

At this point it should be clear that faith isn't about a set of abstract theological or doctrinal beliefs, but a way of being human in relation to God (and, by extension, in relation to all things, including oneself). Faith is about perceiving, judging and responding to all things the way God does, so that faith *is* faithfulness; faith is the fundamental characteristic of the righteous human relationship with God and so the very essence of true obedience (hence the "obedience of faith"). From the scriptural vantage point, the righteous man is the faithful man and the faithful man is the man of faith.

- b. Again, the Old Testament scriptures treat faith as adding one's *amen* to God's, and this representation highlights two fundamental facets of faith, both of which are indispensable and critically important:
- 1) First of all, the believing one must discern what God has made known and committed Himself to. Faith isn't believing in a particular deity (versus another) or agreeing with a set of abstract theological constructs; faith is directed toward the God who has made Himself known in word and deed.
  - 2) Faith has its object in the God who has spoken and acted, but whose words and deeds reflect His faithfulness; faith is unwavering confidence that this God will keep His word and accomplish His revealed purposes.

These two observations underscore the crucial truth that authentic faith depends upon accurate knowledge and discernment. God's *amen* – His *faithfulness* – is His integrity respecting His purposes and promises; human faith is joining one's own *amen* to God's – *it is faith in His faithfulness*. And there can be no such faith except where there is discernment and ownership of what God has committed Himself to; how can a person believe that God is faithful when he has no understanding of what He has pledged?

This consideration exposes the fact that much of what passes for faith in the community of professing Christians is nothing of the sort. Far too often, Christians' "faith" is nothing more than their settled confidence in their own religious and spiritual musings; they believe in a divine being called "god," but they define and construct Him according to their own notions and sensibilities and then write Him into their own personal agenda. Working from the premise that this "god" is good and loving, they conclude that he is fully committed to and will bring to pass that which *they* have determined to be good, appropriate and needful. In turn, they assess the goodness and faithfulness of this deity based on how closely the circumstances and outcomes in their lives conform to their expectations. Such "faith in God" is really only commitment to oneself and one's own perceptions, thoughts, judgments and desires; *it is adding one's amen to the natural mind*. This dynamic is both supported and enhanced by the general ignorance of the Scriptures among professing Christians; to the extent that a person doesn't know the God who *is*, he is free to construct his own. And having done so, he then reads his "god" back into the Scriptures, so that the Bible becomes the authoritative, legitimating instrument of his self-serving idolatry.

Ironically, some of the most ardent Christians have the least understanding of the Scriptures. (One need only engage with Christian media to prove the point.) Like so many in Israel before them – and perhaps the majority of the Jews of Jesus’ generation – they have *zeal without knowledge*; they, too, do not know the righteousness of God (His “yes and amen” in Christ – Romans 3:21-22) and so do not submit themselves to it (Romans 9:1-10:21).

Faith is joining one’s own amen to God’s, and God’s amen has become fully manifest in the Christ event. *This is why the New Testament treats faith in God in terms of faith in Jesus the Messiah* (John 14:6; Acts 4:1-12; cf. also John 6:42-45, 8:31-47, 14:1-11). Faith in the Messiah is now the fundamental expression of the faithfulness which defines man as true – man as truly human. And this faithful (righteous) humanness is obtained, not by merely *believing* in Jesus, but by *appropriating* Him as faithful Man. As the Last Adam, Jesus is true man and the substance of authentic humanness. There is no true human existence – no life and no righteousness – except in Him (John 1:4, 5:25-26, 6:47-58, 11:1-27).

- This shows us that authentic faith isn’t faith **in** Jesus, *except as it is the faith which embraces and owns His faith and faithfulness as one’s own.*
- It is only in this sense that Jesus is the exemplar of faith; *we don’t merely imitate His faith and faithfulness, we appropriate them by union with Him.*

And to appropriate Jesus’ faith and faithfulness is to lay hold of Him as He *really* is – both as *God* in relation to men and His creation and *man* in relation to God. And laying hold of Jesus as He actually is means owning Him as the Scripture reveals and interprets Him (John 5:39-47; ref. also Luke 24:13-27, 44-48). If faith in Jesus sets *us* aside, it also sets aside all of our personal premises and notions of who He is and our interests and ends respecting Him.

*“His humanity is His standing in our place ‘to fulfill all righteousness’ for us, as in His baptism, and offer up to the Father the confession of sin, the worship, prayer and faith which we owe... The fact that Jesus takes our place even in faith radically supplants us, setting us aside and calling in question all our righteousness, even the faith we think we can offer. His is the only true response to the Father, which is precisely part of the reason for his becoming man in the one man Jesus.”* (Robert Walker)

The New Testament scriptures testify that even Jesus’ apostles – those closest to Him – had to be supplanted in this way, but this could not happen until their faith in Him was truly realized after He sent His Spirit. Prior to Pentecost, the Twelve were firmly convinced that Jesus was Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, *but the Messiah of Israel’s historical and rabbinical speculation*. They interpreted Him through their flawed grid which left them with a distorted understanding of who He was, what He was doing and what He’d come to accomplish (cf. Matthew 16:1-22, 20:20-28; Luke 9:18-56; cf. also John 13:1-17 with Luke 22:7-27).

Even the event of Jesus' resurrection wasn't sufficient to fully transform the apostles' understanding and faith (Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-29) and neither was His subsequent instruction regarding His kingdom, even though He instructed them over forty days as the resurrected Messiah (Acts 1:1-8). It was not until Jesus ascended to His throne and sent His Spirit at Pentecost that His disciples came to truly discern and own Him as the One revealed in all the Scriptures (ref. Acts 2:1-39, 3:1-26, 4:1-14, 23-28; etc.) – the One in whom all of God's promises are yea and amen. (So Jesus' action in opening the disciples' minds after His resurrection (Luke 24:13-49, esp. vv. 44-49; cf. also John 20:19-29) only anticipated what was to come at Pentecost.) And as it was with the first apostles, so it was with the later apostle who considered himself "untimely born": Saul of Tarsus, too, was granted a clear and accurate sight of Jesus the Messiah by the Spirit's ministration (Acts 9:10-18). This preeminent Jewish scholar and devoted follower of Yahweh came to actually know Him and His Torah (His revealed truth in the Scriptures) when he came to discern and own the living Messiah revealed to him by Yahweh's Spirit.

The Spirit's outpouring was the decisive turning point in the disciples' faith, and this was so precisely because of who the Spirit is and the work to which He has been appointed. By virtue of the Christ event, the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God – has become the *Spirit of Jesus*. This transformation, however, is functional, not ontological. That is, the Spirit hasn't changed in His being or essential nature, but His work has become Christ-centered in that His role is to impart Jesus' resurrection life to men and perfect that life in them. He is the Spirit of Christ in that He takes what belongs to Christ and imparts it to men; He is Christ present with and in His people (ref. John 14:16-26, 15:26-16:15; cf. also Romans 8:9-11 with Colossians 1:25-27). These truths have two critical implications:

- 1) First, faith in Christ is *participation* in Him by the renewing and indwelling Spirit. Faith in God is faith in Christ and faith in Christ is joining one's amen to God's amen in Christ – not as a matter of *doctrinal* agreement, but *ontological* agreement: *Faith in Christ is forsaking oneself to find one's true self in union with Him and participation in His life as Last Adam and True Israel*. It is obtaining one's authentic humanness – the humanness for which God created man – in the One who is true Image-Son and true Heir (cf. Matthew 16:13-25 and John 6:41-58 with Romans 8:9-17; Galatians 3:23-4:7; Ephesians 2:11-3:7).
- 2) And precisely because faith in Christ involves participation in Him and His resurrection life, faith is necessarily a *divine endowment*; it is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a "gift of God," and yet the present consideration underscores the fact that the typical conception of this doctrine requires a major rethinking and reformulation. To the extent that the concept of faith itself is misunderstood (and there's no doubt that this is the case on a wide basis), the nature and operation of God's role in people's faith will also be misunderstood.

Where people understand faith as purely *cognitive*, they view God's role in faith as granting human beings that cognition: God, by His Spirit, enables people to believe the Bible, and specifically its claim that they are sinners, that Jesus died to make atonement for their sin, and that they will be saved if they embrace Him as their "personal Savior and Lord." But when faith is understood *ontologically* as the pattern of authentic human existence, God's role with respect to faith takes on an entirely new dimension: The Spirit doesn't merely enable people to believe information so that they might be forgiven and delivered from condemnation; He *recreates* them by causing them to share in Christ's resurrection life. Thus the Spirit's work affects human cognition, but in terms of renewal and transformation. He doesn't illumine people's natural mind; He endows them with Christ's mind by bringing them into His life (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:1-3:11). Thus faith is the gift of God in the sense that it is the pattern of Messiah's humanness – the humanness for which man was created and which human beings attain as God, by His Spirit, causes them to participate in the life of the True Man.

These implications, in turn, highlight and clarify how faith in the eschatological age subsequent to the Christ event differs from faith during the preparatory salvation history. There are two fundamental dimensions to this difference, one *objective* and the other *subjective*.

- The objective dimension has to do with faith as salvation-historical fulfillment. This was Paul's concern when he spoke of faith *coming* in relation to the Christ event; he wasn't referring to individual personal faith, but faith as a characteristic principle of the new age which God has inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah (Galatians 3:23-4:7). The faithful who lived before Christ's coming believed and trusted God and conformed their lives to Him as He had revealed Himself and His purposes to them (in the context of covenant structures) and then pledged His faithfulness. They joined their amen to God's, and in this way their faith was no different from the faith of Christians subsequent to Christ's coming. Like their later counterparts, the Old Testament faithful owned the God who is true; *what they couldn't do was own the God whose person, purpose and work are consummately true in the incarnate Son.*
- The subjective dimension has to do with faith as personal experience – the way in which faith exists and functions in the lives of individual people. And the key issue here is the role of the Holy Spirit. This is a sticky subject with differing convictions among Christians and Christian theologians. There are those who see no distinction in the Spirit's role in human faith throughout human history; others believe that the Spirit played no essential part in people's faith prior to Pentecost. Neither of these positions does justice to the biblical text and the question of the Spirit and faith demands a more careful and nuanced consideration.

The Scripture is clear that God's Spirit was His active presence and agency among the people of Israel just as in the New Covenant community of Christ's Church (cf. Exodus 31:1-5; Numbers 11:1-17, 24:1-9, 27:15-19; Judges 3:1-10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:1-6; 1 Samuel 10:1-10, 16:1-13; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 2 Chronicles 15:1-2, 20:14-15, 24:20; Psalm 51:10-12; etc. with Nehemiah 9:20-30; Psalm 106:32-33; Isaiah 63:7-14 and Acts 7:51). The Spirit instructed, directed and empowered Israelites (artisans, prophets, judges, kings, etc.) on behalf of the covenant household, but the Old Testament scriptures never directly connect faith with the Spirit's agency; *faith as God's work by the Spirit is a New Testament concept*. This is a troubling truth for many Christians who sense in it a threat to several key Christian doctrines, among them salvation through faith and human inability with respect to saving faith. But, however uncomfortable it makes us, the fact remains that the Scripture isn't necessarily concerned with the issues and topics which preoccupy us; so it is with the Old Testament and the doctrine of salvation through faith as a sovereign work of the Spirit.

This is not to say that the Old Testament scriptures have nothing to say about the Spirit in relation to human depravity and salvation. They do speak to these matters, but in Israelite terms and with a future orientation: Israel's covenant unfaithfulness demanded that they circumcise their hearts and return to Yahweh (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 with Jeremiah 4:1-4; also Joel 2:1-14), but He promised that He would arise and do what they could not; He would purge their uncleanness, circumcise their hearts and regather them to Himself, thereby ending their alienation and exile (cf. Deuteronomy 30:1-10 with Isaiah 40-45, 59-60; Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 34-37; Hosea 1-3; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 2, 8-10, 14). And He would do so in connection with sending His Spirit (ref. Isaiah 32, 44:1-5; Ezekiel 36:16-29, 37:1-14, 39:21-29; Joel 2:18-29; Zechariah 12:1-13:2). Yahweh was going to restore Israel in faithfulness in order that they would fulfill their calling on behalf of the world. *Thus the Old Testament treats the relationship between Spirit, faith/faithfulness and salvation (deliverance, purging, forgiveness, ingathering) in salvation-historical rather than individual, personal terms*. What may be said about the personal dimension is a matter of cautious inference.

- Since the Spirit was the illumining and empowering agency in Israel's relationship with God, it seems reasonable to conclude that the same dynamic was at work in the faith which marked Yahweh's faithful. It was the Spirit who led men to embrace and live out Yahweh's revealed truth.
- At the same time, the Spirit's *future outpouring* was a central facet of the eschatological hope God set before His covenant people; Israel's faithfulness to its identity and calling depended on it. The Spirit was coming to *Israel*, which debunks the common argument that this end-of-the-ages outpouring referred to the Spirit coming to *Gentiles* (to save them by faith) just as He had done with Israel. Yahweh was sending His Spirit to deliver (save) Israel so that His salvation could then come to the Gentiles, as the Pentecost event makes clear (Acts 2:1-39).

These things show that, while there exists continuity between the pre-Christ and post-Christ eras as concerns faith, there is also monumental discontinuity. And that discontinuity is centered in the outpouring of the Spirit as the predetermined and crucial outcome of the Christ event. The prophetic scriptures bound together Messiah and Spirit and this connection was realized in Jesus' person and work; Jesus of Nazareth was the prophesied Man of the Spirit whose faith/faithfulness was informed and empowered by Yahweh's Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:1-12, 42:1-7, 48:16-49:13, 61:1-3; Zechariah 3-6 with Matthew 1:18-23, 3:1-4:11, 12:10-32; Luke 1:26-45, 3:15-4:21; etc.). Jesus was *Man of the Spirit*, but for the sake of Israel and the world (He is *Last Adam* – 1 Corinthians 15:45); Jesus' own life and work in and by the Spirit had their goal in His giving of the Spirit (cf. John 3:1-8 with 7:37-39, 14:1-26, 15:26-27, 16:13-15, 20:19-22 with Acts 1:1-8, 2:14-18).

Thus the discontinuity in human faith/faithfulness in relation to the Spirit has its fundamental expression in Jesus Himself. God had promised a new age marked by His outpoured Spirit through whom human beings would become His people in truth – faithful children who would add their *amen* to His. *Most importantly, they would do so as a matter of renewal and transformation* (“circumcision of the heart” – cf. again Deuteronomy 30:1-10 with Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:8-12) rather than cognitive illumination and leading. Yahweh had pledged a day when such faith would come, and it has done so in Jesus, the faithful Son. And having become “yes and amen” in Him, this faith defines all who share in Him.

*It is in this sense that we affirm with the Scripture that the faithful who preceded the coming of faith in Christ nonetheless died in faith:* They believed Yahweh for His promises and lived in view of the day when faith would at last be fulfilled in the Messiah. So they died in faith, looking toward, but not having received the eschatological faith that God had determined to be realized in Messiah. They joined their amen to God's amen, but as it was His amen of sure promise; their faith bound them to the future when they would be made complete together with the faithful in the fullness of the times (John 8:56-58; Hebrews 11:39-40).

This eschatological faith is the concern of the New Testament. It is that faith which the preparatory salvation history predicted and hoped for, the faith which is bound up in Christ Himself and is the fruit of the Spirit's renewing work. And because this renewal (regeneration) consists in human beings participating in Jesus' resurrection life, the faith/faithfulness which characterizes this new life is itself sharing in Jesus' own faith/faithfulness. (Note again the previous citation from Robert Walker.) Like the faithful who preceded Christ's coming, the New Covenant faithful join their amen to God's. *But they do so as those who have actually entered into the divine amen as it has been fully realized in Jesus the Messiah.* The New Covenant faithful don't merely embrace and uphold God's amen, they *embody* it; they are the living substantiation of what God purposed for His creation and the irrefutable proof that He is faithful. And they embody God's amen because they are taken up in the One who is its full embodiment.