

## The Just Shall Live By Faith

It is one of the fundamental principles of The Truth, that no man can earn a right to Salvation, as if it were deserved as wages for work done. The only wages a man is entitled to in Yahweh's eyes is death, for it is written: "the wages of sin is death ..." (Rom. 6:23). Working works of sin, men become worthy of its wages – death, and rejection at the Judgment seat of Christ - for that is the only thing that King Sin is able to offer. But the Apostle does not stop there; he continues to say that: "... **the gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Master". Eternal life then, is a "gift" granted to those individuals who eschew every work of sin, and who show faithfulness to the One who redeemed them by the shedding of his blood. As we read elsewhere: "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: **it is the gift of God**: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship ..." (Eph. 2:8-10).

The transformation of a sinner into a saint is, in fact, entirely a work of the Almighty. As we read above, "we are **his workmanship**." Again, it is testified that: "it is God which **worketh** in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13; cp. 1 Thes. 2:13). Salvation, then, does not come about by ourselves, and our own works - on the contrary it is a process entirely devised and worked out by the Father who begat us with the Word of Truth. This is not to detract from the other important truth, that a man's faith must be manifested in righteous works (cp Jas. 2:18). But it is rather that those very works themselves come about by the influence of the Spirit-Word within our hearts. The faith that a man has, and shows forth in his conduct of life, forms the basis of redemption, and the subsequent transformation into immortality.

These principles are bound up together in the words that came through the prophet Habakkuk, which we have taken as the title of this paper. In chapter two, it is stated: "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith**" (Hab. 2:4). Notice the implication in this contrast: a man who is Just is not a man whose soul is elevated in pride, but one who will be given life as a consequence of, and reward for, his faith. King Uzziah provides us with an example of unbelief for us to take heed to: "When he was strong, **his heart was lifted up** to his destruction ..." (2 Chron. 26:16). Though he began his reign by trusting in Yahweh's hand to deliver him from his enemies, and make his kingdom prosperous, Uzziah became puffed up in his pride - and fell from his position of Grace. As the Proverb goes: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Seeking to enter into the Divine Presence on his own supposed merits rather than through the appointed High Priest, he was struck with leprosy in his forehead, and remained a leper until the day of his death.

This passage of Habakkuk is cited three times in the New Testament, the context of which bring out further points of exhortation. We shall, therefore, proceed to examine each in turn:

### ROMANS CHAPTER 1

The context of Romans chapter 1, is that when understood and obeyed, the Gospel message is a power which forms the basis for our future immortal lives: "for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is **the power of God unto salvation** to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Being the "power of God", the words of the Gospel can impart life – as in the case of Cornelius in Acts 11. When he found Peter, he was told that Peter would "tell thee **words, whereby** thou and all thy house **shall be saved**" (Acts 11:14). Again, Paul told the believers at Corinth that "unto us which are being saved, it is the **power of God**" (1 Cor. 1:18).

But that power cannot have any effect unless it receives a ready entrance into the minds of those to whom it is being preached. It can only be a power in those who believe in it: those who embrace it,

and have their faith imputed as righteousness (see Rom. 4). It is against this background that the Apostle quotes our passage from Habakkuk, speaking of the Gospel:

“for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: **as it is written, The Just shall live by faith**” (Rom. 1:17).

This verse contains an interesting turn of phrase: God’s Righteousness is “revealed **from faith to faith** as it is written” in Habakkuk. What does this phrase describe? And how does it relate to Habakkuk? The unusual sentence structure of the saying occurs elsewhere in Scripture. Hence, we read of men who “proceed **from evil to evil**” (Jer. 9:3), and again, of those who are faithful to Yahweh, it is written that “they go **from strength to strength**” (Psa. 84:7). Here, the sense is evidently describing a process of development: advancing from one position to another. This emphasises our citation from Habakkuk: - the Just shall live by a continually developing and growing faith, not one which stagnates and does not grow and expand.

There is also an emphasis in Romans of the Righteousness of God being declared. As we just saw, in the Gospel, “therein is **the righteousness of God** revealed ...” See also chapter 4, which is all about men being justified, or accounted righteous by their faith. And as our citation has it, “the just” would live by faith. The point being, that if we are part of the category of the “just”, we will show forth the righteousness of God. Accordingly, in this chapter of Romans, we have each of these three principles expounded: The **Just**, or Righteous will **Live**, or be saved, by their developing **Faith** in the revealed Word of God.

### **GALATIANS CHAPTER 3**

The second citation comes from Galatians chapter 3:

“... But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: **for the just shall live by faith**” (Gal. 3:11).

The emphasis here, is that being considered righteous by God is not upon the basis of works of obedience to a legal code – as we saw earlier. It is rather upon the basis of Faith manifested in action. So we are told:

“... if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal. 3:21-22).

The Law could not give life – not because there was anything wrong with it, for it was perfect for the purpose for which it was designed. It was never intended to impart eternal life, rather it was designed to bring a knowledge of sin:

“*wherefore* the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:12-13)

Having a knowledge and sense of one’s own inadequacies, we cannot plead our own righteousness as a basis for blessing. Rather, the promise is given “to them that believe,” and so is made sure to all of Abraham’s seed. Those who lived under the Law were not saved by the law, but through the retrospective efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ:

“For this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions **that were under the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

So it was, that law was a ministry of condemnation in that it brought a knowledge of sin – but it could not remove it. Only through faith in Messiah could sin be removed, and he, we are told, died for the benefit of those in times past, as well as in our own era of salvation. Hence, “the just shall live by faith”, and not by rendering perfect obedience to Law.

There is another allusion to Habakkuk in Galatians 3:

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ **hath been evidently set forth**, crucified among you?” (Gal. 3:1).

This alludes to Habakkuk 2:2, which reads:

“... and Yahweh answered me, and said, Write the vision, and **make it plain** upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (Hab. 2:2-3).

The point is, that the message should not be obscured, but made “plain” to those to whom we speak. Jesus Christ has been “evidently set forth”, by the preaching of the Apostles, who were as messengers running with important news: our preaching should be equally “plain”.

#### **HEBREWS CHAPTER 10**

The quotation in Hebrews chapter 10 brings our attention to the immediate context of Habakkuk. Compare this:

“... ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and **he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith**: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him ...” (Heb. 10:36-38).

With this:

“... for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it; because **it shall surely come, it will not tarry**. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith**” (Hab. 2:3-4).

There is, then, as sense of urgency: although it might seem to some that the Lord is delaying his coming again, in actual fact he will come, whether they expect him or not.

There is another Old Testament background to these words in Hebrews 10. 1 Samuel 13 describes how king Saul was to wait for the coming of Samuel. However, he would not wait for any longer than he thought was necessary. So the record informs us: “... and he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed; but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.” (1 Sam. 13:8).

Samuel had not arrived by the expected time, and Saul therefore took it upon himself to offer his own sacrifice instead of that which would have been offered by Samuel. It was this impatience that cost him the kingdom:

“Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of Yahweh thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would Yahweh have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. **But now thy kingdom shall not continue** ... because thou hast not kept that which Yahweh commanded thee” (1 Sam. 13:13-14).

Saul should have waited for Samuel, even if his coming would come later than he expected. Even so, we must wait for the coming of Messiah: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto **them that look for him** shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28).

But Hebrews 10 continues: “if any man **draw back**, my soul shall have no pleasure in him ...” (Heb. 10:38). Again, we have an example of this in King Saul. The word of Yahweh came to Samuel regarding Saul:

“It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is **turned back** from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto Yahweh all night” (1 Sam. 15:11).

The context in this passage is of Yahweh’s command to devote to destruction every vestige of Amalek. Yet Saul “turned back” from following the commandment, and saved the king alive, and took a spoil from their goods (see 1 Sam. 15:9). But are we any different? We are under the command to put to death the old man of the flesh – do we do this? We are commanded: “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14), and to be found “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Do we do that?

It is very easy to remove those sins in our lives that we take no pleasure in: but by the same token, it is very difficult to devote to destruction those things that we obtain enjoyment from. But the example of king Saul is a salutary lesson to us all, of the consequence of our failing to do this: it could cost us our place in the kingdom.

Whilst we have considered above the principles of Habakkuk as they are drawn out in the New Testament, we come now to consider our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. The wording in Habakkuk is specific: it is about a particular man:

“... but the just shall live by **his** faith” (Hab. 2:4).

Whilst we have considered the general principles that must govern our walk towards the kingdom, these words have a very specific application to Messiah. He is the only one who is truly “just” (1 Pet. 3:18) in all his ways. He lived by his faith: he “was faithful to him that appointed him” (Heb. 3:2). He never drew back, but was forward looking in all that he did in obedience to his Father in heaven. He never exalted himself, like Uzziah, but was appointed as High Priest by his Father. We look to him for strength and guidance, and as we patiently wait the day of his coming, we must bear in mind the example of Saul, lest we fall in like manner. The vision pertains to the last days in which we live, and we must follow the Master: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), who “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

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