

A Brief on the Faith of Jesus
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Introduction

The phrase "faith of Jesus" occurs in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible in these verses:

Even the righteousness of God which is by **faith of Jesus** Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (Romans 3:22)

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the **faith of Jesus** Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by **faith of Jesus** Christ might be given to them that believe. (Galatians 3:22)

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the **faith of Jesus**. (Revelation 14:12)

Paul has in Galatians 2 one more verse with a parallel phrase:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the **faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Note that the first verse above from Galatians also has the phrase "faith of Christ" which occurs once more in Philippians:

And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the **faith of Christ**, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Philippians 3:9)

"Faith of" or "Faith in"--A Divine Answer

In the Greek, the phrase that occurs in Galatians 3:22 also occurs in Romans 3:26, but the KJV translates it there, "which believeth in Jesus." The modern translations as a rule translate all the phrases in a similar way, "faith in Jesus" or "faith in Christ." Scholars for years have discussed whether it should be "faith of" or "faith in."¹ In other words, is it something that Jesus does, or that I do as a believer? My conviction is that the evidence is weighted on the side of "faith of"--something that Jesus does. My reasons are the following.

The first reason is noting that the action of "believe" is what "faith" does. The following verses describe that connection, using both of these verb (believe) and noun (faith) forms: Romans 4:5, 11; 2 Corinthians 4:13; Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 1:21. Also, the Bible tells us that there is a close connection between love and faith. Faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). And it is love that believes all things (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Since God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), He is the source of the action "believe" that the dynamic "faith" does. This is why Jesus is called the "author ... of faith" (Hebrews 12:2; the word "our" in the KJV is not in the original). But God's love desires a response in kind--our love responding to His love. In fact, that is the only way we can love (1 John 4:19). Therefore the implications are that our faith is a response to His faith. This is the best way to understand Galatians 2:16--it is because of "the faith of Jesus" that "we have believed in Jesus"--His faith is creative, and ours is responsive. Every other verse in the New Testament that uses both the verb (believe) and the

¹ I have a good article written by a friend of mine in an academic journal (and thus a bit technical) on this "debate" that I can supply if desired.

noun (faith) are describing this reciprocal dynamic, and they are verses quoted at the beginning: Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; 3:22.

This is why there are two other places that speak of "the faith of God." Paul in Romans 3:3 asked a question, "What if some [of the Jews] did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" In other words, what if some did not respond to God's faith with faith--will it nullify God's faith? His response is emphatically "No! God's faith will still be effective in justifying Him."² Paul echoed the same point in this verse: "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:13).

The other location mentioning the "faith of God" is Mark 11:22. The KJV here has "faith in God," but the grammar is the same as Romans 3:3. A modern version in basic English, translates this verse, "Have God's faith" (Bible in Basic English). Jesus' point in this story (at the climax of His ministry) is that the only way to avoid the fate of the cursed fig tree, is to respond to God's faith with faith. There is no future without faith and love! That is why He was so happy at the great faith of two Gentiles (Matthew 8:10; 15:28), and grieved at the lack of faith of His own people (Matthew 6:30; 13:58) and His own disciples (Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

To summarize how this divine dynamic works, we could say it this way. God is love, and thus He has the ability to see and believe what everyone can be in His plan, receiving and giving unselfish love.³ He works to convey that picture to people in how He treats them. As sinners we have lost love and faith, and God's work in saving us is to restore what we lack. He restores love by loving us. He restores faith by believing in us. It is in this way that He has given to each "the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). Jesus came to reveal that. His entire life here, including His death, revealed just that. The righteousness of God was being manifested. But love looks for love, and faith for faith. So when there is a response in kind, true joy and fellowship result. But when love meets no love, and faith meets unbelief, there is suffering and grief.

In the Old Testament

Though we have been considering just New Testament texts, the concept is rooted in the Old Testament, as Romans 3:3 makes clear. The question there follows the observation that the Jews have great advantage over the Gentiles, "chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." The main way we see God's faith at work is by reviewing the written record of His dealing with human beings, writings that began with the books of Moses. Every command and every promise is an expression of His faith working by love. As we review the Bible story from beginning to end, this is what God wants us to see. Paul called it "the word of faith, which we preach" which has the goal of a response of faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:8, 17).

This is why Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 three times --in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38. "The just shall live by faith." But the source of that faith is God Himself. Observe how a Jewish rabbi who knew the Hebrew scripture described it.

Faith is real only when it is not one-sided but reciprocal. Man can rely on God, if God can rely on man. We may trust in Him because He trusts in us.[footnote 35] To have faith means to justify God's faith in man. It is as essential that God believe in man as that man should believe in God. Thus faith is awareness of divine mutuality and companionship, a form of communion between God and man.⁴

² See verse 4. God is being justified from *charges* of unrighteousness by Satan, whereas we are being justified from *being* unrighteous because we are sinners.

³ See the quote at the end for a beautiful description of how faith "sees"--the "eye of faith."

⁴ Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone, A Philosophy of Religion* (1951), p. 190, Section: "Faith is Reciprocity"; Footnote 35: "Faith is ascribed to God in Deuteronomy 32:4."

The text his footnote pointed to reads in the KJV, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4). The word "truth" here is identical to the word "faith" in Habakkuk 2:4! So Jesus, this Rock, lived by faith--faith primarily in His Father (in His secondary role as Son of man), but also faith secondarily in His fellow human beings (in His primary role as Son of God). We are living by that faith, and if we respond in faith, that life can continue forever.

A rabbi in the New Testament whose writings we have been examining most closely, Paul, described this reciprocity in these words in one of his "live by faith" texts. "For therein [in the gospel story of Jesus' life] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17). That is how God's righteousness is functioning--from ("out of") God's faith to ("into") my faith.

Reflections on "Faith of Jesus" Texts

Consider the general ways in which the phrases noted at the beginning occur in the verses there. All of Paul's verses describe this faith as the means "by" or "through" which the following have come: the righteousness of God, being justified, and the promise of the covenant. John's use of the phrase shows it as something to be kept along with the commandments of God, as something that is connected with patience or endurance in the end-times, against end-time evil forces just before Jesus comes. Let's look at each of these occurrence more closely, in the order they occur in the New Testament.

Romans 3:22

The "righteousness of God" in this verse goes with the verb "manifested" in the previous verse, which is in the perfect tense, meaning "an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated."⁵ So there is no way my "faith in Jesus" could match that meaning--that my faith in Jesus manifested the righteousness of God. Only "the faith of Jesus" could have accomplished that.

Galatians 2:16

The two occurrences in this verse are best understood by the parallel phrase in the next verse using the same verb "justify"--"to be justified by Christ." So the one doing the justifying is Jesus Christ, not me nor my faith. Thus verse 16 is contrasting what I can do--"works of the law"--with what Christ has done--"the faith of Jesus," "the faith of Christ." It is "knowing" that fact that leads to the response God wants, "even we have believed in Jesus Christ." This is the pinnacle (center) of the structure of this verse, supported on both sides by two things repeated--affirmations of how we are justified, and of how we are not.

Galatians 2:20

This later verse in Galatians 2 describes a universal truth, being confessed by a believer. Jesus died on account of the sins of all, and was raised on account of that death having justified the very life of sinners (Romans 4:25; 5:18). Paul realized that when Jesus died, all died (2 Corinthians 5:14). So he could confess, "I am crucified with Christ." Since he believed that universal truth, he could continue, "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The indwelling Christ by means of the Spirit is the only solution to indwelling sin (Romans 7:17, 20; 8:2, 9, 11). Everyone is alive because of the faith and love of God revealed in Jesus. For everyone, this phrase is true: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." But only the believer confesses this, and only the believer experiences the freedom of Christ living in him. It is the one who believes in Jesus that confesses that Jesus' faith in him makes not only his faith but also his very life possible.

⁵ Thayer's Greek Lexicon

Galatians 3:22

In Paul's last verse in Galatians with our phrase, he repeats a theme he used in the Romans 3 passage. All are sinners, so God in His faith had to promise them something. A sinner cannot believe first, in order to get God to respond. Sinners are like the woman brought to Jesus in John 8. He did not tell her, "If you believe, I will not condemn you." Instead it was the other way around. After getting rid of her accusers, the faith of Jesus extended a love that said, "Neither do I condemn you." In essence, He was saying "I will not condemn you, so you can believe." It is only the sinner who grasps Jesus' forgiving love that can respond in faith. Otherwise, what would a sinner believe in? But Jesus' faith did not condone her sin. Calvary would show how deadly her sin (and ours) is. And so faith and love don't demand that the other must pay the price. No, they affirm the price but are willing to pay it. So out of that "grace of our Lord [that] was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," He was able to point her to a future she needed to believe. "Go and sin no more." (John 8:11; 1 Timothy 1:14). These words are like telling a lame man to walk. The response of faith is simply accepting Jesus' vision for me, of believing what He believes, and the power of the faith embodied in His word of command. Then a miracle occurs. What He says, is. Thus in our Galatians verse Paul said, the promise is "given to them that believe."

Philippians 3:9

In the last verse quoted from Paul, we have a picture of the apostle himself. Through Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, God revealed a picture, a plan that placed the human race back "in Jesus." The evidence is that as soon as Adam sinned and gave his dominion to Satan (Genesis 1:26, 28; Luke 4:6), the Father gave dominion of the human race to His Son (Psalms 110:1-4).⁶ The faith of God thus extends life to all. Otherwise every sinner would die because of sin (Romans 6:23). Responsive faith accepts the Source of that life, and begins the eternal life anew. Paul here makes clear the need he sees to "abide" in Jesus, what Jesus told His disciples to do (John 15:4-6). One has the freedom to respond to God's faith with faith, and to stop responding. Paul had lived a life of self-dependence (see verses 4-6 in this Philippians chapter), and such "righteousness" was void of faith and love. So Paul here states his plan--to continue responding to "the faith of Christ," to "the righteousness which is of God by faith" so that he "may be found in Him" both now and when all is said and done. In other words, Paul planned to "keep the faith." And that is his testimony at the end of his life. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Revelation 14:12

We finish by considering John's only use of our phrase, "the faith of Jesus." The entire book is a vision Jesus gave to John, and the words of this verse are the final words of an angel messenger Jesus had John hear (see verse 9). Jesus earlier in Revelation had addressed the importance of His faith. He encouraged those in Smyrna in these words. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). In words of commendation "to the angel of the church in Pergamos" Jesus said, "I know ... thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith..." (Revelation 2:13). These words applied to believers entering and immersed in the darkness of the Middle Ages. The words of our verse from chapter 14 carry the theme of "keeping the faith" down to the very end. It is the capstone text that indicates God will have those who keep responding to His faith and love with faith and love, in the face of all of the powers of wickedness that operate at the end. Against the dragon there will be those who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). Against beast from the sea God will have those who do not cave in. "Here is the patience and the faith of

⁶ Psalm 110:2 "rule" is the same word as "dominion" in Genesis 1.

the saints" (Revelation 13:10). And, against the beast from the land, especially as these three powers unite to form end-time Babylon, God will have those who overcome, as our last verse indicates. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."⁷ What we are to keep are two precious gifts from God. The faith of Jesus is no more my faith than the commandments of God are my commandments. God gives them to me, like Jesus gave two gifts to the woman in John 8. In essence, Jesus is saying to human beings at the end (our day), "My plan for you is still the same--go and sin no more; keep the commandments. I know you are sinners, and incapable of doing this on your own, so the only way you can do this is to realize the power of My faith working by love. I see you as victorious. Do you believe My faith and love have that power? If you do, and never stop believing that, you will spend eternity with Me." The story indicates that such faith will lead us not simply to put all our trust in God, but to treat our enemies just as Jesus treated His at the end of His life, calling His betrayer "friend" (Matthew 26:50) and praying for the forgiveness of His crucifiers (Luke 23:34).

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5).

Our faith working by love, believing in Jesus to the end, are but a response to His faith and love, which never fail (1 Corinthians 13:8; Luke 22:32).

Closing Pictures of God's Faith and Our Response

The parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls has a double significance: it applies not only to men as seeking the kingdom of heaven, but to Christ as seeking His lost inheritance. Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen. God looked upon humanity, not as vile and worthless; He looked upon it in Christ, saw it as it might become through redeeming love. He collected all the riches of the universe, and laid them down in order to buy the pearl. And Jesus, having found it, resets it in His own diadem. "For they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land." Zechariah 9:16. "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." Malachi 3:17.⁸

Each word, each action, is a work for God. Here is faith in God, and faith in men. Christ would never have given His life for the human race if He had not faith in the souls for whom He died. He knew that a large number would respond to the love He had expressed for humanity. It is not every heart that responds, but every heart may, and can if it will, respond to that love that is without parallel. "My sheep hear my voice," Christ said. A heart yearning for God will recognize the voice of God. God cannot respond to one soul that does not respond to His grace offered, His love bestowed. He is waiting for a response from souls.⁹

⁷ This beast from the land (13:11) is pictured in the rest of Revelation as the "false prophet," always connected to the dragon and the sea beast (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the three-fold union that comprises Babylon (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 118

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 221