

"Faith" in Romans 3-5

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Background

Some eight years ago or more I did a search for the phrase "faith of Jesus" in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*. What I found astounded me. Approximately 20 times she stressed the significance of this truth, often explicitly stating how it had been neglected. Consider only the following four paragraphs (emphases supplied):

The **faith of Jesus** has been overlooked and treated in an indifferent, careless manner. It has not occupied the prominent position in which it was revealed to John. Faith in Christ as the sinner's only hope has been largely left out, not only of the discourses given but of the religious experience of very many who claim to believe the third angel's message. At this meeting I bore testimony that the most precious light had been shining forth from the Scriptures in the presentation of the great subject of the righteousness of Christ connected with the law, which should be constantly kept before the sinner as his only hope of salvation. This was not new light to me for it had come to me from higher authority for the last forty-four years, and I had presented it to our people by pen and voice in the testimonies of His Spirit. But very few had responded except by assent to the testimonies borne upon this subject. There was altogether too little spoken and written upon this great question. The discourses of some might be correctly represented as like the offering of Cain--Christless....

The third angel's message is the proclamation of the commandments of God and the **faith of Jesus** Christ. The commandments of God have been proclaimed, but the **faith of Jesus** Christ has not been proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists as of equal importance, the law and the gospel going hand in hand. I cannot find language to express this subject in its fullness.

"The **faith of Jesus**." It is talked of, but not understood. What constitutes the **faith of Jesus**, that belongs, to the third angel's message? Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. He was treated as we deserve to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. Faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the **faith of Jesus**.¹

Very many will get up some test that is not given in the word of God. We have our test in the Bible,--the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and have the **faith of Jesus**." This is the true test, but many other tests will arise among the people. They will come in in multitudes, springing up from this one and that one. There will be a continual rising up of some foreign thing to call attention from the true test of God.²

The "faith of Jesus" at present appears to me (from the above testimonies and others, and from the Bible passages in which it occurs) to describe primarily the gospel truth revealed in that of which Jesus Christ came to testify, *God's view of sinners*, which embodies His method of restoring them to His image (which the law or commandments of God describe). Jesus was primarily the Son of God, revealing to us the Father. The "faith of Jesus" is secondarily *the dependence of a human being on God*,

¹ *The Ellen G. White Materials*, pp. 212, 217 (December 1888 manuscript entitled "Looking Back at Minneapolis")

² *Ibid.*, p. 1752 (04/15/1901 talk to ministers entitled "An Appeal to Our Ministers" in GC Bulletin 04/16/1901)

which He also demonstrated for us. As "the last Adam"³ He lived as one of us, by faith in His Father. Jesus was secondarily the Son of man, recovering Adam's fall.

Failing to see the primary meaning contained in this highly significant phrase results in several problems, all having a common root. The New Testament gospel thereby wrongly takes a man-centered focus, our faith. We do not have an adequate foundation for the plan of salvation, God's powerful dynamic of faith working by love. We cannot see the full dimensions of how He views every sinner and justifies their very existence during the probationary period of this life during which they are shown the evidences of His gift of grace to them. And not having grasped the primary meaning, we are hindered in experiencing the secondary meaning. In other words, to the degree that we fail to see and appreciate God's faith, to that degree we fail to have faith in Him. For just as "we love Him, because He first loved us",⁴ so we have faith in Him because He first put faith in us. It is by love that faith works, and alone has power to overcome in the battle against sin.⁵

With this background, I have been impressed to review Romans, chapters 3 through 5, as they appear to be the main Bible passage that develops this theme in Paul's gospel presentation. As I describe the concepts of faith in the left-hand column, the portions of the chapters I had in mind are given in the right-hand column as a rule. Occasionally they are embedded in the left column with a footnoted reference.

Reflections

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| <p>Faith is the creative principle originating in the heart of God.⁶ It is part of what shows Him to be true,⁷ is the basis of His being justified in His sayings,⁸ and is the means by which He will overcome in judgment.⁹ It thereby shows His righteousness in contrast to the unbelief revealed in unrighteousness of which all the world is guilty. God's faith is thus also the only basis of these guilty ones being justified, for the law that defines righteousness cannot impute it, rather can only condemn the guilty. Only the Lawgiver Himself, as the law and prophets witness, can with the heart of faith see and thus treat the guilty ones as though they were righteous, visualizing for them again His ideal, as the only means to achieve it for them.</p> | <p>"the faith of God" 3:3 "let God be true" 3:4 "that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings" 3:4 "and mightest overcome when thou art judged" 3:4 "what if some did not believe? ... their unbelief"; "our unrighteousness" 3:3, 5 "all the world ... guilty before God" 3:19 "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" 3:20 "the righteousness of God ... witnessed by the law and the prophet" 3:21</p> |
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³ 1Cor. 15:45

⁴ 1John 4:19

⁵ Gal. 5:6

⁶ Though most translations now appear to render the phrase in 3:3 as "faithfulness of God", the original Greek clearly says "the faith of God." Of course, having faith makes one faithful, but "faith" appears to have a stronger creative dynamic than "faithful."

⁷ Compare John 8:42-44.

⁸ This is because they are thereby *faithful* sayings; compare 1Tim. 4:9, 10.

⁹ Compare Gal. 5:6 "avail."

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| <p>This righteousness of His was manifested in the faith of Jesus, which was redemptive grace in Him freely given to all. All are in desperate need of this, because of their past and current state of sinful unbelief, which is so far from God's glory of righteousness in and by the faith of Jesus. Again, all have this great need, and in Jesus Christ, God has come to all, treating them as they could be, not as they were, justifying freely. This righteousness by faith revealed in the faith of Jesus to all, is especially manifested upon all who respond to such faith with faith.</p> | <p>"even the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ" 3:22 "freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" 3:24 "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" 2:23 "all ... being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" 3:23, 24 "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" 3:22</p> |
| <p>God expressed mercy and justice through Jesus Christ, as His poured out life (from Bethlehem to Calvary, "his blood") revealed this faith that declares His righteousness in not holding our sins against us through wise and prudent forbearance.¹⁰ In taking the sins of the world upon Himself,¹¹ overcoming them in life and death,¹² and dying for (and because of) them,¹³ He declared His justice (righteousness) while being just at the same time He justifies sinners by His faith.¹⁴</p> | <p>"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" 3:25 "To declare at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." 3:26</p> |
| <p>This law of faith, seen in the life and death of Christ justifying others as He humbled Himself,¹⁵ excludes boasting as it lays the counterfeit glory of man (self-exaltation) in the dust. This is the only way one is justified, for we have nothing in ourselves by which to achieve it, being devoid of that which the law requires. It is this principle, this reality, which makes Him the God who justifies all by faith, not just those who understand the law. And this principle, so far from voiding the law, alone can establish it, as the life and death of Christ revealed.</p> | <p>"boasting ... is excluded ...by the law of faith." 3:27 "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." 3:28 "God of the Jews only? ... of the Gentiles also ... one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. 3:29, 30 "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." 3:31</p> |

¹⁰ The word translated "propitiation" in the KJV is the Greek word for "mercyseat," the top of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary where blood and law met. See Eph. 1:7, 8 for Paul's comment on the wisdom and prudence in what God did.

¹¹ John 1:29

¹² Rom. 8:3

¹³ 1Pet. 2:24

¹⁴ While the KJV usually is faithful in translating the phrase "faith of Jesus," in this verse it rendered it "him which believeth in Jesus." It can be literally translated "one out of (or by) the faith of Jesus"

¹⁵ Phil. 2:5-8

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| <p>Abraham found this faith as he turned more and more from trusting in what he could do (and thus whereby he could glory) to dependency on God's promise, which was but the expression of His faith. God promised Abraham much, including the blessing that is righteousness. This promised future, in the Seed, was for all on earth.¹⁶ For sinners, this is their only hope, their only future. But what an expression of faith on God's part! It is not without effect, even when faced with unbelief on the sinner's part. But its full effect can only be realized by those who respond to it in their hearts by accepting God's view of things, that is, by believing what God believes. When in their helplessness they thus cast themselves—their hope, their future, their all—upon Him, as Abraham did, He does the only thing He can. He counts it righteousness.</p> | <p>"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." 4:1, 2</p> <p>"shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid" 3:3, 4</p> <p>"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." 4:3</p> |
| <p>These children of faith are debtors to God's grace and they acknowledge it. There is no hint of their feeling He is in debt to them because of what they could do. They realize their impotence, and need of His blessed, forgiving, covering imputation of righteousness.¹⁷ When one in his uncircumcised state believes this, the justifying faith of God expressed to all can be especially applied to him individually as his response of faith is imputed for righteousness, as was Abraham's. This experience of imputed righteousness does not come through the flesh, our own efforts, as the rite of circumcision given Abraham showed in the cutting off of the flesh. Circumcision was thus a seal of righteousness by faith not flesh. And this promise of faith does not come through the law as we saw, because the law can only impute to the sinner his sin and its consequences. The law thus condemns us and shows us our need of God's faith, and of responding to that faith as Abraham did, with faith.</p> | <p>"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." 4:4</p> <p>"To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying. 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.'" 4:5-8</p> <p>"he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe," 4:11</p> <p>"For the promise ... was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law.... For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to ... that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" 4:13-16</p> |

¹⁶ Gen. 12:2; 26:4

¹⁷ The imputation of righteousness and the non-imputation of sin are shown to be the same reality in Rom. 4:6, 8. The global dimensions of this act of God's faith and reconciliation, along with the commissioning such awareness bring upon the one who *believes* it, is clearly stated in 2Cor. 5:19.

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| <p>God's reckoning, His imputation, His calling, is life to the dead, and existence to those who be not spiritually. Abraham learned to lean on God's life, not his own deadness. The amazing promise of God he finally accepted and walked strong in that faith, glorifying God (not himself), persuaded that God (not himself) was able to perform in him what He had promised. This response of Abraham, at its very rebirth in his heart that night under the stars, God imputed (counted) to him for righteousness.</p> | <p>"God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" 4:17 "he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb" 4:19 "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." 4:20, 21 "therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" 4:22</p> |
| <p>And He does the same for us, if like Abraham we believe Him. What is the greatest reason we have to believe Him? It is His greatest act of faith working by love. He sent His Son to die for our sins. And when He raised Him from the dead, He expressed how He viewed us—alive from our deadness, justified from our sins, reconciled. What a promise! What faith!</p> | <p>"But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." 4:24, 25</p> |
| <p>When we believe this, it is imputed to us as it was to Abraham, and we have peace with God. Before we believe this, as we trusted in ourselves and lived that way, we were enemies of God and His righteousness by faith. Such self-dependence showed us as powerless, ungodly sinners. But even while we were there, and precisely because we were in such need, God in faith came to where we were, and in Christ's death reconciled us to Himself. All good we have is due to this reality! And when we believe it—what grace we have to stand, what joy in hope of His glory! We then also understand how He works patience and experience through the troubles of this life. We have "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."¹⁸</p> | <p>"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" 5:1 "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." 5:6, 8-10 "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope" 5:2-4</p> |
| <p>"Wherefore"—we need to trace the root of the problem of sin, so we can better see the root of the solution. Because of Adam's position, when he chose to follow the path of unbelief and introduced sin and death to this world, all came under the reign of sin and death. The promise of the solution was given immediately to Adam and Eve—again a statement of tremendous faith</p> | <p>"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." 5:12 "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses" 5:14</p> |

¹⁸ Rom. 5:5

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| <p>embedded in a cryptic prophecy of the Seed, and demonstrated in the amazing reality that they were still alive to hear it.¹⁹ But the death of Adam's second-born son brought terribly home the tyrant that sin and death were yet to be.²⁰ The faith-promise of the Seed was repeated to Abraham.²¹ But, even though Abraham caught a glimpse of life from the dead,²² not until Moses was the reign of death broken,²³ conclusively showing that the reign of sin was also doomed.</p> | |
| <p>But the real solution was by another Man, "Him that was to come,"²⁴ Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection unfolded the free gift of God's grace to meet all of the consequences of Adam's sin. This new Man was shown to be the promise at the beginning, the enmity against the real enemy, the Seed who would conquer the originator of sin and death. The righteousness of God revealed in the faith of this Man was seen to be that which justified the continued existence of the sinful race from that fateful day in Eden. It thus "abounded unto many,"²⁵ was "unto justification,"²⁶ even "the justification of life."²⁷ So even though sin and death had invaded God's realm, they had never taken over fully. And those who, again like Abraham, believed this reality and the promise of faith behind it, by having faith in the Seed to "receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."²⁸ By His victory over sin and death, "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous."²⁹</p> | <p>"For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." 5:15</p> |
| <p>As God sent the law through Moses to show us how bad we are, and as in resisting that revelation our sin even increases, so at the same time He has</p> | <p>"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" 5:20</p> |

¹⁹ Gen. 3:15

²⁰ Gen. 4:7, 8

²¹ Gen. 22:18

²² Rom. 4:19; compare Heb. 11:19

²³ See Jude 9; Matt. 17:3

²⁴ Rom. 5:14

²⁵ Rom. 5:15

²⁶ Rom. 5:16

²⁷ Rom. 5:18

²⁸ Rom. 5:17

²⁹ Rom. 5:19

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| been pouring out more abounding grace, whose reign "through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" ³⁰ will bring to an end the reign of sin and death, fully experienced by all whose faith responds to God's faith. | |
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May this "righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all" be grasped and seen "upon all them that believe,"³¹ that the day of His final victory may hasten!

³⁰ Rom. 5:21

³¹ Rom. 3:22