

## **LIVING BY FAITH**

**By Bob Young**

**Text: Rom. 1:14-17; Hab. 2:4**

### **Introduction**

Our subject today is faith. What is faith? Is faith only mental? James 2 suggests a negative answer. Faith is more than mere assent. Faith is trust, dependence, believe, obedience. Let us explore faith further. Are we faithful? Hoping by Faith. Justified by faith. Living by faith.

Ever notice how hard some people make the Christian life? Never fun, never sure, no certainty, always guilty. Do you know anyone like that? Do you ever act like that? Do I? If your life is like that even part of the time, this lesson is for you.

Really, it is no wonder we struggle, for Paul's thesis statement in Rom. 1:16ff is immediately followed by 1:18, and the first chapter of Romans only gets worse. Despite the good news, this message doesn't always seem good news. Sometimes it seems to be bad news.

Perhaps that is because we tell people what they must do before tell them what God has done, perhaps because it is not personalized. How can we personalize the gospel? How can we communicate good news?

Faith depends upon starting with God, personalizing the good news. Believe that he is, that he rewards. Heb. 11:6.

It is true that God's wrath is revealed, and that truth goes on for at least 2½ chapters in Romans. Yet echoing in the back of our minds throughout those chapters is the simple promise of 1:17. What does it mean? The modern tendency toward self-righteousness is not good news. But as the book of Romans unfolds, we do not see self-righteousness, but a vicarious righteousness, imputed righteousness, reckoned righteousness, accounted righteousness. Those with such righteousness credited to their lives can live by faith, will live by faith.

Understanding this text is essential. Just shall live by my faith/his faith. Paul just says faith. But the original OT text that lies behind the thought is essential. We live by faith. Jesus first lived by faith. Jesus was faithful as God is faithful. Look at the first verses of chapter 3. Faith progresses—it moves from God to Christ to us. Not until we get to 3:21 (begin reading in 3:19) do we get the rest of the story. Not only is a wrath of God revealed, but also a righteousness of God, apart from law, apart from legal obligation, apart from meritorious and demeritorious bookkeeping systems. In fact, this was ultimately in view in the law and the prophets. What is this righteousness? How does it work? Begin with God. How can I get in on it? Personalize the good news.

The answers are life-changing. You will never be the same. You will never talk the same, act the same, relate the same, be the same. The answer begins: this is a righteousness of/from God, by faith of/in Jesus Christ. Is this subjective or objective faith? Is this Christ as the subject acting with faith/faithfulness? Or is this us believing in Christ, so he is the object of our faith? As K.C. Moser pointed out over forty years ago, if we make any of the conditions of righteousness or salvation, including faith, meritorious, we have misunderstood the gospel. Burton Coffman argues likewise in his commentary on Romans. Perhaps we cannot know for sure, but consider the option for a moment. Consider the significance of the faith principle in relation to God, to Christ, and ultimately to us.

### **I. God is faithful. Rom. 3:3.**

### **II. Christ is faithful, based on 3:22 as translated in KJV.**

Christ's faithfulness then is the basis of this righteousness which can be credited to us. This is more clearly seen in the triteness of 3:22 with many contemporary translations. Have you noticed it? What shall we say? TDNT

devotes 54 pages to faith, but does not touch Rom. 3:21-26. The faith of Christ. Here is a wonderful explanation of 1:17, not an ever increasing faith, not a faith from beginning to end, but the faith of God and faith of Christ leading to our faithfulness.

**III. We have been called to faith, to faithfulness**, despite the fact of our sinfulness, 3:23. No Jewish/Gentile distinctions matter, all have sinned. But we are made righteous (justified, a legal term); redeemed (bought back, an economic term from the marketplace and slavery); atoned (from the religious sacrificial systems, both Heb. and Grk.). Thus vs. 25 says God presented him as an atoning sacrifice by faith by (not in) his blood. God thus becomes righteous and the one making righteous the one who is of the faith of Jesus (3:26). The one who is faithful like Jesus, depending like Jesus, obeying like Jesus, living like Jesus.

Is that good news? Can you take that personally? God is calling us to rely upon the one who is reliable, to fidelity toward the one who epitomizes fidelity, to loyalty and allegiance to the faithful God, who will remain faithful and will never disown himself even when we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13).

This faith idea is often used of contractual relationship in classical Greek. This contract/covenant/agreement is unbelievable! We receive God's grace because we rely on, depend upon, believe, trust--the one who is worthy of trust, who is faithful.

So faith can mean faithfulness, as Rom 3:3. Consider other passages where this meaning may be in view.

- Faithfulness in human dealings, Mt 23:23; Gal 5:22; Tit 2:10.
- We can be faithful to Christ, 1 Tim 5:12, where it almost takes on meaning of oath.
- In Acts 17:31, used in sense of to give a pledge, to offer proof.
- Later can take on sense of to believe in that it affirms dependence upon and obedience to, thus can take on nuance of obey.

In primitive Christianity, faith became leading term for describing relation of man to God. Five related ideas.

- To believe--more often means to believe God's words than to believe in God's existence. Belief is put in Scripture (Jn. 2:22); what is written in law and prophets (Ac. 24:14); in what prophets have said (Lk. 24:25), in prophets (Ac. 26:27); or in Moses and writings (Jn. 5:46). If believe in what God is saying, believe in God's messenger (as John the Baptist, Mk. 11:31; Mt. 21:32). Thus in John's gospel, believe Jesus or His Word, as one sent by God speaking the words of God.
- To obey, that to believe is to obey is particularly emphasized in Heb. 11. Also Heb. 3, unfaithfulness vs. disobedience.
- To trust
- To hope
- To be faithful. As in Heb. 12:1, endurance is closely related. With negative prefix can mean unfaithfulness of Christians, Heb. 11:17; Heb. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:13. In 1 Pet. 1:7, faithfulness must be demonstrated when tested.

### **Conclusion**

Faith then comes to be a life changing experience, because of our acceptance of the teaching as the content of the faith, and in the personal relationship to Christ, or to God through Christ, which comes as we become like him, partaking of the divine nature.

It is only later that we see that all missionary preaching demands faith in the deity proclaimed, and thus faith comes to be a religious attitude to degree that in it man, actualizes his relationship to God.