

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: SAVING FAITH

The Source of Saving Faith

1. *The grace of faith by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls is the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Normally it is brought into being through the preaching of the Word. By the Word and its ministry, by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, by prayer, and also by other means appointed by God, faith is increased and strengthened.*

Faith is a gift of God's grace to the elect (Acts 13:48, 18:27, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29). It is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart in regeneration, and not the other way round (see John 1:12-13, 1 John 5:1). The Holy Spirit usually works in connection with the preaching of the Word as the instrument, because preaching is about Christ as the One in whom men are commanded to believe (Romans 10:13-15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-24).

The Nature of Saving Faith

2. *By faith a Christian believes everything to be true that is made known in the Word, in which God speaks authoritatively. He also perceives in the Word a degree of excellence superior to all other writings, indeed to all things that the world contains.*

The Word shows the glory of God as seen in His various attributes, the excellence of Christ in His nature and in the offices He bears, and the power and perfection of the Holy Spirit in all the works in which He is engaged.

In this way the Christian is enabled to trust himself implicitly to the truth thus believed, and to render service according to the different requirements of the various parts of Scripture.

To the commands he yields obedience; when he hears threatenings he trembles; as for the divine promises concerning this life and that which is to come, he embraces them.

But the principal acts of saving faith relate in the first instance to Christ as the believer accepts, receives and rests upon Him alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life; and all by virtue of the covenant of grace.

(a) **Faith is centred in the Word of God** (lines 1-3). Faith is not believing in the things you think, or you need, or you feel. True faith is always the response to what God says. Hebrews 11 is the great chapter in the Bible about faith – note how their faith was in God as He had spoken to them: Noah was warned by God (v. 7), Abraham was called by God (v. 8), Sarah was promised by God (v. 11), and their descendents promised to by God (v. 13). As the greatest example of faith, Abraham's whole life was one of response to God who had spoken to him (see especially Romans 4:17-21). Saving faith therefore puts the Word of God above every other word as the final authority.

(b) **Faith is centred in the God of the Word** (lines 4-6). The Bible is first of all a book about God, revealing who He is and what He has done. Note how the Confession understands God to be revealed as three Persons. Many people approach the Bible as if it is a book about men, both good men and bad men. Rather it is about how God reveals Himself in His dealings with men. For example, we learn about God's grace, patience, and justice in His dealings with Abraham and his descendents. When you read the Bible, the first question to ask is: 'What does it tell me about God so that I might believe in Him?'

(c) **The response of *faith* to the Word of God.**

1. Implicit trust (lines 7-8) – You do not demand proof for the things you read in the Bible. You accept them as true just because they are in the Bible. Saving faith does not question the Bible, still less does it argue with the Bible. It humbly submits to the Bible as the Word of God.
2. Active service (lines 9-10) – You put into practice whatever the Word of God requires, whether obeying the commands, trembling at the threats, or embracing the promises. For example, Noah was told to build the ark, and he did it without questioning God’s command (Hebrews 11:7)
3. Resting in Christ alone (lines 11-13) – Because the whole Bible is about the salvation God has planned and accomplished in Christ, if you are not trusting in Christ then you do not have any true faith. Note that it is in Christ “alone” that you put all your trust for salvation and nothing in yourself or anything else. So you acknowledge that your salvation is by grace alone.

Different Types of Faith

3. *Saving faith has its gradations. It may be weak or strong. Yet, like all other kinds of saving faith, even at its lowest ebb it is quite different in its nature from the faith and common grace of temporary believers. In consequence, though it may be frequently attacked and weakened, it wins through to victory, developing in many Christians until they attain full assurance through Christ, who is both the ‘author and finisher of our faith’.*

(a) **Weak** and **strong** saving faith. Read Matthew 6:30, 14:31, 16:8, Romans 14:19-20 for examples of both weak and strong faith. It depends how much you are prepared to implicitly trust what God says. Despite all the obstacles to faith that Abraham had in himself and in his wife, he grew strong in faith because he considered God was able to do what He had promised.

(b) **Saving** faith and **temporary** faith. There are examples in the Bible of people of whom it is said that they believed, but they did not have saving faith (see John 2:23-25, Acts 8:13, James 2:14-26).

(c) Saving faith and **full assurance** of faith. Faith is not the same thing as assurance. Faith is centred in Christ. Assurance is the certainty I am saved. Just as faith grows, so also does assurance grow (Hebrews 6:11, 10:22). Not all Christians develop this full assurance because their faith is still mixed with many questions and doubts. The letter of 1 John was written to develop assurance in true believers (see 5:13).