**Lecture 1: Faith in God’s Promises (Genesis to 2 Kings)**

Faith “is indeed easy to talk about, but it is hard to grasp; and it is easily obscured and lost”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Introduction

Two questions: What is faith?

Why is faith the means by which we are put right with God?

Biblical theology: “concerned with how the revelation of God was understood in its time, and what the total picture is that was built up over the historical process”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Mark 1:14–15: Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Historical Overview

Augustine [Faith, Knowledge and Love]

*Fides quae*:[[3]](#footnote-3) the *objective* understanding refers to the content of Christian faith

*Fides qua*:[[4]](#footnote-4)the *subjective* belief a person exercises

Isaiah 7:9 (LXX): “if you do not believe, neither shall you understand”

Galatians 5:6 “faith working through love”

Anselm [Faith Seeking Understanding] and Aquinas [Faith is Formed by Love]

Anselm: “I believe in order to understand”; “faith seeking understanding”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Aquinas: unformed faith (bare assent); formed faith (faith and love)

Luther [Faith as Trust]

“a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favour that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

“a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old Adam and makes altogether different people”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

“faith justifies without love and before love”.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Melancthon [Faith as Knowledge, Assent, and Trust]

knowledge, assent and trust [*notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*].

*assent* to the entire Word of God as it is given to us, particularly to the free promise of reconciliation given for the sake of Christ the Mediator, and it is *trust* in the mercy of God promised for the sake of Christ the Mediator.[[9]](#footnote-9)

John Calvin [Faith as Knowledge]

a firm and certain *knowledge* of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.[[10]](#footnote-10)

the knowledge of God’s goodness will not be held very important unless it makes us *rely* on that goodness.[[11]](#footnote-11)

he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.[[12]](#footnote-12)

the root of faith can never be torn from the godly breast[[13]](#footnote-13)

Van Mastricht [Faith as Receiving]

several acts coincide in saving faith—knowledge, assent, consent, trust, and so forth…but one particular act is predominant among them…receiving.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Richard Baxter [Faith in its Entirety Justifies]

It is not therefore any one single act of faith alone by which we are justified, but it is many physical acts conjunctly which constitute that faith which the gospel makes the condition of life [… including] our assent, or acceptance of Him as our Teacher and Lord, our desire of Him, our love to Him, our renouncing other Saviors and our own righteousness.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Jonathan Edwards [Faith as Love]

that our love to God enables us to overcome the difficulties that attend keeping God’s commands; which shows that love is the main thing in saving faith, the life and power of it, by which it produces its great effects.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Cf. John Piper: “for *trust* to be saving, it must be a treasuring trust”.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Friedrich Schleiermacher [Faith as Feeling]

Hegel: faith as knowledge

Kant: faith as doing

Romantic philosophers: faith as feeling

the sum total of religion […] is to feel all that moves us in our feelings.[[18]](#footnote-18)

faith is the… *feeling* of absolute dependence.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Rudolf Bultmann [Faith as Existential Decision]

the acceptance of the message in faith takes the form of an act of obedience because of the fact that the message which demands acknowledgement of the crucified Jesus as Lord demands of man the surrender of his previous understanding of himself, the reversal of the direction his will previously had.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Teresa Morgan [Faith as Relational]

*pistis* is, first and foremost, neither a body of beliefs nor a function of the heart or mind, but a relationship which creates community[[21]](#footnote-21)

*pistis* language, for New Testament writers, is *more* relational (focusing on trust etc.) than propositional (focusing on belief)[[22]](#footnote-22)

Israel’s History: Salvation by Faith Alone

Genesis: God’s Word the proper object of faith

Adam and Eve fail to believe God’s Word

The object of their faith was much less definite than that of ours… the essence of this faith, subjectively considered, was the same, viz., trust in God’s grace and power to bring deliverance from sin.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Abel and the Hermeneutic of Faith

Abraham believed God’s Word

This statement is taken by some as suggesting that God is involved in some kind of play-acting. Abraham had faith but was a bit short on righteousness. Since he didn’t have any righteousness to speak of, God pretended that his faith was righteousness. God had nothing to put in the righteousness column of his “Abraham” ledger, so he put down his faith instead. This view misses the point of both Genesis 15:6 and Paul’s argument in Romans and Galatians. At a turning point in the history of the world, God had spoken his word of promise to Abraham. And Abraham believed God. In God’s estimate, that *is* righteousness.

Psalm 106:30–31 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.

In both cases, righteousness is constituted by a single action—just one out of a many that make up their respective life-stories. […] As with Phinehas, righteousness is reckoned to Abraham in consequence of a singular action. [However] within its own terms of references, Phinehas’s action possesses a heroic quality that sharply differentiates it from the other actions ascribed to him. In the case of Abraham, the case is the exact opposite. […] There is nothing obviously heroic about Abraham’s act of “believing God”. […] When YHWH commands, Abraham habitually obeys—whether he is instructed to forsake his homeland or to sacrifice his son. But the statement, “… and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” is not attached to any of these acts of heroic obedience but to an act of consent to another’s self-commitment. This is still an “act”, and is distinguishable from the absolute passivity of the “deep sleep” to which Abraham succumbs a few verses later (Gen. 15:12). Yet this act is almost invisible as such, since it is oriented entirely to the divine promise that has evoked it and to which it responds. A small thing in itself, its greatness lies entirely in the greatness of the promise.[[24]](#footnote-24)

“to count” (*ḥšb*)

1. Objective

Joshua 13:3 Ekron […] is counted as Canaanite

1. Subjective

Genesis 31:15 Rachel and Leah lament that they are “regarded by [their father] as foreigners”

1. “qualitative-authoritative or performative-creative”

a person or an act of a person is “classified” subjectively and willingly into a “category,” over which the evaluating person possesses, or has received, the authoritative power of disposition. This act converges with a qualitative, essential change of the person, which can be caused only by the evaluator, or the one who transferred authority to the evaluator.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Job 13:24; 19:11; 33:10

[Job laments] that God considers him “for himself” (*sibi*) as [an] enemy, which is equivalent to a fundamental change of his status before God and the world, as it factually removes all attributes and goods from him that used to define him.[[26]](#footnote-26)

2 Samuel 19:19 (= 19:20 MT) [Shimei] said to the king, “Let my lord *count no guilt against me*”

Psalm 32:2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD *counts no iniquity*.

These passages and others[[27]](#footnote-27)

relate to questions of guilt and righteousness, of death and life and therefore refer the judgment, which is given authoritatively by Yahweh, priest or king, *to the person’s very existence*. The judgment transforms [the] *being* and *condition* of the person and also of those who follow; their “being’ is established in and through [Yahweh’s] speech.”[[28]](#footnote-28) From this perspective, therefore, they carry a decisively soteriological connotation and involve the notion of God’s free salvation-giving grace.[[29]](#footnote-29)

1. Eschatological-Declarative

God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be *just and the justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:25–26)

Exodus: Salvation by Faith in God’s Word

Signs produce temporary faith

Salvation by faith is God’s work

Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. (Exodus 14:13)

Numbers: Entry into the promised land by faith in God’s Word

Moses, Aaron and the people fail to believe God’s Word (14, 20)

The people are preserved by faith in God’s Word (21:1–9)

It is not coincidental that the Lord chose this means of healing the people, for faith is the key marker of those who would enter the Promised Land. The unbelieving generation of their parents, including Moses and Aaron, were excluded from the land because of their unbelief (see 14:11; 20:12). The judgment by the fiery serpents would similarly eliminate any from the new generation who were lacking in faith, for those who refused to look to the Lord through the bronze serpent would die. Only those who believed could enter the land, for only those who believed would live.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Hezekiah: Exile because of unbelief in God’s Word (2 Kings 18–20)

18:5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.

19:19 O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.

20:17–18 ‘The time will certainly come when everything in your palace and all that your fathers have stored up until this day will be carried off to Babylon; nothing will be left,’ says the LORD. ‘Some of your descendants who come from you will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’

20:6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.

Conclusion

1. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:114. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. More fully, *fides* *quae creditor* “the faith which is believed”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. More fully, *fides* *qua creditor* “the faith by which it is believed”. The precise distinction between *fides qua* and *fides quae* is not actually found in Augustine. The significant passage is found in *De Trinitate* 13.2.5 where Augustine states: *verissime dicimus, sed aliud sunt ea quae creduntur, aliud fides qua creduntur* (we say very truly, but the things which are believed are one thing, and the faith by which they are believed another). Morgan observes that although this is the only place where Augustine juxtaposes these two ideas of faith, it is clear “from references to one or the other scattered throughout his works, that this binarism is ingrained in his thinking” (*Roman Faith*, 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Proslogion*, 1. At this point, it is worth noting that the history of reception of these ideas is much more complex than I am laying out. Although the idea of “faith seeking understanding” is most frequently traced back to Anselm of Canterbury, its prominence in Protestant theological discussion is largely due to the work of Karl Barth and his book *Fides quaerens intellectum*. However Zwingli’s role in this has frequently been overlooked as shown by Peter Opitz, “Zwingli as the Father of the Hermeneutical Principle *Fides quaerens intellectum*”, *RTR* 83.1 (2024), 6–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “An Introduction to St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” Luther’s German Bible of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546; Translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith. Martin Luther; Johann K. Irmischer edition of Dr. Martin Luther’s Vermischte Deutsche Schriften, vol. 63 (1854), 124–125. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. LW 35:370. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. LW 26:137. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, tr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia, 1992 [1543], 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Inst* 3:2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Inst* 3:2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Inst* 3.2.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Inst* 3:2:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 2: Faith in the Triune* God, ed. Joel R. Beeke, tr. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Richard Baxter, *Of Justification: Four disputations clearing and amicably defending the truth against the unnecessary oppositions of divers learned and reverend brethren* (London: Nevil Simmons, 1658), 77–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jonathan Edwards*, Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith,* ed. Sang Hyun Lee and Harry S. Stout, vol. 21, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 448. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John Piper, *What is Saving Faith: Reflections on Receiving Christ as a Treasure* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 59 note 4: It would not be accurate to say that my proposal in this book is that we add a fourth element to the traditional three: knowing, assenting, trusting—and treasuring. More accurate would be to say that my proposal is that for *knowing* to be saving, it must be a knowing of Christ as a treasure, and for *assenting* to be saving, it must be assenting to Christ as a treasure, and for *trust* to be saving, it must be a treasuring trust. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Friedrich Schieiermacher, *On Religion: Addresses in Response to its Cultural Despisers*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Terrence N. Tice (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), “Apologia,” note 27, page 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Schieiermacher*, Christian Faith* 14:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, tr. Kendrick Grobel (Waco: Texas, 2007), 1:315. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Teresa Morgan, *Romans Fauth and Christian Faith:* Pistis *and* Fides *in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Teresa Morgan, ‘*This Rich Trust’: The New Testament and the Theology of Trust*, (Oxford: OUP, 2022), 28. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, IL: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 43–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, (London: T&T Clark: 2004), 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith in Romans 4: Paul’s Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15: 6* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lev 7:18, Num 18:27, 18:30, , Job 13:24, 19:11, 33:10, Ps 106:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Citing Brueggemann. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith*, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Iain M. Duguid, *Numbers: God’s Presence in the Wilderness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)