

Faith' and 'The Faith'

by H.J. Vine

Faith is the principle on which we are justified, and it is the whole scheme of God's revelation given in this present dispensation, centred in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 16:1, Isaiah 26:10, Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 10:17, Galatians 3:23, Colossians 1:23, 1 Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 11:1, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "True Faith", "Justification By Faith"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the significance of faith from the days of Abel to the present, emphasizing that true faith was delivered to the saints through Christ. He urges believers to contend for this faith, as many are departing from it in the last days, revealing their lack of true faith. The Old Testament illustrates the consequences of lacking faith and the shining of faith in times of trial. The New Testament emphasizes that faith is a gift from God, received through hearing His Word, leading to justification. The faith is centered on Jesus Christ, the Leader and Completer of faith, enabling believers to stand firm, grow, and overcome the world.

Transcript

From the days of Abel right on to the present time there have been men of faith, but it was not till Christ came that the faith was "delivered to the saints."

Previous to that, we are told, they were "kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed" (Gal. 3:23). We are now exhorted to "contend" for it, and, when in possession of it, to "continue" in it, for many are departing from it in these last days, just as God's Word foretold. Such apostates show by so doing that they are devoid of faith, even though they once professed the faith.

The word faith occurs but twice in the authorized version of the Old Testament. First, in Deuteronomy 32, it is said that God's earthly people would turn away from Him, and lightly esteem the Rock of their salvation, provoking Him to anger by their vanities, so He would hide His face from them, "for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" (v. 20). The second is in Habakkuk, where we are told of a time of great poverty and distress, in contrast to the plenty and fatness spoken of in the first Scripture. This period of need became the occasion for faith to shine, so Habakkuk finds strength, salvation and joy in God, so he sings his song to the Lord with a lofty tone, whilst he walks upon high places, and looks forward to the day that "will not tarry," and meanwhile, he says, "The just shall live by his faith" (2:4).

The first Scripture shows that the professing people of God in seasons of prosperity may become faithless and forget God, and the second that in times of trial the qualities of faith may shine with a special lustre. In Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, the Spirit cites the words from Habakkuk, and this alone shows their immense importance, emphasizing, as they do, a distinct fact in each of the three citations. Moreover, James 2:5 indicates that faith is enriched by the testings of difficult times, inasmuch as they cast us the more upon God Himself, so it is written, "The poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom." Consequently, it is said, "My brethren have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons," for an opulent man professing the faith may be poor indeed as regards faith, and even be devoid of it altogether.

Whatever profession may be made, it is impossible to please God without faith, but when we have faith it may be increased, and we may become "in faith." Hebrews 11 begins by telling us that it makes real to us the things hoped for and the things not seen, and then gives the names of many who "obtained a good report through faith"; but chapter 12 opens by pointing us away from this cloud of witnesses to Jesus Himself, who is both the Leader and Completer of faith.

We are to look with steadfast contemplation upon Jesus, and not upon those who are but witnesses to the power of faith, for He is the only Leader in this and also the only Perfecter of faith. He has Himself trodden the whole path in flawless perfection through shame and suffering, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. We are therefore told to "consider Him well." Herein lies the secret of enrichment in faith, and as we do so what we sometimes sing will be increasingly true of us--

"Like Him in faith, in meekness, love,

In every beautiful grace;

From glory into glory changed,

Till we behold His face."

Under law this spiritual or moral transformation was not possible, but the faith is now revealed, and our Lord Jesus Christ is its Centre. It is "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." It is also spoken of as the "one faith" and "the faith of God's elect"--"our faith." True liberty is connected with it--liberty to behold the glory of the Lord, and where there is faith the Spirit enables us to do so. Moses had to veil his face when it reflected only a measure of glory, for God's earthly people could not look thereon. The law was given by Moses, but both grace and truth subsist today through Jesus Christ. Liberty and not bondage is therefore ours now, and the faith which centres in Christ is the faith in which we are told to "stand fast." It is the faith which a bigoted religionist once sought to destroy, but which, after being touched by the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ he zealously preached till the end of his days (see Gal. 1:23, etc.).

"Faith"

Having made the above general remarks, it is necessary to speak more in detail. In one connection faith is contrasted with works of law, and in another with sight. Now Ephesians 2:8 tells us that faith is "not of ourselves," but is "the gift of God." When we possess that gift, it may be said to be ours, as we read, "Thy faith has saved thee." How, then, does it come to us? Romans 10:17 answers the question--"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." A report, God's Word, brings it to us. The first man recorded

in the Old Testament to "believe" is Abraham. God pointed him to the starry heavens on high and made him a promise (Gen. 15:5), and "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). The Gospel of God comes to men today, pointing them to God's Son, who has died for our sins, who has lain in the grave, who has been raised again by God for our justification, who is now exalted at God's right hand, and of the one who receives these glad tidings it can be said, "His faith is counted for righteousness." He is justified on the principle of faith.

Faith is not the portion of all, and bad and evil men will always try to hinder the spread of the Gospel of God's grace, nevertheless "the household of faith" will be enabled to maintain its testimony till the Lord returns, both in their experience and in their life. God's present administration is in faith, and at the very start, when the Gospel of God first reaches us, His righteousness in setting us right with Himself is revealed on the principle of faith to faith (Rom. 1:17), and "the obedience of faith" is the result of this. No mere obedience to religious rules without this can give pleasure to God. We "walk by faith," and our service is the "work of faith" when carried on in the energy of faith which "worketh by love." And in the warfare of faith we need its "shield" as well as its "breastplate," and thus we shall be marked, not by self-confidence, but by the boldness of faith, for our armour is provided by God.

Now the apostle said to some of the household of God, "Your faith groweth exceedingly," and the disciples once asked the Lord to increase their faith, so we read also of the faith of the saints at Corinth increasing, and of the "progress and joy in faith" of the Philippians. This shows that development is to be expected and not decline in faith. How is this to come about? If it comes to us by God's Word at the beginning, surely it is by that same Word, which increases our true knowledge of God, that faith is also both sustained and increased. Without question we should desire to be rich in faith; but it must be remembered that it is a matter of the heart rather than the head. "With the heart man believes," we are told, and it "worketh by love," as we have seen.

Faith makes real to us the things of God, which are brought before us by the Spirit in God's Word; the things that are to come and the things that are within the veil are ministered to us, and faith appropriates them. The man who is merely natural, even if religious, cannot receive them, for as we read, "Faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, N.Tr.). Therefore, we come in this way even now to the wide range of the glory connected with Christ which shall soon be displayed--to mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the universal gathering, to the assembly of firstborn ones; and we also enter in the same way into the holiest, where Jesus is within the veil, having boldness by His blood; and we offer by Him the sacrifice of praise to our God and Father as purged worshippers having no more conscience of sins.

"For freely God the saints can greet

Where glory crowns the mercy-seat."

"The Faith"

We have seen that faith is the principle on which we are justified; also that it is the principle on which we receive the things of God; and that faith is in the heart, where it works by love. It has been said, that it is "light in the soul"; that, however, is insufficient to express the truth, though of course light is present, but it is rather the heart where this believing principle is, and both light and truth from God have to do with its presence there. It does much for the believer, and the believer can do much by it. Faith brought to Enoch the testimony that he pleased God, and by faith Moses forsook Egypt and endured as seeing Him who is

invisible. By faith Rahab perished not, and by faith the walls of Jericho fell. It enriches the believer, and it enables him to do exploits. It is peace giving, and it is practical. It receives in, and it works out.

When, however, we speak of "The Faith," an expression often found in the New Testament, we are on different ground altogether. It was unknown in Old Testament times. It was revealed when Christ came, and not before (Gal. 3:22-26). To the saints it was given at the beginning (Jude 3). Many speak of Christianity when it would be better and safer to speak of that which the Spirit terms "the faith." It is for this we are to contend earnestly together, so that we may possess it in Divine power; for it is from this, even though men retain the name Christian, the Spirit expressly tells us, some will depart, "in the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith." Nevertheless we are not instructed to contend against them, but when they do this we are to unitedly possess the good which they forsake. The faith is said to, be ours--our "most holy faith," and we are to build ourselves up on this, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in God's love, as we await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not easy to express in a sentence or two what the faith is, but it is clearly something which may be kept, for Paul said, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). It is also something in which we may be "sound," in which we are to "stand fast," in which we may be "established," in which we may "love" one another, and in which we are to "abide," for we shall be presented holy, unblameable, and irreproachable in the glory if we "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (Col. 1:23). On the other hand, it is equally clear that it is something which may be departed from as we have already seen. It is something which may be left after being once professed, for we read of those who aspire to be rich and "have wandered from the faith" (1 Tim. 6:10). It can also be "denied" by bad conduct, it can be "missed" by making profession of false-named science, and it can be "cast off" by those who grow wanton against Christ. Seeing, therefore, it was "revealed" after the law period, and that it "was once delivered to the saints" at the beginning, we conclude that it is the whole scheme of God's revelation given in this present dispensation, the Centre of which is our Lord Jesus Christ, and in which true believers stand in abiding relationship with Him. Those who have faith will continue in it, and those who only profess it without true faith will not. It is similar to "the truth" so often spoken of in John's writings, though that is rather the exact expression of what is true in every sense, and none are of the truth or in the truth who are not born of God.

We need to be edified in the faith, to be nourished with the "words" of it, and to hold "the mystery" of it in a pure conscience. This being so, we shall be steadfast, and we shall not be unsettled by the inconsistent conduct of many who profess it. There is a striking verse in Isaiah 26--"Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will be deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord" (v. 10). It is the same in the profession of this holy faith today, some deal unjustly, and have no desire after the beauty and glory of the Lord. How different to others, who amidst many trials, "glorify the Lord in the fires," and "sing for the majesty of the Lord." The Holy Spirit designates the faith today as "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." It centres in this glorious Person. It is sustained by Him. And we are maintained in it in Divine energy and grace as His majesty and beauty are appreciated by us in faith.

"O Lord, Thy glory we behold,

Though not with mortal eyes;

That glory, on the Father's throne,

No human sight describes."

It is the eye of faith which sees it, and the heart rejoices in it, making our gladdened souls sing for the majesty of the Lord.

"Our Faith"

As this is increasingly true of us, we shall take up these words of the Holy Spirit, and use them with a tone of joyful triumph,--"Our Faith!" We have seen that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Leader and Perfecter of faith. Entering upon the path, we hear Him say, "Preserve Me, O God, for in Thee do I put My trust" (Ps. 16:1). Going forward, He does not take the names of apostates into His lips, but to God He says, "Thou maintainest My lot. The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places . . . I will bless the Lord." Then looking beyond the grave to resurrection and glory, He says, "Thy countenance is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." The Son of God finished His course to God's glory and is now Himself glorified on high, and He has given gifts from thence for the work of the ministry, "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." There is just the "faith" given of God today, and Titus was Paul's child according to the faith which is common to all true believers (1:4), therefore with thankful hearts we can say, This faith is ours! and esteeming its Divine grandeur as given by God Himself, glorying in its Sustainer, the exalted Son of God, knowing that it is the Spirit who enables us to behold His glory, with exultation we may well sound aloud our song of rejoicing in spite of the opposers and the apostates. Kings--all honour to them!--may inscribe their coinage with the letters FID. DEF.--"DEFENDER OF THE FAITH"--but the possessors of it can sing in triumph--

"The world with sin and Satan,

Display their strength before us,

By Thee we shall break through them all,

And join the heavenly chorus!

By faith we see the glory

Of which Thou dost assure us,

Thyself on high, our glorious Prize,

Where Thou hast gone before us."

Thus shall we continue and be enriched in the faith, not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel, but looking off unto Jesus from all else, and looking on, to being with Him and like Him for ever, we shall take up the verse where John but once mentions the word "faith" in his Gospel or Epistles, and say, "THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD, EVEN OUR FAITH! WHO IS HE THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD, BUT HE THAT believes THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD?" (1 John 5:4-5).

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