

# God's Sovereignty Revealed in Faith

By Mark Hoeksema

Much is written and spoken concerning faith in our day. We hear about faith constantly; faith in government, also called its credibility, faith in our leaders, faith in our fellow man, faith or confidence in the economy and the markets, etc. We also hear a great deal about faith in God or faith in Christ. We are told that it is something which we must have in order to be saved; we must believe. But just what is this faith? Are the current notions of it correct? How are we to understand it? Is it the work of man or the work of God? In order to solve some of the confusion and to obtain a proper view of faith, we must look at the Biblical teaching regarding it.

We must say that faith is the bond whereby the regenerated sinner is united with Christ. Now a bond presupposes a certain unity with Christ on the part of those that possess this faith. And exactly such a unity there is. For faith is grounded in God's sovereign election, that act of God whereby he chooses some to be His people in Christ Jesus. This immediately unites them with Christ, and also means that only the elect can be the possessors of faith. Moreover, this unity with Christ is principally realized in the people of God in God's sovereign work of regeneration, that work of God whereby he changes the elect sinner from a child of darkness and sin to a child of God as to the center of his being, his heart. So undoubtedly we must say that even before faith is worked in God's people, there is a unity between them and Christ, a unity grounded in election and begun in regeneration.

Now faith is the means whereby that unity is realized for the child of God, i.e., whereby he becomes conscious of and knows his relationship with God in Christ. This idea may be compared to an electric light which is connected by wires to a power source; the light does not burn until the switch is thrown and current flows through it. So also is faith; though there is a connection between God's people and Christ, that relation is not realized except through the means of faith. Faith is therefore the living bond or connection between them and Christ, whereby they consciously become partakers of Christ and all His benefits. We must remember that all of our salvation is in Christ alone; in Him is our redemption, the forgiveness of sins, the adoption unto children, eternal and perfect righteousness, knowledge of God and wisdom, sanctification, eternal life and light. Faith is the means whereby all of these blessings of Christ, and Christ Himself, become the conscious possession of the believer.

Further, faith may be distinguished as potential and actuality. In order to understand this, we may best compare the power of faith to the power of dynamite. A stick of dynamite is power; but it is not real power, only potential power. When it is detonated, it becomes real power. So also is faith; it is distinguished as a potential and an actual power. The potential of faith is given in regeneration. Regeneration is principally all of salvation, though given in seed form; thus it also includes faith. God gives the gift of faith already in His sovereign work of regeneration, though that faith is only potential. That faith is brought to consciousness through the divine calling. When God through His Spirit and Word speaks to the elect, regenerated sinner, he calls him out of the darkness of sin into the light of conscious faith. The faith which the sinner has becomes conscious faith; he knows Christ, embraces Him, puts all his hope and trust in Him, looks to Christ for all his salvation, relying on Him in time and eternity. Thus the faith of the believer is active, becomes an actuality, a fact, a living power whereby he is more and more united with Christ.

As to the contents of this faith, it consists first of all of a certain knowledge. This is not a mere intellectual knowledge or theoretical knowledge of Christ. Such a knowledge is possible for anyone to have. Anyone can read the Scriptures and understand in his mind the doctrines of it. But Scripture emphatically teaches that only God's people have faith, not anybody and everybody. Also this idea can be illustrated by an example. Supposing there is a table of food prepared and two men stand before it. The one is a professional dietitian, who can understand and explain all of the ingredients and their value, and analyze thoroughly the protein, vitamin, mineral, and caloric contents of that food; but of that food he cannot partake because he has cancer of the stomach. The other man is ignorant and uneducated, and knows nothing of the complicated chemistry of that food. But he has worked hard and is hungry. He sits down and consumes the food with relish and enjoyment. So also is the knowledge of faith. It is not a knowledge about something, but a knowledge of something; not a knowing about Christ, but a knowing Christ. That means that it is a matter of the heart; Solomon says, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." Faith must arise from the regenerated heart of the child of God, with the result that he knows Christ, not with a mere head

knowledge, but with the deep knowledge of the heart. Thus that knowledge is also certain, sure; because it arises from the heart it cannot be shaken or changed or lost, but clings and seeks and looks always to Christ.

Faith also consists of a hearty confidence in Christ. Again, the source of this confidence is the heart. By that confidence the believer surrenders himself entirely to Christ and relies on Him completely. And he does so consciously, for this confidence belongs to his will. From this changed will, grounded in his regenerated heart, arises this confidence whereby he trusts wholly in Christ for all his salvation. This confidence follows from the certain knowledge of faith; they cannot be separated; the one without the other is impossible. It is necessary therefore first to have the true spiritual knowledge of Christ before He can become the object of the confidence and trust of the believer; and following from that knowledge is the hearty confidence. Knowing Christ from his regenerated heart, the child of God believes in trust.

This faith is usually presented as being the work of man. According to the Arminian idea, faith is a work whereby man accepts Christ. Often it is compared to a hand by which man reaches out to accept the offered gift of salvation. Thus the matter is relatively simple: God loves everybody, and wants to save all men, and offers salvation to anyone that believes. All man must do is accept the offer, extend his hand of faith, and thereby become the possessor of salvation. But such is certainly not the teaching of Scripture; it is the doctrine and heresy of man, not the Word of God. For one thing, God does not love or want to save all men, but only His elect. For another, this idea denies the sovereignty of God in the work of His salvation of His people; God does not save, or at least He cannot save without the consent and cooperation and acceptance of man. Man must save himself through believing on Christ; God does not save him. Further, such a conception is totally impossible. How can the natural man, the sinner outside of Christ, ever believe?

Scripture teaches that he is wicked, totally sinful and depraved, in fact dead, spiritually dead in his sins. Can the physically dead extend a hand to one who would raise him from his grave? How then can the spiritually dead sinner ever extend the hand of faith to Christ, apart even from the fact that he does not and cannot want to do so because he is at enmity with God? How can one who is not regenerated ever have faith? Scripture says (Romans 10:10) that with the heart one believes unto righteousness. No one that has not been regenerated and had his heart changed by the sovereign work of God, can ever believe. Thus, such an Arminian and Pelagian idea is indeed the wicked doctrine of man and not the word of God.

Rather, Scripture teaches that also faith is the work of God in its entirety. He gives the potential in regeneration; He calls it to consciousness through His powerful and efficacious calling; He realizes faith as an actuality in the hearts and lives of believers. Is not such the direct teaching of Scripture in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Thus it is God that gives the gift of faith to the elect, regenerated sinner. He gives, and we believe. And believing, we are saved through Christ to whom we are united by faith. And the end of it all is that God receives the glory. He is the Author and Finisher of our salvation, and to Him belongs all the honor and glory forever, for He is the Giver of the sovereign gift of saving faith.