

“Of Saving Faith” part 10, WCF 14.3.1, Varying Degrees of Saving Faith

2021.05.09 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

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WCF 14.3 (TPH p927–8)

III. **This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong;**(k) may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory;(l) growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ,(m) who is both the author and finisher of our faith.(n)

**(k) Heb. 5:13, 14; Rom. 4:19, 20; Matt. 6:30; Matt. 8:10.**

(l) Luke 22:31, 32; Eph. 6:16; I John 5:4, 5.

(m) Heb. 6:11, 12; Heb. 10:22; Col. 2:2.

(n) Heb. 12:2.

Hebrews 5:12 **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

Of what did they need to be retaught the first principles (v12)?

In what should believers be developing skill (v13)? What does this name for Scripture imply that it produces in our lives (v13)?

What is one way that the Lord gives this skill (v14)?

Of Whom are all of these principles (cf. Heb 6:1, the next verse)?

Romans 4:16 **Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all <sup>17</sup> (as it is written, “*I have made you a father of many nations*”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; <sup>18</sup> who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “*So shall your descendants be.*” <sup>19</sup> And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup> He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. <sup>22</sup> And therefore “*it was accounted to him for righteousness.*”**

How old was Abraham when the promise and the faith and the accounting for righteousness was given to him (Gen 15)?

But what age is he in the reference in v19? What does this verse say had not happened to his faith?

What does v20 say happened to his faith from this new encounter with God (Gen 17)?

Matthew 6:30 **Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>Matthew 8:10</sup> When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! <sup>Mark 9:23</sup> Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”**

Romans 12:3 **For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.**

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**(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)**

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Our father in heaven how we thank you? That you have designed for us our entire salvation and the matter that would so glorify you. And so satisfy us with your own glory. We thank you for the part of that entire plan that includes you giving us your spirit you giving us life.

You giving us the faith that we have you growing us in our faith in this life. And we pray that you would do that now by attending the study of your word by your spirit with your power. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

So finally into the third paragraph of chapter 14 the confession and the fact that this faith is different in degrees. Now, that was important in the 17th century because. The essence of biblical faith is to be sure. And the question is sure of what or sure of him and we've talked about this before it is especially to be sure of Christ.

But in our experience of Christ he gives us an increasing understanding of him increasing conviction about him and the different things that we learn about him from his word and our learning is imperfect and also a increasing conviction that we are is and that last. Bit that conviction that we are is is what we call the assurance of faith.

And if you think of the gospel of John in the first letter of John as the two different parts of that, he ends the gospel or in the second of last chapter the gospel says these were things I had written that you may believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so that's that faith to be certain that Christ is God in the flesh who came to Redeem us and as accomplished that to be certain of Christ and to receive Him as that. But then at the end of his or towards the end of his first letter he says these things I have written to you who do believe that you may know that you believe and that's the assurance of faith.

So that's more being convinced not. What Christ has done and that he is for sinners and clinging to him for what he has done outside of us, but that's perceiving by the evidence of the work what he has done in us in joining us to himself. So that's in the 16th century there was a strong emphasis on the certainty of faith.

And you can see that in the biblical definition faith is certainty faith is assured even if things that are unseen or that are not yet. But that was over against Roman Catholicism in which since very literally made money and accumulated power by your neediness for them they were very heavily invested in nobody being sure of anything except the Pope and the Church.

Then anymore want you to be sure enough of Jesus. So that you would be doing all these other things and they would have to mediate. Grace to you. Hate even saying the word grace in that context because it's not grace. But one of the things in the transition from the 16th to 17th century is many believers who were short of Jesus but unsure of themselves were very rattled that they didn't have faith at all or as they as they increase in understanding of Christ worried that they had never believed before because now they know this this glorious new thing that the Spirit had given them insight through the preaching or through their study and there.

Was this increasing uncertainty and so Scripture teaches that faith can be weak and faith need to mature and that faith can be strong and that you can have full assurance all those things are taught in the Bible and so for about a hundred years or so between the the main reformers Calvin and such dealing with the recovery of the church from Catholicism Middle of the 1500s to.

Where the Westminster confession pastors had been dealing from the Bible where the believers difficulty now the fact that faith is a varying degrees, we can strong is also important today. Because of a wrong definition of what strong faith is. And you will run into believers who will do it in what I consider a very grace and disgusting way that will allow to be able to recognize and say that's wrong and else.

I well if you had you know, if you had more faith you wouldn't get cancer or your cancer would go away. If you had more faith, you would not have lost your job or this terrible thing wouldn't have happened. Or so forth very different than for instance we'll get in Philippians next Lord's day afternoon when Paul who had had a thorn in the flesh and he had asked God with apostolic faith to remove it from him and God said no my strength has made perfect and weakness.

And then he tells us at the end of Philippians about a pathologist and he's commending about us by saying he got so sick that he almost died. He's not saying poor Patronitis didn't have strong enough faith to not get himself so sick. So that's kind of a very gross disgusting way of describing what strong faith receives and we can see that it's fleshly strong faith receives the same infinitely perfect Christ that weak faith receives but as he as he grows us in faith, it's not faith for the things that we want or that our flesh wants.

It's faith for the things that Christ wants. And that's exactly what he's saying there at the end of Philippians the Timothy has seeks not his own but the things of Christ and therefore he'll be sincerely interested in the Philippians well-being because that's what Christ is interested in. He's interested in his church.

He's interested in strengthening and growing his church. So, that's what Timothy's faith for and faith is for and, similar with the Pathraditis next week who have Timothy this afternoon. So there is however. This this idea that if. If you just had a strong enough faith. Your children wouldn't of your children would mature faster in Christ or come to the Lord if they're still if they're still unbelieving that that stronger faith would make everything perfect in your spiritual life and there's a temptation there to say oh well, you know, I guess I don't have very strong faith.

Well,

Paul also at the end of his ministry as far as the New Testament is concerned his second. Timothy talks about how. The Alexander the copper smith opposed him and no one stood with Paul but everyone abandoned him and here he is clinging to Christ with this triumphant faith in which he is looking forward to the crown of life and the commendation from the master and the Lord himself he

says in that context, you know, all abandoned me, but he says the Lord stood by me Jesus made a special personal appearance to him so even in spiritual things.

The Lord's Providence is often different than we thought it would be or would have enjoyed to have it and yet that is not necessarily an indication of weak faith but they do come in degrees and it is strengthened and we are to seek it strengthening so in Hebrews chapter 5.

He has started to open the Genesis on Melchizedek, he's actually going to come back to Melchizedek in a little bit in the letter. But he makes this comment which Hebrews is probably originally a sermon. I think we covered that when I preached through it how he calls it a word of exhortation at the end and that's first in first century phrase, that is the same as what we you know, it's basically means sermon.

But then he says in verse 11 of him we have much to say and hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing verse 11 probably not the kind of thing that would fly and preaching today. I'd really like to preach more on this part of the passage but since y'all are hard-hearted and backsliding and that has caused dullness in listening to the Lord will just set that aside for now and maybe come back to it later.

I don't know some of you would talk to the elders and the elders might tell you well. I was in the Bible or they probably kind of had a talk with me if I said that from the pulpit. But that brings us to verse 12 for there by this time you want to be teachers you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a babe or baby. But solid food belongs to those who are a full age. That is those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection and so forth.

So he says, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. So, of what do they need someone to re-teach them the first principles?

The Word of God, okay so this is something that we've been seeing about faith in our in our study our entire study of it that faith is believing what God says what faith believes rather is what God says and that's what that's an oracle means, they're the utterance of God the voicing of God's word.

So they needed to be re-taught the first principles of God and then he says in verse 13 for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness. So in what should believers be developing skill? Or in the handling of what? The Word of God that it's very specifically called what here.

The word of righteousness. So, what do you expect the outcome to be if you're handling the word of righteousness? There's a there's a scale word here yes the it's the word of righteousness in that it tells us about Christ who is God's righteousness for us but he's talking here about different degrees of Christian growth different levels of Christian maturity.

So when he says for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, what is he saying will be the result of skillful handling of that word?

Maturity in righteous living. It will produce largest character will produce conformity to Christ to use the way the Apostle Paul talks and several places. You know, we think especially of Romans chapter 8 Philippians chapter 2, it will produce in us a likeness to Jesus. So baby Christian is not an immature.

Christians are not necessarily differentiated by whether or not they can read very complex systematic theology with ease there are a lot of people who can read complex systematic theology with ease and don't bear very much likeness to Christ. So the biblical skill and handling the word biblical maturity is going to be identified by likeness to Christ from the handling of the word.

One way that the Lord gives us that skill then especially is in verse 14 mine says by reason of use in the New King James. What other translations you have for that part of the verse so solid food belongs to those who are full age, that is those who?

By reason of use is what I've got.

Okay, so constant practice. There at the end is Hebrew they're translating that. He when else. Okay because of practice yes, so. Practice makes perfect as something that you may have heard.

Verse 14 is saying practice makes mature. So there is a skilled handling of the word that is made effectual for our growing or our maturing by our practicing of it so faith is in different degrees the faith that is in different degrees is in the understanding of the word and the skillful use of the word.

Thank you. I hope it's streaming now the faith that is in different degrees is in the skillful use of the word and the skillful use of the word isn't just an intellectual. Exercise it is an exercise of practice and the word that we have there translated their senses, it's actually the only place that word appears in the New Testament.

You might you know, the lexicons will say their faculties but we don't use the word faculties anymore it means what God has given you and so the practice of using how God has made you in every part of you according to the word increases your discernment your understanding of good and evil and then I think it's important that we go into the next verse.

Verse 1 of chapter 6 therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary and New King James supplies were principles the elementary things of Christ and so what is the word of righteousness about what are the oracles of God about there, especially about Jesus aren't they who Jesus is what Jesus has done what Jesus has liked what he does in us as he makes us to be like himself.

Okay main point. Of all of this is that Christians grow. And our understanding and and living out of. Who Christ is and what he has done in our lives increases what Christ has done does not grow or diminish he has completed his work in his life his perfectly obedient life his death his resurrection those things are once for all and so.

Faith grows in understanding and appropriating and living out of those things. So the next proof of text they give us is in Romans 4 verse 19.

And there's some important math involved there.

So he's been showing in the book of Romans up into this point that no one has any righteousness of their own. And that no one has any spiritual life of their own apart from grace that Christ alone has all righteousness in in himself and God alone gives spiritual life in order to believe and that God had done this for Abraham and that God had done this for David.

So he's switched in in chapter four to talking about Abraham and David and. We pick up in verse 16, why don't we have one person read verses 16 through 22 someone who reads strongly yes as a please. Guarantee. Of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham who is the father of assault as it is written.

I have made you the father of your nation and. Presence of the God in whom he believed. He gives life to the dead and calls into his. The things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations. As he had been told so shall your offspring be?

He did not weaken and faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead since he was about 100 years old or when he considered to bearing necessary wounds. No, unbelief made him waiver concerning the promise of God, but He grew strong in his space as he gave glory to God.

Holy convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That, Is why his righteousness his faith was counted to him as righteousness. Okay, very good. So when Abraham was originally promised that that he would have this seed who would come from his own body this offspring would come from his own body and solve the death problem and God showed him the stars of the sky as well.

And Abraham believed God knows credited to him as righteousness. First what chapter of Genesis in what chapter Genesis do we find that?

Okay in 12, he makes original promise in in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. Seventeen is where we're going in verses 19 and 20. Genesis 15, that's right. Genesis 15 verse 6 one of the most famous Old Testament verses in New Testament. Scripture many times and Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now Abraham at that point was no older than 86. Ishmael had not been you know, they tried a Hagar method of covenant promise fulfillment in the next chapter in Genesis 16 and then there's at least 13 years and here he says about a hundred. In in verse 19 until.

He said 17 someone said 17 until chapter 17 and you remember you have the two laughings. When Abraham is a is a hundred and says well, she's getting her name changed. Sarah is ninety. God tells Abraham, you're gonna have a son by Sara and Abraham laughs. And then when they're in the in front of the tent sale laughs, but the two laughings are very different and one of the reasons we know that they're very different is Romans 4 verses 19 and 20.

Sales laughter was a laughter of unbelief in which she starts arguing with the Lord. Abraham's laughter, however was only laughter of joy, and I know that it might have been joy to we're more complex than that and I don't want to. Accuse of no belief whatsoever but verse 19 says in Romans 4 and not being weak in faith he did not consider his own body already dead since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb so the original time at which Abraham believed God that was credited to him is righteousness he was how old.

87 86, maybe a little bit younger it's been at least 13 years. Of his walking with God. And the apostle here. Speaks of the time at which he was a hundred as a time at which he might have weakened in his faith and yet he had not become weak in his faith and when God brings a new promise in verse 20, what does it say happened verse 20, he did not whatever at the promise of God through unbelief, okay?

God makes a new promise and everything we read in the Bible you're either responding with faith or unbelief. Okay, the Bible always cuts two ways what way did this new promise in chapter? 17 of Genesis cut for Abraham according to Romans 4 verse 20. Strengthened his faith to faith can weaken and faith can grow and again the means of strengthening is the word of God so God comes with new word and he actually is strengthened in faith giving glory to God being fully convinced that what he had promised he was able to perform and therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness.

A couple more texts that wasn't sure we would get to and they really are just one-offs the two Matthew verses are given as proof texts and we could open the context but I think most of us are familiar with those contexts and then the mark text and the Romans text.

I've added well some read for us. Matthew 6 verse 30. And will someone read for us. Matthew 8 verse 10. All right. Peter 6 verse 30. Luke 8 verse 10, who will read Mark 9 verse 23 and 24. Lowery please. And then will someone read for us Romans 12 verse 3, Jordan, please.

Yeah, I've got so close the grass and field which today is tomorrow is thrown into the oven will he not much more clothed you oh you of little faith.

Okay, thank you that helps us of course with the health and well stuff it doesn't say God will not clothe you because you are a little faith does he? He says God will do what God will do and we ought to have faith to believe it but again the fact that there is such a thing as little faith and big faith these are realities that believers experience it's good for us to know that our Lord himself speaks in that way so that when we find ourselves with little faith, we'll know that he wants us to grow in faith he wants to mature us he wants us to make good use of his means and to grow and, We won't be shaken by the fact that our faith is little because our redeemer is not little.

Okay. Matthew 8 verse 10. Not even.

His full humanity speaks in this way you expect because of the covenant of God and the Word of God and all those advantages that that Paul repeats in his two lists, the list is abbreviated the beginning of Romans 3 and he gives more of the advantages in Romans 9 Jesus expected to find greater faith in Israel, didn't he and so Jesus is observing that there's such a thing as little faith and there's such.

A thing as great faith and this is a good reminder to us that the means of grace are still in and of themselves just means it is God who gives the faith and here already am I am marveling and we are confident because of his perfect character marveling with joy over what God had given to the centurion the greatness of that of that faith.

Growing in faith pleases God. Christ loved you gave himself for you if you love to do that which honors God that which brings him honor that which pleases him you should seek by his means to grow in faith you should ask him to increase your faith such as. Who did who has Mark 9:23 and 24.

Please help my abilities. Okay, including this one they didn't include this one because this father and what he says are not necessarily an example of what is true. Lots of mere men say lots of untrue things but because of the reality that we've seen in the other passages that faith is in different degrees, sometimes weak sometimes strong and something that we should be growing in which growth happens by use of the word because that's what the Lord has appointed even though he is.

The one who gives the faith. This is a really good prayer. This is a really good way of when God confronts you with the smallness of your faith. Jesus is not going to speak from heaven and challenge you as to how strongly you are clinging to him but he will give you providence in your life that will remind you of your desperate need of him and those those experiences will challenge you to cling more to him.

Now the way faith responds to its own smallness is by looking to someone else to strengthen it. Right. Faith looks to Christ. And so he says Lord I believe and then it is actually an act of belief to ask the Lord for help for your unbelief. I often when I am praying.

Find that. I know intellectually that the things that I'm asking for are things that God approves of in His Word. But I find in myself. Not even the desire for them that I have and not an expectation that God will do it. And often when I'm praying that way the prayer immediately changes to asking for more desire and asking for more confidence that He will do according to His word and not according to my understanding or my expectations or the weakness of my desire.

Yeah, I'm not. Holding myself out as an example there that of course is weakness in me, but I want to remind you that the same God who presents him to all of us presents himself to all of us is available to you directly in prayer. Lord, I believe helped my unbelief and then Romans 12 verse 3.

Okay, so several different things here very quickly just saw my watch were lagging a little bit first of all, there's the language there of a measure of faith. Okay, so we have different degrees of faith second of all the provenance of God in whatever degree of faith you have so when you think of yourself as sober judgment, you realize you did not produce your faith and so you are not proud of your faith if you perceive it to be great which is not the way faith perceives itself, but but nor would you be discouraged either you consider the faith?

As something that has been given to you by grace and therefore also as you think severely about yourself as you think soberly about the fact that even even your trusting in God had to be given to you by God that gives you humility that gives you hope for others when you when you think about others and often one of the places where you are going to be tempted to pride is when you perceive a difference and you might be wrong about your difference, remember the the Pharisee and the Publican and how the Pharisee wasn't even justified he wasn't even right with God according to what Jesus says at the end of that parable but when you perceive that someone is immature and you may because the Bible gives us descriptions of what Christness looked Christ likeness looks like rather than in that moment giving into the temptation to being puffed up about yourself, you can say God has given me whatever.

I have God has given him whatever he has and, God can give him more and so there's this desire for for him to have faith and that's where he's transitioning there in Romans 12 about the the the different roles that God has given to all of us in the building up of everyone else's faith that's I'm sorry we don't have time to to look at it in the context but for today all of these passages primarily teaching this this one main thing that faith is in differing.

Degrees and that it's a gift of God that he has appointed to grow by means of understanding his word and by practicing according to what we understand in his word and by climbing out to him who gives it for more of it. And then of course also by the sacrament but we saw that earlier in the chapter, let's pray.

Our father in heaven how we thank you that you have given to us not only the clothes that we wear and the food that we eat just as you have clothed the lilies and fed the birds, but that you also measure out to us our faith. And so we pray that you would strengthen us in our conviction about what your word says and that you would cause us more and more to practice interacting with you according to your word and that you would help us to desire maturity not only for ourselves but also for our brothers and sisters and so grants to us to attend well upon the means of your grace and to strengthen one another in attending well upon the means.

Of your grace and make us to live according to your word all these things we ask in Jesus name amen.