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EDITED BY

JOHN T. DUFFIELD,

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS, IN PRINCETON COLLEGE.

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FAITH IN CHRIST THE SOURCE OF LIFE.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES HODGE, D.D.,
PROFESSOR OF EXEGETICAL AND DIDACTIC THEOLOGY.

“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 ii. 20.

THE churches in Galatia were founded by the Apostle Paul. He had appeared among them in much weakness. There was something either in his personal appearance, or in his external circumstances, which tended to excite contempt. But the Galatian converts did not on that account reject him, but received him as an angel of God, and even as Christ Jesus. This devotion to him, and to the gospel which he preached, was very short-lived. He begins his epistle to them by expressing his astonishment that they had so soon turned unto another gospel. It is plain from the course of his argument, that this apostacy was Judaism. The Galatians had been induced to live after the manner of the Jews, to consider circumcision and keeping the law necessary to salvation. Paul's object is to convince them that this apostacy, if persisted in, must be fatal. There are but two methods of salvation—the one by the law, the other by grace—the one by works, the other by faith. These

methods are perfectly incompatible. They cannot be combined. The adoption of the one is the rejection of the other. Salvation must be wholly by works, or entirely by grace. Paul, therefore, says:—"I testify to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect to you; whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." By adopting the legal, you have rejected the gracious method of justification. It was his deep conviction, both from the revelation of God, and his own experience, that the law, in none of its forms, could give life. Neither the Mosaic institutions nor the decalogue, neither ritualism nor morality could avail to restore sinners from death to the life of God, and life with God. The law, he argues, cannot free us from condemnation, because we are sinners, and it is the very province of the law to condemn sin. How can we be justified by that which condemns? Neither can the law give spiritual life. It can only present the form of knowledge and truth. It cannot change the heart. On the contrary, it exasperates its opposition by the extent of its inexorable demands, so that it slays, instead of giving life. Paul says, he found the law which was ordained unto life, to be unto death. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God has accomplished by the gospel. He has set forth his Son as the author of life, as the redeemer from judicial death, and the giver of inward spiritual life. There are two indispensable conditions on which our interest in his

salvation is suspended. The one is, the renunciation of the law, or of the legal method of salvation; and the other is, union with Christ, so that we become partakers of the merit of his death, and the virtue of his life. I am dead to the law, says the Apostle, 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 in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The doctrine of this passage is, that faith of Christ is the necessary condition and source of spiritual life.

By faith of Christ is not meant the faith which Christ had. The faith which is the life of the soul, is not mere belief of the existence of God, and of those great moral and religious truths which are the foundation of all religion. Those who would bring revelation down to the level of philosophy, and resolve all its doctrines into truths of the reason, tell us that all the Bible means when it says we are saved by faith and not by works is, that confidence in God, and in moral and religious truth, is not only the source of virtue, but the test of character. What a man is, is determined more by this habitual state of mind, than by individual and outward acts. When it is said, Abraham was justified by faith, they would have us understand that it was his inward posture of mind toward God that was approved and recognised as the source of all true piety. Here, as in most other cases, error is negative. The evil lies not in what is affirmed,

but in what is denied. It is true that faith in God is the principle of all religion; but it is far from being true that this is the whole import of the scripture doctrine of salvation by faith. It is characteristic of the doctrines of the Bible, that they comprehend all that is true in other forms of religion, while they contain a divine element to which their power is due, which is to be found nowhere else. The faith, therefore, by which the Christian lives, is something more than mere faith in God.

Neither does the faith of Christ, of which our text speaks, mean faith in that unseen world which Christ has revealed. It is, indeed, true that the life of the Christian is regulated by the objects of faith, as distinguished from the objects of sight. It is true that he walks by faith, and not by sight; that he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. It is true the Christian has a faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of the things hoped for. It is true that faith, as the organ of perceiving what neither sense nor reason knows, as the cognition of the things of the Spirit, does regulate the Christian's life, determine his conduct, sustain him in trial, comfort him in affliction, and open for him the perennial fountain of life. Still this is not all the Scriptures teach on this subject; nor is this the doctrine which they mean to inculcate, when they teach that we are saved by faith; and when they represent faith as the source of spiritual life to the soul.

Neither is the truth in question either exhausted

or accurately stated by saying, the faith which has this life-giving power has the whole word of God for its object. It is, indeed, admitted that faith has respect to the whole revelation of God. It receives all his doctrines, bows to all his commands, trembles at his threatenings, and rejoices at his promises. This, however, is not the faith by which the Apostle lived; or, rather, it is not those acts of faith which have the truth of God in general for their object, which gives life to the soul. The doctrine of the text and of the whole New Testament is, that the soul is saved, that spiritual life is obtained, and supported, by those acts of faith which have Christ for their object. Other things in the Word of God we may not know, and, therefore, may not consciously believe, but Christ we must know. About other things true Christians may differ; but they must all agree as to what they believe concerning Christ. He is in such a sense the object of faith, that saving faith consists in receiving and resting on him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel. It consists in receiving Christ—*i. e.*, in recognising, acknowledging, accepting, and appropriating him, as he is held forth to us in the Scripture. It includes, therefore, a resting on him alone for salvation—*i. e.*, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.

That this is the true doctrine on the subject is plain, from the common form of expression employed in Scripture when the Bible speaks of faith in connection with justification and life. It is not of faith as general confidence in God, nor faith as

assent to divine revelation, but specifically "faith of Christ," that is, faith of which Christ is the object. Thus the Apostle, in the earnest and important passage whence the text is taken, and in which he condenses the whole substance of the gospel, says three times over, that the only method of obtaining justification and life, is by those acts of faith which terminate on Christ. In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, from verse 21 to the end, where we have another of those condensed exhibitions of the gospel, the same form of expression occurs. We are said to be saved by "the faith of Christ." So, too, in that remarkable passage, Phil. iii. 1—14, in which he contrasts the two systems—the legal and evangelical—Judaism and the gospel, he ascribes the power of the latter to secure justification and life to "the faith of Christ." The same doctrine is taught in all those passages in which we are required to *believe in Christ* in order to salvation. The specific act which is everywhere declared to be essential, is to believe on the Son of God. He that believeth on the Son, it is said, hath life; he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. The Apostle John insists much on this point. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, is the message which the Gospel brings to every creature. This doctrine is taught, also, by all those passages which declare

Christ to be our life. It is by union with him we live. Our life is hid with Christ in God. It is not we that live, but Christ that liveth in us. The life which we now live in the flesh is by faith of the Son of God. The whole scheme of redemption is founded on this truth. Men are dead in trespasses and sins. They cannot be delivered from this state by any works or efforts of their own. Neither can they come to God without a mediator. Christ is the only medium of access; therefore faith in him is the indispensable condition of salvation. Whatever else we may believe, it will avail us nothing unless we exercise faith in Him; and, therefore, the specific act which sinners are called upon to perform, is to come to Christ; to look to him; to flee to him as a refuge; to lay hold on him as a helper; to confide in him as the propitiation for their sins; to commit themselves to him as their High Priest. In all these, and in many other ways, are we clearly taught that Christ is the immediate object of that faith which is connected with life and salvation. This is so plain and so important that our Catechism defines the faith which saves the soul to be that grace, whereby we received rest on Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered to us for salvation. It is not, therefore, by faith in God as God, nor by faith in divine revelation; but by faith in Christ, that is, by those acts of faith which have him for their immediate object, that the soul is freed from condemnation, and made partaker of divine life.

But what is meant by faith in Christ? What

are those truths concerning Christ which we are required to believe? Thanks be to God for the distinctness with which this all-important question is answered in his word. We have that answer summed up in the passage before us. There are three things which we must believe, or our faith is dead,—First, *That Christ is the Son of God.* Second, *That he loves us.* Third, *That he gave himself for us.*—All these are essential elements in that faith which gives life to the soul.

First, We must believe that Christ is the Son of God. Both the divinity and incarnation of the object of our faith are included in this expression. The designation, Son of God, is applied in Scripture to the divine nature of Christ, and implies his essential equality with God. God is in such a sense his Father that he is equal with God, of the same nature or substance, possessing the same attributes, bearing the same titles, performing the same works, and entitled to the same confidence, obedience, and worship. In this light He is set forth as the object of hope in the Old Testament. In this light He exhibited himself when he appeared on earth, teaching in his own name, working miracles by his own power, claiming for himself the love, confidence, and obedience due to God alone, asserting his power to save all who come to him, promising to raise the dead, and foretelling his coming to judge the world at the last day. These claims were authenticated by the manifestation of the glory of God in his character and life, so that those who were with him beheld his glory as of the only

begotten Son of God, and knew He was indeed the true God and eternal life. God confirmed these claims by a voice from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;" by the works which he gave him to do, and by raising him from the dead, thereby proclaiming with power that he was the Son of God. The Apostles received, worshipped, and preached him as the true God. They proclaimed themselves and all their fellow-Christians to be the worshippers of Christ, and the great object of their mission (as it is to this day the great end of the ministry) was to bring men to know, worship, and obey Christ as God. It is, therefore, one of the essential elements of faith in Christ to believe in his divinity. This, however, necessarily includes faith in his incarnation, because all the designations applied to Christ belong to him as an historical person. Jesus Christ is the name of a person who was born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, who rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of God. Everything taught concerning Christ, is taught concerning that person. He, that is, the person who was thus born, who thus suffered, died, and rose again, is the Son of God, that is, a divine person. This, of course, supposes that He became flesh and dwelt among us. Faith of the Son of God is, therefore, necessarily faith in the incarnation. It is faith in Christ as God manifest in the flesh. This is so prominent and so important an element in saving faith, that it may be said to in-

clude all others. Hence the Apostle says: "Who-soever believeth that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God;" and, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God." That faith, therefore, which has power to give life, has the incarnate God for its object. It contemplates and receives that historical person, Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem, who lived in Judea, who died on Calvary, as God manifest in the flesh. Any other faith than this is unbelief. To believe in Christ, is to receive him in his true character. But to regard him, who is truly God, as a mere creature, is to deny, reject, and to despise him. It is to refuse to recognise him in the very character in which He is presented for our acceptance. If this truth be hid, "it is hid," says the Apostle, "to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Saving faith, then, is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is perceiving and recognising him to be the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his substance. This is that knowledge for which Paul said he was willing to suffer the loss of all things; and which our blessed Lord himself declared to be eternal life.

The necessity of faith in the divinity and incarnation of our Lord, to the saving power of faith, is further plain, because a Saviour less than divine, is no Saviour. The blood of no mere man is an adequate atonement for the sins of the whole world. The righteousness of no creature is an adequate foundation for the justification of sinners. The assurance of the gift of eternal life is mockery from any other lips than those of God. It is only because Jesus is the Lord of Glory, the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, that his blood cleanses from all sin, that his righteousness is infinite in value, sufficient to cover the greatest guilt, to hide the greatest deformity, and to secure even for the chief of sinners admission into heaven. The ranks of angels give way to allow any one to enter and ascend, who appears clothed in the righteousness of God. Yes, the righteousness of God; and any righteousness short of his, would be of no avail. Faith draws her power to give life to the soul; to free from the sentence of death; to speak peace to the troubled conscience only from the divine character of its object. It is only an almighty, an ever present, an infinite Saviour, who is suited to the exigencies of a ruined immortal.

It must also be remembered, that it is to the spiritually dead to whom Christ is declared to be the author of life. But no creature is life-giving. It is only He who has life in himself that is able to give life unto others. It is because Christ is God; because all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him, that he is the source of spiritual life to us.

God only hath life in himself, and all creatures live in him. If, therefore, Christ is our life, he must be our God.

Spiritual life, moreover, supposes divine perfection in the object on which its exercises terminate. It is called the life of God in the soul, not only because God is its source, but also because He is its object. The exercises in which that life consists, or by which it is manifested, must terminate on infinite excellence. The fear, the admiration, the gratitude, the love, the submission, the devotion, which belong to spiritual life, are raised to the height of religious affections only by the infinitude of their object. It is impossible, therefore, that the soul can live by the faith of the Son of God, unless it believes him to be divine. It is the exhibition of divine perfection in the person of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Ghost, that calls forth, in the benumbed and lifeless soul, the aspirations and outgoings of the spiritual life. It is the glory of God as thus made known, thus softened, and brought down to our apprehension, and revealed in its manifold relations to us, that brings us into that communion with the divine nature in which our life consists. Nothing is more clearly taught in Scripture than that Christ is the object of the life of God in the souls of his people. He is the object of their supreme love, of their adoration, of their confidence, of their devotion and obedience. The whole New Testament is a hymn of praise to Christ. The whole Church is prostrate at his feet; and whenever heaven has been opened to

the eyes of mortals, its inhabitants were seen bowing before the throne of the Lamb. To live by faith of the Son of God, therefore, is to live by believing him to be divine. The faith which gives life to the soul, is the cognition, or spiritual apprehension of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Without this, faith is dead, and the soul turns its leaden eye on an eclipsed sun.

The second great truth we must believe concerning Christ, is his love. It is not enough that we believe he loves others, we must believe that he loves us. Paul said, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved ME, and gave himself for ME. This means, first negatively, that we do not exclude ourselves from the number of those who are the objects of Christ's love. This is really to reject him as our Saviour, while we admit he may be the Saviour of others. This is a very common form of unbelief. The soul under a sense of sin, is disposed to think there is something peculiar in its case; something either in the number or the aggravation of its sins, which makes it an exception. It, therefore, does not believe that Christ loves it. It thinks this would be presumptuous, supposing that to be the object of Christ's love we must be lovely. It forgets the great, salient, life-giving truth of the Gospel, that God loves his enemies, the ungodly, the polluted, and by loving makes them lovely. Alas! Did he not love us, until we loved him, we should perish in our sins. The love of God is the love of a father—it has a hidden source, and is not founded on the charac-

ter of its objects. It is unbelief, therefore, however it may assume the specious garb of humility, to exclude ourselves from the number of those whom Christ loves. So long as we do this we exclude ourselves from His salvation. The second or positive aspect of the truth contained in this part of our text is, that we must appropriate to ourselves, personally and individually, the general assurance and promise of the love of Christ. Faith is not mere assent to the proposition that God is merciful; but trust in his mercy to us. It is not a mere assent to the truth that Christ loved sinners; but it is the appropriation of his love to ourselves; a believing that he loves us. It is not necessary in order to justify this appropriation, that there should be any special revelation that we, as distinguished from others, are the objects of Divine love. The general declaration is made that God is merciful. The general promise is made that he will receive all who come to him through Christ. To appropriate these general declarations, is to believe that they are true, not in relation to others merely, but to us. We credit the assurance of God's love; we look up to him as propitious; we say to him, Our Father; we regard him not as an enemy, but as a friend, for Christ's sake. This is faith. It is precisely because it is so hard to believe that, notwithstanding our unworthiness, God loves us, that the Scriptures are so full of assurances of his mercy, and that so many illustrations are employed to set forth the greatness and freeness of his love. God, it is said, hath commended

his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. This also is the reason why the way in which God can be just and yet justify the ungodly is so distinctly set forth in His word; and why we are exhorted to come with boldness to the throne of grace; to draw nigh with confidence; to come with even the full assurance of faith. This, too, is the reason why we are reprov'd for doubting the mercy of God, for distrusting his promises, or questioning his love. And this is the reason why such blessings are pronounced on those who trust in the Lord. This again is faith. Trusting in the Lord, is believing. It is taking him at his word, when he offers us his mercy, and assures us of his love. There are all degrees of this faith. It may be exercised with an assurance which excludes all doubt, or with a diffidence which scarcely admits of hope. It may alternate with doubt, and be attended with many misgivings. Still the thing believed is, that Christ loves us. When, says Calvin, the least drop of faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to see the serene and placid face of our reconciled Father, dimly and afar it may be, but still it is seen. A man in a dungeon may have no light but through a crevice. Oh! how different is this from the bright light of day. It is, however, light. Thus the feeblest faith and the strongest assurance differ in degree, and not in their nature or their object. The love of God in

Christ is the object of both. The one sees that love glancing through the clouds, or stealing through a crevice; the other sees it as the sun at noon. Still the thing seen, and the act of seeing are in both cases the same.

Faith in Christ, therefore, includes faith in his love towards us. The life of the soul consists in communion with God. There can be no communion with God, without faith in his love. We must believe that he loves us, in order that we should love him. We love God, says the Apostle, because he first loved us. His love is the light and heat which calls our love into being and exercise; and the faith which gives life to the soul, must include the belief that Christ loves us. This is the fountain of life. That a being so exalted and glorious should love us, who are so unworthy and worthless, fills the soul with wonder and gratitude. It calls forth all its activity, and fills it with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The third element included in the life-giving faith of which the Apostle speaks, is believing that Christ gave himself for us, *i. e.*, that he died for us. This again includes two things—first, faith in his vicarious death as an atonement for sin; and second, faith in his death as a propitiation for our own individual or personal sins. Both of these are necessary. We must believe not only that Christ has made an atonement for sin; but that he died for us, that our sins are washed away in his blood. This is plain, because faith in Christ is the act of

receiving and resting on him, as he is offered in the gospel, for our own personal salvation.

It cannot be necessary to prove before a Christian audience, that Christ is set forth in the gospel as a propitiation for sin, and that faith in him involves the receiving and resting upon him in that character. The Bible clearly teaches on this subject—first, in general terms, that Christ died for us; secondly, that the design of his death was to reconcile us to God; thirdly, that his death accomplishes this design, because it was a sacrifice, or propitiation for sin, or because he bore our sins in his own body on the tree; fourthly, that we are, therefore, justified meritoriously, not by works, but by the blood or righteousness of Christ, and, instrumentally, by faith. These are plain Scriptural doctrines. Faith in Christ, therefore, must include the belief of these doctrines. To regard him merely as a teacher, or merely as a sovereign, or merely as the means by which a new and divine element has been introduced into our nature, is to reject him as a sacrifice for sin. It is to refuse to be saved by his blood. It is not, however, sufficient that we should believe the doctrine of atonement. This angels believe; this devils believe; this millions of our race believe, who yet die in their sins. It is not enough that we should stand as wondering spectators round the cross of Lord of Glory. It is not enough that we should see others wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb; we must appropriate the merit of his death; we must lay our hand on the

head of the victim; we must have his blood sprinkled on our own conscience; we must accept him as the propitiation of our sins, and believe that God for his sake, is reconciled to us. This is faith indeed! To believe that God, for Christ's sake, is propitious; that he loves us; that he regards us as his children, and has adopted us as his sons and daughters. Until we thus take Christ for our own, we have nothing wherewith to satisfy the demands of the law, or claims of justice; nothing wherewith we can appease a guilty conscience. But being justified by faith, we have peace with God and rejoice in hope of his glory.

He, then, that has the faith by which Paul lived, is able to say with Paul, I believe Jesus is the Son of God, or God manifest in the flesh. I believe he loves me, and gave himself for me. However weak and faltering our faith may be, if we have any saving faith at all, this is what we believe.

If such be the doctrine of the text and of the Scriptures, it answers two most important questions,—First, it tells the anxious inquirer definitely what he must do to be saved. There are times of exigency in every man's experience—times in which the question, what we must do to be saved, must be answered without delay, and with clearness and authority. It is well to have the answer which God has given to this question graven on the palms of our hands. We shall need to read it sometimes when our sight is very dim. In such seasons of emergency, the soul is apt to get confused, and its vision wandering and indistinct. The mind becomes

distracted in the multitude of its thoughts ; it looks inward to determine the character of its own experience ; it looks outward, and with unsteady eye gazes all around for some source of help. The voice of the Son of God on the cross is : Look unto me. The voice of his messengers is : Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. This is much. But still the anxious question arises—What must I believe ? Here comes the definite answer from the lips of Paul : Believe that Jesus is the Son of God—that he loves you—that he gave himself for you. If you believe this, you will also believe that God for Christ's sake is reconciled to you ; that your sins are forgiven ; that Christ is made of God unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Do not then, in these hours of trial, allow yourself to be careful and troubled about many things. This is the one thing needful. If you thus believe, your salvation is secure. But must I not be born again in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven ? Certainly you must. Regeneration, however, is something to be experienced. Believing is something to be done. The former is God's work—the latter is yours. Do your part, and you will find that His is already done. When Christ said to the man with the withered arm : Stretch forth thy hand ; he did not wait to ascertain whether his arm was restored before he obeyed, although stretching forth his hand pre-supposed the restoration of his limb. Let not the man, therefore, who is seeking his salvation, be deluded by a false philosophy, and because faith implies re-

generation, refuse to believe until he knows he is regenerated. His simple duty is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God ; that he loved us, and died for us ; and that God for his sake is reconciled to us. Let him do this and he will find peace, love, joy, wonder, gratitude and devotion filling his heart and controlling his life.

The second question answered by the doctrine of the text is: How the divine life in the soul of the believer is to be sustained and invigorated. Paul said the life which he lived, he lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him. The clearer the views we can attain of the divine glory of the Redeemer, the deeper our sense of his love, and the stronger our assurance that he gave himself for us, the more of spiritual life shall we have ; the more of love, reverence, and zeal ; the more humility, peace, and joy ; and the more strength to do and suffer in the cause of Christ. We should then regard all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. We should glory even in infirmities and afflictions, that His strength might be the more manifested in our weakness. Death would bear a smiling aspect, for we should have a constant desire to depart and be with Christ.

The great duty then inculcated in the text is to look away from ourselves, and to look only unto Christ ; to contemplate him as God manifested in the flesh, loving us, and giving himself for us. The text calls upon us to suppress all doubts of his love as the suggestions of an evil heart of unbelief ; to

cherish the assurance that nothing can separate us from him ; that having loved us while enemies, and died for us while sinners, he will love us unto the end. Believing this, we shall not only have perfect peace, but we shall feel that the entire devotion of our heart and life is the only return we can make for the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

“ Now, unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”