

XXXVII.

Faith in the Sacred Scriptures.

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

—*Rom. x. 10.*

Calvin says beautifully and comprehensively that the object of saving faith is none other than the *Mediator*, and invariably in the garments of the Sacred Scriptures. This should be accepted unconditionally. Saving faith is possible, therefore, only in sinful men and so long as they remain sinful.

To suppose that saving faith existed already in Paradise is to destroy the order of things. In a sense there was no need of salvation in Paradise, because there was pure and undisturbed felicity; and for the development of this felicity into still greater glory, not faith, but works, was the appointed instrument. Faith belongs to the “*Covenant of Grace*,” and to that covenant alone.

Hence it may not be said that Jesus had saving faith. For Jesus was no sinner, and therefore could not have “that assured confidence that not only to others, but to Him also, was given the righteousness of the Mediator.” We have only to connect the name of Jesus with the clear and transparent description of saving faith by the Heidelberg Catechism to show how foolish it is for the Ethical theologians to explain the words, “Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith,” as tho He had *saving* faith like every child of God.

Hence saving faith is unthinkable in heaven. Faith is *saving*; and he that is saved has obtained the end of faith. He no longer walks by faith, but by sight. It should therefore be thoroughly understood that saving faith refers only to *the sinner*, and that Christ in the garments of the Sacred Scripture is its only object.

Two things must, therefore, be carefully distinguished: faith in the *testimony* concerning a person, and faith in that *person* himself.

Let us illustrate. A ship is ready to sail, but lacks a captain. Two men present themselves to the shipowner; both are provided with excellent testimonials signed by creditable and trustworthy persons. Of the absolute truth of these testimonials the shipowner is thoroughly convinced. And yet in spite of this testimony one is engaged and the other dismissed. Conversing with both, the owner has found the first a very reasonable fellow, readily allowing him, as the owner of the ship, to issue orders; in fact, as captain he would have nothing to say. But the other, a real sailor, demanded absolute control of the ship, otherwise he would not take the responsibility. And, since the shipowner enjoyed issuing orders, he preferred the meek and tractable captain and dismissed the rough sailor. Consequently the tame commander, obeying orders, lost the ship the first voyage, while the rival ship commanded by that Jack-tar returned home laden with a rich cargo.

We distinguish here two kinds of faith. First, faith or no faith in testimony presented; second, faith or no faith in the persons to whom this testimony refers. In the illustration, faith of the first kind was perfect. Those testimonies were accepted as genuine; the shipowner had perfect faith in the signatures. And yet it did not follow that he was immediately ready to entrust his property to either one of these captains. This required another faith; not only faith in the contents of those papers, but faith also that these contents would prove true regarding the command of his ship. Hence he carefully considered both men, and discovering that the one left no room for his self-assertion, it was natural that he engaged the other, who flattered his egotism. And, influenced by this egotism, he did not place that second faith in the right person. His neighbor, not so egotistically inclined, kept the end in view, had faith in the bold seaman, and his profits were almost fabulous. Hence both men had unconditional faith in the testimonies; but the one, denying himself, had also faith in the excellent captain, and the other, refusing to deny himself, had not.

Apply this to our relation to Christ. That vessel is our soul. It is tossing upon the waves and needs a pilot. The voyage is long, and we ask: "Who will safely pilot it?" Then a testimony is laid before us concerning One wonderfully skilled in the art of safely guiding souls into the desired haven. That testimony is Sacred Scripture, which throughout all its pages offers but one, ever-continued, divine testimony concerning the unique excellence of the Christ as leading souls to the safe haven. With this testimony before us, it is for us to decide whether we will accept it or not. Its rejection ends the matter, and Jesus will never be the Guide of our soul. But, accepting it, saying, "We believe all that is written," we can proceed. This confession implies: (1) faith in the genuineness of the testimony; (2) faith in God who gave it; and (3) faith in the truth of its contents.

But this is not *saving faith*, only faith in the *testimony*. To believe that it will prove true in our case, in our own persons, is quite different. This depends, not upon the testimony, but upon whether we will *submit ourselves to Him of whom it speaks*. Altho this Captain pilots souls safely across very deep waters, He does not pilot all souls. They must, be *able* and *willing* to submit themselves to Him according to His demands. The unwilling are left behind, and, trying to pilot themselves, they miserably perish. Hence we must submit. And this requires the laying aside of all our self-conceit, the utter casting out of self. So long as self stands in the way we refuse Him as our spiritual Guide; nor do we believe in His power. But as soon as self is cast out, the ego silenced, and the soul abandons itself to Him, the second faith awakens, and, upon bended knee, we cry: "My Lord and my God!"

It is exactly as our Catechism beautifully and comprehensively expresses it: "That true faith consists of two things, *first*, a certain²⁵ knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but *also* an assured confidence, which is a firm and steadfast

25 "Certa fiducia." Not a certain knowledge, but *certain* knowledge.

confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the Gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given of God; merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."

Examining more closely what these two points have in common, we find, not that the one is *knowledge* and the other *confidence*, but that both consist in *being persuaded*.

With the testimony laid before him, the natural man is inclined to reject it. He has many objections. "Is it genuine?" "Was it not affected by various alterations? Can I rely on the truth of its contents?" For a long time he continues his resistance: He says: "No man can ever convince me; I believe a great deal, but not that impossible scripture." But the Holy Spirit continues His work. He shows him that he is wrong; and, altho still resisting, it becomes like a fire in his bones until opposition is made impossible, and he confesses that God is true and His testimony genuine.

However, this is not all. He still lacks the second faith: whether this applies to him personally. He begins with denying it. "It does not mean me," he says; "Jesus does not save a man like myself." But here the Holy Spirit meets him again. He brings him back to the Word. He holds the image of the saved sinner before him until he recognizes himself in that image. And tho he still objects, "It can not be so; I only deceive myself," yet the Holy Spirit persists in persuading him until, wholly convinced, he appropriates Christ to himself and acknowledges: "Blessed be God, that saved sinner *am I*." Wherefore it is not first *knowledge* and then *confidence*, but both are an inward persuasion by the Holy Ghost. And the man thus *persuaded believes*. He that is persuaded of the truth of the divine testimony concerning the Guide of souls believes all that is revealed in the Scripture. And being also persuaded that the saved sinner described in Scripture is himself, he believes in Christ as his Surety.

Hence the peculiar feature of faith in both its stages is to be *persuaded*. Saving faith is a persuasion, wrought by the Holy Spirit, that the Scripture is a true testimony concerning the salvation of souls, and that this salvation includes my soul.

Is the Heidelberg Catechism wrong, then, in speaking of knowledge and of confidence? No; but it should be noticed that it speaks, not of faith's *origin*, but of its fruit and exercise, it being already established. Being persuaded that the Scripture is true, and believing the divine testimony concerning Christ; we at once possess certain and undoubted knowledge regarding these things. And being persuaded that that salvation includes my soul, I possess by virtue of this persuasion a firm and assured confidence that the treasure of Christ's redemption is also my own.

Hence faith has three stages: (1) *knowledge of the testimony*; (2) *certainty of the things revealed*; and (3) *persuasion that this concerns me personally*. These used to be called *knowledge*, *assent*, and *confidence*; and we are willing to adopt them, but they must be used carefully. By the *first* must be understood nothing more than the obtaining of knowledge independently of faith. Hence the Heidelberg Catechism omits this as not belonging to faith

proper, and mentions only *assent* and *confidence*. For that certain knowledge of which it speaks is not what the scholastics put in the foreground as knowledge; but what they call *assent*. *Knowledge* is not the emphatic word, but *certainty*.²⁶ It is not the knowledge, but the *certainty* of the knowledge that belongs to the true faith.

Wherefore some used to distinguish knowledge and assent, and treated them separately. For it should be remembered that the unconverted do not understand the Scripture, nor can they read its testimony. Not being born of water and of the Spirit, they can not see the Kingdom of God. The natural man does not understand spiritual things. Hence we say emphatically, that the knowledge preceding faith and to which faith must assent implies the *illumination* of the Holy Spirit. Only in that light can one see the glory of Scripture and apprehend its beauty; without this it is but a stumbling-block to him. Yet it is no part of faith, but only part of the Spirit's work making faith possible.

A truth or a person is not faith, but the object of faith; faith itself is to be persuaded when, all opposition ended, the soul has obtained undoubted *assurance*. Hence the absolute absurdity of speaking of faith cut loose from Scripture, or directed upon anything but Christ; or of calling faith a universal inclination of the soul, crying after salvation, to quench its thirst. All this robs faith of its character. When I say, "I believe," I mean thereby that this or that is to me an undoubted fact. In order to believe one must be *assured, convinced, persuaded*—otherwise there can be no faith; and the fruit of this being persuaded is rich knowledge, glorious confidence, and access to the Lord.

However, it should be noticed that we have spoken of faith only as it shows itself *above the ground*. But that is not sufficient. We must still examine the root, the fibers of faith in the soul. We must examine the faculty that *enables* the soul to believe. Of this in the next article.

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XXXVIII.

The Faculty of Faith.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”—*Rom. viii. 14.*

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Saving faith should always be understood as a disposition of man’s spiritual being by which he can become assured that the Christ after the Scripture, the *only* Savior, is *his* Savior.

We write purposely a “*disposition*” by which he *can become* assured. As water is in the pipes, altho not running just now, or as gas is in the tubes, altho not burning so by virtue of regeneration is faith present as a disposition in man’s spiritual being, even tho he believes not yet, or believes no more. If the house is connected with the city’s water-works the water can run; but for this reason it does not always run; nor does the gas always burn. That in your house the water *can* flow, and gas *can* burn, is the difference between your dwelling and your neighbor’s which is not so connected.

There is a similar difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate; that is, between him who is united to Jesus and him *not* so united. The difference is not that the former believes and always believes, but only this, that he *can* believe. For the unregenerate can *not* believe; he has purposely destroyed the precious and divine gift whereby he could have joined himself to the life of God. God gave him eyes to see, but he has purposely blinded himself. Hence he does not see Jesus. The living Christ does not exist for him. Not so the regenerate child of God. True, he also is a sinner; he also has purposely blinded himself; but an operation is performed upon him, restoring his eyesight, so that now he can see. And this is the implanted *faculty of faith*. This faculty touches the consciousness. As soon as the fact that Christ is the *only* Savior and *my* Savior, as an undoubted, firmly established, and fundamental truth, is introduced to my consciousness—which is the clear representation of my whole being, and is perfectly adapted and joined to it—I *believe*.

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But this truth does not suit the consciousness of the natural man. He may insert it now and then by means of a temporary or historical faith, but only as a foreign element, and his nature immediately reacts against it, in precisely the same manner as the blood and tissue react against a sliver in one’s finger. For this reason a temporary faith can never save a man, but, on the contrary, it injures him; for it causes his soul to fester.

The human consciousness as it is by nature, and the Christ after the Scripture, are in principle diametrically opposed. The one excludes the other. That which suits and fits the consciousness of the natural man is the persistent *denial* of Christ. This natural consciousness is the representation of his sinful existence; and since an unconverted sinner always asserts himself and thinks himself savable, and proposes to save *himself*, he can not tolerate Christ. Christ is unthinkable to him; therefore he can not acknowledge Him. No, there is no need of Him; he can save, too, with Jesus, or just as well as Jesus, or after the example of Jesus; wherefore this Jesus is by no means the *only* Savior.