

Bible Student's Notebook

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Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XVIII Issue 448

What Is Faith?

by — Arthur P. Adams (1847-1920)

irst, I would reply negatively in the language of Scripture,

The law is not of faith: but the man that doeth them shall live in them (Galatians 3:12).

If you want to get salvation by doing, even by the least bit of doing, go back to Sinai: you have no need of Calvary. The word "faith" does not occur in the Old Testament except twice (Deuteronomy 32:20; Habakkuk 2:4), while it occurs hundreds of times in the New. Read on this point very carefully verse by verse the whole of Galatians 3. We shall refer to this further. In the realm of law, faith has no place; yet the law must be the "child leader" (Galatians 3:24), and it must come before the gospel; we shall see why presently.

In seeking an answer to the question, "What is faith?" we need not blunder about among the wordy disquisitions of men, or the unreasonable creeds of the churches. We have a plain direct Bible answer.

Faith is the substance [i.e., foundation, or ground] of things hoped for, the evidence [proof] of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

Let us study this definition. "Faith is the foundation of things hoped for," but what is the foundation of faith? The truth, I answer, for,

faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Now we have "The Word of God" (Acts 12:24; 18:11; Ephesians 6:17; Colossians 1:25; I Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:2; 19:13) as the foundation of faith. It will not do to leave out the foundation. Faith

that is not founded on Scripture is shadowy and vain. Faith that is not founded on the truth, God's Word (John 17:17), is a dead and worthless faith.

The first important point then, regarding faith, is that it is founded on the truth, or knowledge of God, for all truth is knowledge of God. Our faith in God will be in proportion to our knowledge of Him. Thus it is always: we cannot have much faith in a stranger, or in one with whom we are slightly acquainted. In proportion as we know a worthy person, as we become better and better acquainted with him, so our faith in him increases. So it is in our relationship with God: it is but reasonable that the better we know God the more we should trust Him, the less we know Him the weaker will be our faith.

Thus we see how true it is that the foundation of faith is knowledge of God. Every advanced believer knows how true this is in his own experience. When he was a "babe in Christ" (I Corinthians 3:1) his faith was weak and wavering; but as he grew in grace and increased in the knowledge of God, his faith continually strengthened.

This is an important point, and one that many miss. They realize that faith is important, but they do not understand that it is founded on knowledge. Hence they try to work up a great faith with very little knowledge of God. People but slightly acquainted with the Lord strain after an enormous faith; thus building with wood, hay and stubble, instead of gold, silver and precious stones (I Corinthians 3:12).

(see **F**AIT**н**, page 3987)

What Is Faith?	3985
Charging God Foolishly	3990



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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25):
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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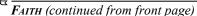
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There is a great deal of foolish talk among Christians about "believing." Seekers after religion are told to "believe." Seekers after sanctification are given the same advice. Such teachers of faith are "blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:14).

Learn this truth: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Hear the Word! (Luke 11:28). Study the Word! (II Timothy 2:15). "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39), and so get acquainted with God to become one of His "friends" (James 2:23), to know what He is doing, and you will not have to struggle to get your faith up to a certain pitch, as one might strain himself to blow up a big balloon and have nothing but a bag of wind after all, but your faith will grow spontaneously with your knowledge – indeed, it will "grow exceedingly" (II Thessalonians 1:3) like the tiny mustard seed from a mere speck to a "great tree" (Matthew 13:31-32), "a finished," perfected faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Now, I think that we can understand why the law was necessary, and why it must come before the gospel. The purpose of the law is given in Romans 3:20-21. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," and it is also a "witness" of "the righteousness of God." In other words, the law gives us knowledge of self, and knowledge of God.

I do not intend now to notice the former thought, but simply notice how the law gives us knowledge of God. The whole system of the law is one of God's revelations of Himself to man. All of the ceremonies and forms, all of the paraphernalia of the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, etc., all of these are types, shadows, patterns, figures of the "things pertaining to God" (Hebrews 5:1), thus revealing the Creator to the creature. Hence the law must come before the gospel which inculcates the way of faith, because the law gives us knowledge of God, the foundation of faith.

The order of development in this respect is as follows: First comes the law, giving us knowledge of God in type and shadow; then comes Christ, the most perfect revelation of God and hence giving us the most perfect knowledge of God; then, established upon this knowledge, comes faith, begetting blessed hope that lifts the veil of the future and gives us a foretaste of heaven; then in the next age comes sight, the actual realization of all that we now claim by faith.

Now, all of this is set forth in Galatians 3. In the first place, the apostle makes it plain here that the gospel is

the realm of faith and not law.

Received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the spirit are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (:2-3).

The law is of the flesh, faith is of the spirit. These Galatian Christians were trying to do what the church has not ceased trying to do to this day – namely, to unite the law and the gospel in the same dispensation: this is an impossible union. Under the law there was no faith (:12, 23-25). Yet when faith comes we are no longer under the law – the two are mutually exclusive: you must choose between them, for you cannot live under them both at the same time. Which shall it be, Sinai or Calvary? Law or gospel? Works or faith? Moses or Christ?

Do not deceive yourself by supposing that you can mix law and faith together, that, while you are an "heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Romans 4:13), you may also be "under the law" (Romans 2:12; I Corinthians 9:20).

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Of all professing Christians, the most to be pitied are those who profess to believe on Christ and to have entered into grace, and yet at the same time are trying to stagger along under the yoke of the law which neither the apostles nor their fathers were able to bear (Acts 15:10). They might as well try to walk on both sides of a stone wall at the same time; they might as well try to walk in opposite directions simultaneously.

The apostle goes on to illustrate faith, as he does in Romans 4, by Abraham, "the father of the faithful."

Abraham believed God ... (Romans 4:3).

That is all Abraham did, "and it was accounted to him [set down to his account] as righteousness" (Romans 4:3). There's justification by faith in a nutshell. Do not try to tack anything on to it; let it be plain and simple.

Now, right here I would notice how Abraham's faith illustrates the truth that knowledge is the foundation of faith. If Abraham had not had knowledge of God he never could have believed him, because God told Abraham something that, humanly speaking, was not true:



A father of many nations have I made thee; and I have made thee exceeding fruitful, and I have established my covenant between Me and thee, and I have given to thee and to thy seed after thee the land of thy sojournings, and I have become their God (Genesis 17:5-8).

If Abraham had not been well acquainted with the Lord, he never could have believed Him when He spoke of those things that were not as though they were. Herein lies the greatness of Abraham's faith, and the ground of his claim to the title of the "Father of the faithful" (Romans 4:16).

It was "before faith came" (Galatians 3:23) that Abraham thus believed God, way back in the dim period of type and shadow and allegory. He believed not only a promise in the future tense, - one which, in the common course of nature, was impossible – but when God spoke in the past tense as though the thing was already accomplished, although as yet God's Word had not begun to be carried out, for "the seed had not come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:19), not even the typical seed much less the true seed. Yet,

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what He had promised *He was able also to perform* (Romans 4:20).

Can we not see how mighty and wonderful Abraham's faith was? and that he will stand at the head of those who "believe God" (I John 5:10)? Can we not see also from this illustration what faith is, and how it is dependent on knowledge? Faith takes God at His Word, and "staggers not," even when the "wisdom of this world" (I Corinthians 1:20-21) would say, humanly speaking, that God's Word was not true. Yet a faith that measures

up to this Abrahamic standard is one that is founded on a knowledge of "the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:10).

Now we will notice further the third chapter of Galatians. The apostle goes on to show that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (:10), but that "Christ hath redeemed us from this curse" (:13), for He is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

Mark it well: if you have not come to "the end of the law," you have not come to Christ - a truth that we shall find still further confirmed in this same chapter. The apostle goes on to set forth the true seed "which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16), and to tell why the law comes in between the promise and its fulfillment: "it was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:19).

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid (Galatians 3:21).

The law is preliminary to faith: it gives us needful discipline and training to prepare us for the way of faith, as the apostle goes on to show.

Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our child-leader unto [i.e., until we get to] Christ (Galatians 3:23-24).

There are two very misleading errors here in the common version. First, instead of "schoolmaster" it should be "child-leader." The figure is taken from the ancient custom of having slaves attend the children to and from the school; such a slave was not by any means a school-



The Church Which Is His Body, and The Bride the Lamb's Wife

We have reprinted a grand work on the subject of "the Body" in contrast to "the Bride" by the late J.H. Kessler.

"In Scripture the church of this dispensation is symbolized as 'the Body of Christ,' never as 'the Bride.'" — Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*

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master, but one to lead the child to school when he was handed over to the charge of the schoolmaster.

The other error here is in the supplied words, "to bring us." These words are not in the original as is indicated by their being in italics, but are supplied by the translators to make out the sense, as, doubtless, they supposed; but they make the passage express an untruth. The law does not bring us to Christ: this is not the purpose of the law. Rather, the law brings us to ourselves; it slays us (Romans 7:11); it brings us to a knowledge of the horrible pit in which we are sunk, and leaves us there, for it has no power to help us out.

The law brings us into that condition of perfect self-despair where Christ can help us (Romans 7:24-25); but if Christ did not come to us we should never be helped, for the law would never bring us to Him. What Paul means here is as follows: The law deals with man in his childhood, the "natural man," restraining and checking and condemning him until he gets far enough along to cry out, "O wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:24).

Then the law has done all for him that it can at that stage of his development, and Christ takes him up; he begins to attend the school of Christ, to learn how to escape the deadly grip of the law (Romans 6) and to "obtain the righteousness which is by faith" (Romans 1:17; 9:30). Now read the next two verses:

The law was our child-leader unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith [we never could be justified by law]. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a child-leader, for ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24-25).

Thus we have learned two important facts about faith.

1. Faith is dependent on, and in proportion to, our knowledge of God.

Faith comes by hearing; and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

2. Faith has no place in the law, and the law has no place in it.

The Law is not of faith (Galatians 3:12).

After that faith is come we are no longer under the child-leader [law].

Now we will notice a little further Hebrews 11:1,

Faith is the foundation of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Rotherham renders this passage thus:

Faith is of things hoped for, a confidence, of facts, a conviction, when they are not seen.

This brings out the apostle's meaning very clearly. The foundation or confidence of our hope is faith, a scriptural faith, itself founded on knowledge of God. A hope that has no foundation, one in which we have no confidence, is a worthless hope. It is our faith that gives confidence; our faith in God's Word is the foundation, broad and solid, of our expectations of future good.

As yet, we have actually experienced nothing of our hope. All we have now is faith and hope; but this faith may be so strong, if we know God, that we may actually speak of the realization of it as in the past, as Paul does in Ephesians 2 and Colossians 3.

Is it not clear that "faith is the foundation of things hoped for?" Is it not equally true that it is "of facts, a conviction, when they are not seen?"

The only things in this world that really deserve to be (see Faith, next page)



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Charging God Foolishly

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

It is no relief to seek to exonerate God, as the gnostics did, by interposing some of God's creatures between Himself and evil. That false faith invented a series of subordinate divinities, the lowest being responsible for evil. So some of His saints seek to shield Him by interposing Adam, and his will, or Satan and his rebellion. Yet Adam was God's creation and Satan himself is His creature. It was not Satan who planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden. Why did not God plant two trees, one for the knowledge of good, and the other for the knowledge of evil? Was it not because the two are inseparable? Can good be known apart from evil, or evil apart from good? Are they not like light and darkness, which we know only by contrast? Never let us doubt God's wisdom in planting one tree for the knowledge of both good and evil. Rather let us rejoice that the knowledge of evil will always constitute the prime ingredient in our appreciation of good when evil it-

self is no more.

duced by intermediaries. God did not directly afflict Job. Satan was His instrument. Yet Job was not deceived. Even the dim light in which he lived was sufficient to lead him back to the One Who is the primal Cause of all. He did not say, Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil at the hand of Satan? There would have been much truth in that. He received evil at the hand of God (Job 2:10). Let us learn the lesson Job knew so well and boldly say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Is this a sin? Is this charging God foolishly? "In all this," we read, "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:21-22).

It is true, and well to note, that evil is intro-

— *The Unveiling of Jesus Christ*, Concordant Publishing Concern, 1935, pp. 168-169

FAITH (continued from previous page)

called facts are the "unseen things" (II Corinthians 4:18) – the things discerned not by natural sense, but by faith. Of course, this is contrary to worldly wisdom, which will acknowledge nothing as facts that does not come under the cognizance of the natural senses or is not established by evidence plain to the natural man. Hence, "the things of the spirit of God" are "foolishness" to the natural man (I Corinthians 2:14); yet these only are the enduring things. They can be apprehended only by the spiritual sense; and oh, how solid and substantial they appear to the one who, with anointed vision, is able to see "afar off" (Hebrews 11:13; II Peter 1:9), and having his spiritual "senses exercised by reason of use" (Hebrews 5:14) can apprehend the truth!

Thanks be to God for the solid facts that faith enables us to grasp! God can make "the things that are not seen" (II Corinthians 4:18) so plain and positive to us that they will indeed appear as facts; the things that we grasp by faith will seem the most solid (in fact, the *only* solid things) of all others. Why? Because they rest on God's Word. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah

40:5), and it cannot fail. Happy is the man who thus knows the way of faith.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him (Psalm 2:12).

O you called and chosen ones, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22).



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