for *they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel*'. Judgment is also seen in Isaiah 8:6–8. Israel should fear the Lord, and not depart from Him: 'the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; *let him be your fear, and let him be your dread*'. This disobedience is the same as *faithlessness*: 'If you *will not believe, surely you shall not be established*' (Isa. 7:9). Where there is true faith (covenantal) then there is no panic: 'He who believes will not be in haste' (cf. Isa. 28:16).

(d) *There Is a Day of Restoration to Come for Israel*

(cf. Jer. 31:31–34, Ezek. 36:24–28; ch. 37; Joel 2; etc.).

The Prophets: Men of Faith

The prophets, by the word of the Lord, continually speak to Israel to bring that faith which is at the same time trust and obedience (cf. Rom. 10:17). Whenever there is covenant-breaking they speak against it and tell the judgments of God, both present, coming and eschatological. When, however, the people are under judgment,

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they also speak in encouragement of the mercy of God and His plan of love for them. In both cases their task is difficult. In the first case they must awaken repentance and obedient faith: in the second they must awaken the faith of trust and anticipation, that is, anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promises. They always have their eyes on God, His nature, being and plan. What others do not see, they see, *by faith* (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8–9).

Jesus: Originator and Completer of Faith

God's actions and plan are all related to His promises (cf. Rom. 4:1–16; Gal. 3:16–19). His promises are His oath (Gen. 26:3–5; Heb. 6:13–17). What God has promised in history He contains and completes in Jesus Christ. Hence when Jesus comes he comes to fulfil God's plan, spoken of beforehand by the prophets (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8–12; 2 Pet. 1:21), and in fact there can be no real faith in God unless these are fulfilled. Faith 'comes to life' in what Jesus is and does, since it is in fact God the Father doing the same (e.g. John 14:6–10). The following shows us the truth of this:

- (a) *Romans 15:8–9*: 'For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness to *confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy'.
- (b) *Matthew 15:24*: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'.
- (c) *Acts 3:26*: 'God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning everyone of you from your wickedness'.

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- (d) *2 Corinthians 1:20*: 'For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God'.

That he is the fulfilment of the promises and plan of God is seen in such passages as Luke 24:26–27, 44, and 1 Corinthians 1:30. This is why Israel must believe in him.

Jesus and Israel

When Jesus comes, he comes in accordance with the prophecies and is preceded by the greatest of prophets—John the Baptist. Hence faith is informed. He comes demanding belief in himself and the Gospel, as the fulfilment of the plan of God, for he is its continued action. Mark 1:15 reiterates that the Kingdom is at hand. Men must repent, because they have strayed from God. They must believe the Gospel. In John's Gospel, Jesus is saying continually that men must believe *in him, in fact as they do in God* (cf. John 14:1f.). He and the Father are one in action (John 5:17ff.; cf. 8:28; 14:6; 10:30). Nevertheless Israel decisively rejects him, both at the crucifixion and later, representatively, as the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 5:33, 40; cf. 22:18; 7:54ff.). Romans 9–11 speaks of this rejection showing Israel is in a state of *unbelief*. It predicts the ultimate faith and obedience to which all Israel will come.

Jesus and the Gentiles

Romans 15:8–9 indicates that Jesus came for a dual purpose—to confirm and fulfil the promises made to the fathers, showing these things to the circumcised (Jews), and also to bring mercy to the Gentiles. Paul quotes 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; 117:1; Deuteronomy 32:43; and Isaiah 11:10, to prove that the plan of God had the

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Gentiles in mind, and because the word of God says so then the Gentiles can have faith and come to the obedience of faith (cf. Acts 15:14–18). Jesus had indicated in Acts 1:8 (cf. Ps. 2:7ff.) that the Gospel would be preached to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, obviously with a view to Genesis 49:10 being fulfilled. Hence *in regard to the Jews* who have believed in God there must now be *faith in Jesus Christ* (Acts 20:21). In regard to the Gentiles they must *first come to believe in God* (Acts 26:17–20; 14:15; 17:24–30) and *then to believe in Jesus Christ* (Acts 10:42–43; 16:31; cf. 20:21). It is clear that all must believe in both the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. *Christ is the new object of faith.*

Jesus and the Completion of the Plan

The plan which God has for history was known generally, from the beginning. Note that some of its aspects were hidden (cf. Eph. 3:9; Rom. 11:25–26; cf. Rev. 10:7; 19:10; Acts 3:21), since Abel was the first prophet. God's action in history, through the judgment of the Flood, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants was all dynamic and significant, and explained by the Word and the prophets. Faith could be 'the assurance of things hoped for, the reality of things unseen'.

Christ, of course, as Son and the Word, was the Creator–Mediator, as is seen from John 1:1–3, Colossians 1:15–20, Hebrews 1:3, and 1 Corinthians 8:6. It is without doubt that he has always worked with the Father (John 5:17; cf. 17:5, 24) and the triune work of the Godhead in the Old Testament shows us that the Son was equally operating with the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; Isa. 6:1–10; John 12:37–41; 8:56; etc.). His incarnation was to fulfil the Abrahamic Covenant (Luke 1:68ff.), which demanded that he should be the mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 8:6ff.; 9:15;

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etc.), the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Ezek. 36:24ff.; etc.), and this he was as we see from Matthew 26:28 (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19; etc.). Hence, Old Covenant for example in the Letter to the Hebrews, Jews must see the old (Mosaic) covenant outmoded and superseded by the New Covenant. In Galatians they must not revert to law, seeing the grace of the promises given to Abraham are fulfilled in this New Covenant, which is really the fulfilling of the Abrahamic Covenant. We mean that the Abrahamic and New Covenants are essentially the same thing.

Hence we see that Christ, as the Son and the Word, has ever been in history. Now, as Jesus, he is Lord (see Acts 2:36; 10:36; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 10:9; etc.). He is the one who outworks the plan of God to the end (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 11:15; Phil. 2:9–11). Thus he initiates faith for the believer in the Gospel, since he comes to enact, make real and make permanent, the good news of redemption and sonship. He, however, does not cease at this point. Having effected redemption he now has to work out the plan of God until the end of time (cf. Acts 1:8; Ps. 2:8; etc.). Because he is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, he is the originator of faith, the one who, as its object, continually sustains (encourages) faith, and faith relates to hope which is concerned with the end things, that consummation of the plan. That is why we must always look to Jesus—Lord over all.

The Faithful People of God

Whilst the Gospel is for personal redemption, yet it also has in view the ‘obedience of the peoples’, the gathering together of the nations to the Messiah himself (Gen. 49:10). Hence the command of Acts 1:8 (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:44ff.; John 20:19ff., Mark 16:16ff.), which relates to Psalm 2. Revelation 21:3, and 21:22 – 22:2

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shows the people of God before Him, and He in their midst (cf. Rev. 7:9–10). The plan of God is completed! See also Ephesians 1:4–12.

This people of God is the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant, and the plan of God (cf. Eph. 2:8 – 3:11). Also the people of God, the church, work with the Son who is its Lord and Head, to fulfil the plan and purpose of God. However, they cannot do this without faith, as we will see, that is, unless they are men of faith. Faith and obedience are so closely linked as to be the one. Hence we have the statements of Paul in Romans 1:5–6, ‘through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the *obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations’; Romans 15:18, ‘For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to *win obedience from the Gentiles* [i.e. the nations]’; and Romans 16:25–26, ‘Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to the revelation of the mystery . . . now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations*, according to the command of the eternal God, *to bring about the obedience of faith*’.

Thus the faithful people of God are co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9) to bring the nations to Him, so that the nations will have faith, and be one with the people of God (cf. Acts. 6:7, ‘a great many of the priests *were obedient to the faith*’).

FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The use of the noun, adjective and verb to indicate faith in the New Testament is so profuse as to be beyond this study. Briefly, faith is the act by which one believes. One

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can believe the fact, the truth, or on the Name, or the Person of God or Christ. To believe *on* or *in* generally denotes personal faith, or faith-union with that one. Faith is sometimes the act by which one believes, and sometimes what one believes, or the instrument by which one acts or does something.

Paul uses the noun almost without exception, whilst John uses the verb. Sometimes the verb is used in the aorist form, meaning a completed action. One has believed, and that is that; it is committal which is completed. Sometimes the present continuous tense is used in which case believing is a permanent state, one which continues. We would do well to study these various emphases, and see the contexts in which they are employed. If, however, we divorce our understanding of faith from its history we will be preoccupied with its elements and immediate contexts and miss the general view of faith, that is, that it is *believing the acts of God, believing in God and His Son, and receiving the benefits of faith, namely the fruits of the works of God, and personal understanding of God, as also the relationship of union with Him.*

The Objects of Faith

In John 14:1 the sense is 'You believe in God—equally believe in me'. Hence:

- (a) *The objects are God the Father, and also the Son.* What Jesus said is to be the object of faith; 'you do not believe me' of John 8:45 means they do not believe what he says. 'But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me', means that they neither believe what he says, nor him.

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- (b) *The object of faith is the truth.* In John 5:30–47, Jesus speaks of the witness to himself by John who bore witness to the truth. Jesus bore witness to the same, but primarily by his works. Then the Father bears witness to Jesus, as also do the Scriptures, yet the Jews believe none of these things. As against this faithlessness the Samaritans believe on Jesus ‘because of his [own] word’ (John 4:41).
- (c) *The object of faith is the work done.* The truth spoken or done, and the works done, are not to be separated from the person saying or doing them, yet because of them one believes in the person. Hence in John 5:24, ‘he who hears *my word* and believes him *who sent me*, has eternal life’. Likewise, ‘if you . . . believe in your heart that God *raised him from the dead*’ (Rom. 10:9). In John 2, the disciples witness the miracle of the water being changed to wine so that *they saw his glory and believed on him*. In John 2:22, the disciples see what Jesus has done in cleansing the temple, but only after the resurrection do they truly believe ‘*the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken*’. In John 2:23, there is a kind of belief in *seeing the miracles that Jesus has done*, and again in John 8:30–31, there is a kind of belief *from the very utterance of his words*. More strongly in Acts 9:36–42, the people believe on the Lord when *Tabitha is raised* by Peter. In Acts 16, the *earthquake at Philippi* and *the manner of Paul and Silas* move the jailer to believe in Christ, whom he must have heard *preached previously*. In Acts 10, the Gentiles believe Peter when he calls for faith because *the prophets have said* that they will receive remission of sins if they believe. Such instances could be multiplied.

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Most powerfully John says that the signs which he writes concerning Christ are written that the readers might believe. At the same time he suggests that not only do we believe when we see (cf. John 2:11; 4:48; 20:29), but rather we see when we believe (John 11:40; 20:24ff.). We conclude then that the *preaching, teaching, the truth, the acts* are believed, but that in fact it is *the one from whom they come* who is really believed, that is, the Father or the Son, or both. This is why Jesus can ask for belief in himself, or belief for the very works' sake (John 14:11).

Coming to Faith

In Ephesians 2:8–10 and Philippians 1:29, faith is described as a gift. It 'is given to us to believe'. This accords with John 6:44–65, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him', yet at the same time Jesus says that the Father teaches those who come, so that, 'Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me'. This is very close to Romans 10:17, which tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:14 asks how one can believe without hearing, whilst 1 Corinthians 1:21 says it is by the foolishness of the proclamation (which one hears) that men are saved. Faith then comes when one accepts what one hears. What one hears is not acceptable to the attitude described in the fall of Man, and the rejection of God (Gen. 3:1–6; Rom. 1:19ff.). Therefore when one accepts, one in fact 'obeys' the Gospel. This is clear from Romans 10:14–21. Verse 16 says, 'they have not all obeyed the gospel', so that believing is really coming to obedience. That the Gospel is a command is clear from 2 Thessalonians 1:8, where unbelievers are said to not obey the

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Gospel, and so will be punished. Likewise John 16:7–11 speaks of the world being convicted of *sin* because it does not *believe* in Christ. Those who *hear* what the Father teaches come to the Son (John 6:45). In Galatians 3:1–3 the Gospel is known by ‘hearing with faith’. This accords with the ‘obedience of faith’ of Romans 1:5, 15:18, 16:26, and Acts 6:7. *Why* one *reacts* to the Gospel, and another *responds* is the mystery of election, but cannot be explained psychologically. It is debated as to whether: (i) Man has the power to respond; (ii) the power to respond is given to some or not to others; or (iii) response is evoked by the *innate power* of the *word*, or by the *Spirit*, or *both*. This is a mystery. What is clear from Romans 10:14 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2) is that the word has to be uttered and heard before faith is born and exercised. When it is seen that repentance, faith and forgiveness are gifts, then it could be said that such gifts are pointless unless exercised.

The Content of (the) Faith

It is *what* one believes which matters. What one believes must be so for faith to have value, benefits and fruit. One believes in God, one believes He is the faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19), Redeemer (Isa. 63:16), the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:1–2; etc.), and one in believing in Him believes in His Son (John 14:1). One believes the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14), that is, to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). Confession of the mouth (‘Jesus is Lord’) is dependent upon belief of the heart (‘believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead’) as Romans 10:9 indicates. The other elements of the faith—that God is Father, Jesus Christ is Lord—relate to repentance and

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conversion (Acts 2:38; 13:38; etc.). The above may be stated in many ways, and has many concomitants, for example, 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (1 John 4:2). The 'most holy faith' (Jude 20) is constituted of the 'apostles' teaching' of Acts 2:42, or the deposit of faith.

The Fruits of Faith

Salvation as a whole is the full fruit of faith. It comprises the forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, new creation, regeneration and adoption (sonship)—(cf. John 5:24; 3:16–18, 36; 1 John 4:9–10; Acts 2:38f.; 3:19f.; 5:31; 22:16; 26:18–20; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13–14; Titus 3:3–7; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; John 1:12–13; Rom. 5:1; etc.). It also means deliverance from the powers of sin, Satan, the world powers, the world-system, death, the flesh, the wrath of God, and conscience (Rom. 6:1–14; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:55–56; Gal. 6:14; 5:24; 1 Thess. 1:8–10). By faith Man is delivered from idols (1 Thess. 1:8–10).

The fruit of faith is union with Christ. Christ dwells in the heart by our faith (Eph. 3:17) as also we abide in him (John 15:1ff.). We also receive the Spirit by faith (Gal. 3:13–14; but especially 3:5; Eph. 1:13; Acts 11:17). The 'obeying' of Acts 5:32 is really believing the Gospel. One cannot be obedient before receiving the Spirit.

Living by Faith

Habakkuk 2:4 says, 'the righteous shall live by faith'. This has been translated as, 'He who by faith is justified shall live', which doubtless is the thrust of Romans 1:16–17. It is, nevertheless, a principle for all Christian experience. The various aspects of this are detailed below.

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However, it is difficult to classify the wide range of these aspects. *Walking by faith* in Hebrews 12:1 is spoken of as *running*. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are told that we walk by faith, and not by sight. Since walking is simply living, Galatians 2:20 says that ‘the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’. He means that he sees himself constantly as justified, the one for whom Christ died. This is similar to Philippians 3:9 where he is found having ‘the righteousness of . . . Christ’. To have such faith is to reckon oneself dead to sin, and so free from its power (Rom. 6:10–14). One must always live in that faith. One has constantly, then, the fruits of justification, which are in fact the basis of true sanctification (Rom. 6:7, ‘He who has died is [justified] from sin’, that is, sin’s penalty having been taken, one is free *for* obedience).

In Habakkuk 2:4 there is the contrast of the proud man (his soul is lifted up in him) who is akin to Satan in pride. The man of faith must ‘take heed lest he fall’. He does not have an undue estimate of himself, but a high view of what God has done.

Weak Faith and Strong Faith: Conscience

The strength of conscience, as also its wellbeing, is related to the strength of faith. This is seen in Romans 14:1 – 15:6 (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1–13). One Timothy 1:5 speaks of ‘love that issues from a *pure heart* and a *good conscience* and *sincere faith*’; 1:19 speaks of ‘holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith’. Romans 14 shows that the man with weak faith is the equivalent (as in 1 Cor. 8) of the man with a weak conscience. Obviously weak faith and a weak conscience are the result of not

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having seen the totality of the saving work of Christ. One still 'eats . . . judgment' when the conscience is not clear, if one eats against one's conscience. The truly forgiven, liberated conscience arises from strong faith in the total work of Christ. Love demands that the one with strong faith exercise such faith before God, and not before his brother who can be thus stumbled by his uninhibited actions.

The Obedience of Faith

When one obeys the Gospel, one has not earned salvation by works. Nevertheless, when one believes, it leads to doing the works of God (Eph. 2:8–10; cf. John 9:4). James says that faith without works is dead. One's justification brings forth fruit as also one's repentance (cf. Acts 26:20). Obedience, however, is not giving satisfaction to God for one's own sins, but doing the will of the Lord; nothing more and nothing less (Eph. 5:17; Rom. 12:2; etc.). This will of God, as we saw above ('The Faithful People of God'), is the outworking of God's plan by Christ and his church—the people of God—until history is consummated. The *labour of love* is always alongside *the work of faith* (1 Thess. 1:3). Faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), that is, its works spring from love, for one has faith in the love of God. All true obedience springs from love (John 14:15; 1 John 4:19), but faith grasps the fruits of the Cross, by which love is engendered.

Faith and the Enemy

We will shortly see that there is no life for a believer without faith, and since faith is essential to life, it is attacked by the evil one. Faith is union with God, and so

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the attack will be to seduce one from trust in God, so that one will trust oneself before God. To do this the work of God in His love must be attacked. If one can be moved from this simple trust—the belief in truth, and this steady obedience to the will—then one is undone. Hence Satan’s attack of accusations directed at the Christian. A study of Ephesians 6:10ff.; Revelation 12:10f.; 1 Peter 5:8–9; James 4:7; 1 John 2:13; 4:4; and 5:4–5, shows that by faith we overcome. We overcome the fiery darts of the wicked one by using the shield of faith; we resist Satan steadfast in the faith, knowing that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. It is by faith we overcome, and our faith is that Jesus is the Son of God.

Faith and the Gifts

Gifts are received by faith, such as forgiveness, the Spirit, and eternal life. In Romans 12:3ff., Paul speaks of having a proper estimate of oneself. Each has been given a measure of faith, which accords with the gift (*charisma*) given to him. He ought then not to exercise this gift beyond that measure of faith. An example of this is in verse 6, where prophecy should not be ‘strained’ but according to the measure of faith given. One Corinthians 4:7 says that all we have is gifts, and there is no room for boasting. Pride is the opposite of faith, which is primarily trust in God and not in oneself.

FAITH: THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN

We now come to the final but significant things in regard to faith. The writer of Hebrews tackles the matter of faith

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from a slightly different perspective to that of Paul and John. To Paul, faith is the believing of and in the things which God has done to redeem, justify and sanctify Man, and by which he is made a son of God. To John, faith is the act of believing which is at the one and same time the act of knowing. To know is to believe and vice versa. For the writer of the Hebrews letter, faith is seeing what is unseen. There are parallels in John and Paul. In John we saw them in 4:48, 11:40, and 20:29. One sees and believes, but it is better to believe and see. Likewise Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) for he has just been talking about looking at ‘the things which are unseen’ for they are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18), and he says in similar vein to Hebrews 12:1–3 that we look at the glory of the Lord, as in ‘a mirror dimly’ (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). However, for the writer of Hebrews the life of faith is ‘as seeing him who is invisible’. Paul has a similar thought in Romans 1:20 where he says that the invisible things of God are made plainly known by the visible things.

Sometimes the Hebrews’ concept is made to appear as Neo-Platonic, that is, that the writer thinks this world is not the true one, and the true one is an invisible one. It is doubtful whether the New Testament writers thought of the entire universe—terrestrial and celestial—as the one creation. So, certainly, does the writer of Hebrews, but he means that the world as we see it with the eyes of ‘faithless reason’ is not that of ‘things as they essentially are’.

All the time the true man of faith sees what God is about. He knows the plan. He knows what God is doing. He knows what he should be doing in all this, and so he lives accordingly. If the Kingdom is invisible, it is nonetheless real, for the things which men did in regard to that kingdom (‘which cannot be moved’) were very much of

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this earth, and in this world, *yet they pertained to that Kingdom*. Abel offers actual gifts, Noah builds a ship, Abraham thinks in terms of this world being peopled by his descendants and, as we shall see, others gave themselves to very real efforts in this world's sphere. *It is what happens here that is significant*. If there is a New Covenant, then it is here amongst God's people in this mundane sphere, whatever its eternal significance may be. It is here that the effect of the heavenly sanctuary reaches and obtains, and whilst one is here one can draw near to the throne of grace.

How, then, do we understand faith? The answer is: faith has ever seen God as He is. Faith has ever known the nature of God, His being, His plan, and His acts and operations, and faith has ever been in the plan and work of God. Fallen Man cannot understand these things. He has devised his own false theology, cosmology, and anthropology. He is not simply in error. He is in pride; hence what he understands in the moral and spiritual realm is actually false. Indeed it is opposed to the truth. Until he renounces unbelief he cannot come into faith, for faith is the opposite of unbelief.

Faithless Reasoning: Reasoning Faith

The 'real' world of the natural man, the man who uses faithless reason, is different from the world of the man who uses reasoning faith. They are two different systems. The so-called real world of the positivist or the rationalist or the natural man can be felt and seen and handled, and by empirical deduction can be understood. That which is in the world of the man of faith is by contrast insubstantial and stupid. It is in fact seemingly non-existent, the religious concoction of a fanciful imagination. Yet to the man

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of faith it is other. It is the real world. The natural man reads his universe and is dreadfully deluded. Satan has blinded his eyes (2 Cor. 4:4) and in fact Man is constantly deceived by the devil. His pride causes him to have his clever and intellectual views and rationalisations. The true man of faith sees an action which, commencing at creation, is wholly purposive—God-initiated, God-controlled, and God-operated. The end is purposed from the beginning, and the entire action is one concerted whole.

So faith is able to participate in the action. In a moment we will read what faith does, but first a practical caution. Paul says he has fought the battle or fight of faith. It is one we fight continually. We have warnings about being vigilant and sober, about withstanding the attacks of the evil world-system. We must be constantly renewed in the spirit of our minds, lest we fall back into worldly ways of understanding and worldly ways of operation. How many know that when we revert—for some reason—to reasoning about the things of faith by the modes of faithless reason, the world of faith disappears like a chimera, a mental mirage, and we are left with nothing but the unattractive and deadly derelict of faithless reasoning. Hence we must go on fighting in faith; go on being renewed in our minds; go on ‘enduring, as seeing him who is invisible’, and knowing that what we see has been made out of the things which do not appear, and that God *is*, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

So let us read now from Hebrews 11:4–40, and see the incredible dynamic of faith to accomplish those elements of the plan of God which He has put into the hands of His Son, His Spirit, and His church, the people of God, the true men and women of faith! With this let us realise that the invisible world is true, and substantial, and know that it is not another world. It is the true meaning of this world,

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the one to which God is always present, and for which and in which He is always purposefully active. Then we will understand that faith is the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.

This will bring us to our conclusion that faith is that living belief in the redeeming acts of the faithful Creator–Father–Redeemer which not only brings us back to Him, but gives us full sonship, the outcome of which is that we participate in His plan and work for His total creation. Faith then is first believing God and His acts; then it is receiving the fruit of these. It leads to union with God, and then knowledge of and participation in His plan. Whilst such faith is constantly assailed, and whilst it remains faith as we live in this world, hope—which is faith with a future look—is ours. Faith, in its totality, will one day be realised in complete sight—for we shall see Him ‘face to face’, and we shall know Him, even as we ourselves are known.