

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## Faith Alone

THOMAS SCHREINER

“I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

—*Martha, in John 11:27*

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

—*Act 16:31*

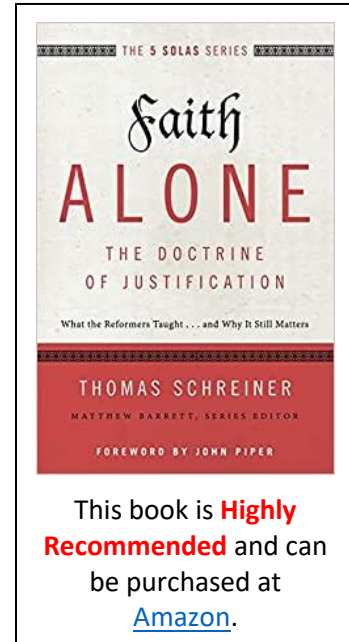
In the previous chapter we examined what Paul means by the phrase “works of law” and saw that the word focuses on the entire law, and that Paul stresses that righteousness doesn’t come by works of law since all people fail to perform what the law requires. This is due to human sin and disobedience. How, then, can a person be justified? The repeated answer we find in Scripture is *by faith*. If faith plays such a decisive role in one’s relationship with God, we should expect it to be a prominent

feature of the NT documents. In this chapter, we will investigate the role of faith in the Synoptic Gospels, John’s gospel, Acts, and Paul. Once again we will be touring, for an entire book could be written about faith in each piece of literature we consult.

### The Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels don’t discuss the relationship between faith and works in the same way as Paul’s epistles or the letter of James does (which will be examined in a later chapter), presumably because the matter wasn’t the subject of debate. Furthermore, the fundamental purpose of the Gospels was to present the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, we don’t find the same emphasis on faith that we find elsewhere in the NT. Still, there are indications that faith plays a central role in one’s relationship with God. I will discuss a few examples to illustrate the point.

Jesus commends the faith of the centurion, saying his faith is greater than any he had seen in Israel (Matt 8:10, 13; Luke 7:9). We should not read too much into this story since it is primarily a record of the healing of a servant. But we do learn that the centurion had a radically different view of himself than the Jewish leaders. They encouraged Jesus to heal his servant because of his concern for the Jewish people and his work in building a



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synagogue. Hence, they pronounced him “worthy” (*axios*) to receive the request for healing (Luke 7:4). The centurion, however, didn’t share their perspective, for he confessed to Jesus that he was “unworthy”: “I am not worthy [*ou hikanos*] to have you come under my roof” (7:6; cf. Matt 8:8), and “I don’t consider myself worthy [*oude emauton ēxiōsa*] to come to you” (Luke 7:7). Jesus healed the centurion’s slave because of the man’s faith, not because of his noble efforts on behalf of the Jews or his worthiness.

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Moreover, even though the story has to do with the healing of his slave, Jesus ties his faith to salvation, for he declares that many Gentiles “will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11), whereas many Jews “will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (8:12). There seems to be an indication here that salvation is by faith, not by works, for the centurion received an answer to his request because of his faith, not because of his worthiness.

A connection between faith and forgiveness is forged in the story of the healing of the paralytic. Though the faith mentioned is that of his friends instead of his own faith (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20), it is likely that the paralytic also exercised faith. The healings of Jesus often function at two levels, representing the wholeness of Jesus’ work. Those who were healed physically were also spiritually healed. The woman with the hemorrhage for twelve years was healed when she touched Jesus’ garment. Almost all English versions render Jesus’ words to her as, “your faith has made you well.” But literally Jesus declared to her, “your faith has saved [*sesōken*] you” (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48).<sup>1</sup> Both her physical and spiritual healing were due to her faith. It is striking as well that in the story of Jairus’s daughter, which frames the account of the woman healed of her hemorrhage, Jesus says to Jairus when his hope of his daughter’s life continuing is beginning to fade: “Don’t be afraid. Only believe” (Mark 5:36; cf. Luke 8:50), suggesting that faith is fundamentally what is required for human beings.

Luke’s use of the phrase “your faith has saved [*sesōken*] you” is particularly interesting. He uses it on three occasions, and each one of them is significant (Luke 7:50; 17:19; 18:42). The first instance occurs in the story of Jesus’ meal with Simon the Pharisee (7:36–50). A disreputable woman enters and begins to weep, and her tears fall onto Jesus’ feet. As she wipes off his feet with her hair, Simon is astonished that Jesus allowed such a woman to touch him, and concludes that Jesus isn’t a prophet. Jesus, however, demonstrates his prophetic status by reading Simon’s mind. He explains that the woman has loved much because she has been forgiven much (7:42–43, 47). The story features the forgiveness of sins: “her many sins have been forgiven” (7:47), and Jesus declares to her, “Your sins are

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<sup>1</sup> The wording is exactly the same in all three accounts.

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forgiven.” The story concludes with Jesus’ ringing affirmation. “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (7:50). This story accords with the notion that justification is by faith alone, for the forgiveness Jesus offers here is not secured by obedience—the woman was a notorious sinner. Instead, she was forgiven because of her faith, her trust that Jesus would forgive her.

In Luke 17:10–19 we read that Jesus healed ten lepers. One leper, a Samaritan, returned and gave glory to God by thanking Jesus for what he had done. None of the other lepers returned and gave thanks. Jesus singled out the one who returned and gave thanks, and his concluding words, “your faith has saved you,” are limited to this man. It seems fair to conclude that only the Samaritan was “saved” in this encounter, for he was both physically and spiritually healed.<sup>2</sup> The other nine were healed physically, but the words of salvation are limited to the one who returned and gave thanks. He differs from the other nine in truly exercising faith, and thus the wholeness of salvation is restricted to him.

The final story we should consider is the healing of the blind man in Luke 18:35–43 (cf. Matt 9:28–29; Mark 10:52). When the blind man heard Jesus was passing by, he pleaded with him as the Son of David to have mercy on him. People tried to convince him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:39). The blind man requested that Jesus open his eyes, and Jesus granted his request. The opening of the eyes isn’t limited to his physical sight, for he recognized that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah of Israel. Thus, when Jesus declared, “Your faith has saved you,” his words aren’t restricted to physical healing. This is borne out by the conclusion of the story, for the blind man followed Jesus to Jerusalem, to the place where he would suffer as the Son of David on the cross. The blind man didn’t just believe in Jesus for healing and forgiveness, he followed him in discipleship. Luke emphasizes in these three narratives that salvation is by faith, that those who trust in Jesus are forgiven of their sins.

The account of the Canaanite woman is also remarkable (Matt 15:21–28). Jesus discouraged her from approaching him since she wasn’t an Israelite, and the disciples entreated Jesus to send her away. Nevertheless, she kept pressing Jesus to act on behalf of her daughter, and Jesus healed her daughter. Jesus highlights her great faith (15:28), showing that this is the fundamental requirement in our relationship with God.

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<sup>2</sup> In a careful study Yeung says both physical and spiritual healing are intended here. Maureen W. Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul: A Comparison with Special Reference to ‘Faith That Can Move Mountains’ and ‘Your Faith Has Healed/Saved You’* (WUNT 2/147; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 53–195. See also Ben Witherington III, “Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity: The Soteriology of Luke-Acts in Its First Century Setting,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 145–66.

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Another story in Luke is worth examining, even though the word faith isn't mentioned. Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). The parable is important because we find the word “justified” (*dikaioō*) used in a soteriological context (18:13). The story is well-known, so there isn't any need to rehearse it in detail here. What stands out is that the Pharisee isn't justified in the end, despite his attention to religious ritual (18:12). Instead, the Pharisee was condemned before God because he trusted in his own righteousness and exalted himself (18:9, 14). The tax collector, however, was obviously a sinner, one who belonged in the same category as the “greedy, unrighteous,” and “adulterers” (18:10). But in the end he was declared righteous because he humbled himself, because he admitted his sin, and because he pleaded with God to show him mercy (18:13–14). Though the word “faith” isn't found here, the parable certainly fits with the notion of justification by faith alone, for the tax collector wasn't justified by his works but solely through God's mercy. I. Howard Marshall says, “Jesus' lesson is precisely that the attitude of the heart is ultimately what matters, and justification depends on the mercy of God to the penitent rather than upon the works which might be thought to earn God's favour.”<sup>3</sup> And Joseph Fitzmyer comments, “One achieves uprightness before God not by one's own activity but by a contrite recognition of one's own sinfulness before him.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of faith is underscored in the Synoptic Gospels, for entrance into the kingdom is for those who believe (Mark 1:15). Jesus often reproaches his hearers or disciples for their little faith (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28), but even worse are those who are unbelieving (Matt 13:58; 17:17; Mark 6:6; 9:19, 24; Luke 9:41; 12:46; 24:11, 41). Even faith as a mustard seed suffices (Matt 17:20; Luke 17:6), though faith that is temporary doesn't save (Luke 8:13; cf. 18:8; 22:32). The little ones who belong to God are characterized by their believing (Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42).

## Believing in the Gospel of John

The centrality of believing in the Gospel of John is evident, for John uses the verb “believe” (*pisteuō*) ninety-eight times. It isn't my purpose here to examine the usage of the verb in detail, but we will consider a few examples to appraise how John uses the word and to confirm its importance. We begin with the purpose of the gospel: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (20:30–31). John informs us that he included the signs in his gospel so that the readers of the gospel might believe. This belief

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<sup>3</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 681.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* (AB; New York: Doubleday 1985), 1185.

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has a specific content and profile, for John wants the readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and God's Son. Scholars debate whether John refers to initial faith or ongoing faith here, but the issue isn't decisive for our purposes, for in either case faith is necessary for eternal life.

The importance of faith is relayed in another story. In John 6 many disciples were forsaking Jesus, for they were scandalized by what he was saying, especially when he insisted that one must eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:52–59). Jesus asked the remaining disciples if they wanted to leave him as well. Peter responded, “We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God” (6:69). Those who belong to Jesus believe that he is God's holy one, God's chosen one. We see the same kind of response from Martha after her brother died. In the midst of a conversation with Jesus, she confesses, “I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world” (11:27). Martha's words reflect the purpose of the gospel (20:30–31), which we looked at earlier.

The belief John calls for here is centered on Jesus: one must believe in Jesus (John 16:9) and that God sent him into the world (16:27, 30; 17:8, 21). Given the narrative of the gospel as a whole, this includes belief in Jesus' death as the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), the conviction that he gave his life for his sheep (10:11, 15), that he gave his life so that his people would not perish (11:50), and that his flesh was given for the world's life (6:51). People must believe in his death—that is, eat his flesh and drink his blood to enjoy eternal life (6:52–58). They must believe that God sent his Son (3:16) in order to enjoy forgiveness of sins (20:23).

Belief is not optional or secondary. Only those who believe will enjoy life in the age to come (20:30). The notion that one must believe is central to the entire narrative. The children of God are limited to those who believe in Jesus' name (1:12), and thus those who don't believe are excluded from God's family. All who believe have eternal life (3:15; 6:40, 47), so that those who believe in the Father who sent the Son already possess the life of the age to come (5:24; cf. 11:25–26). By contrast, those who refuse to believe are condemned (3:18) and stand under God's wrath (3:36). They will die in their sins for refusing to believe in Jesus (8:24).

John not only emphasizes the importance of believing, he also contrasts faith with works, believing with doing. We have the fascinating exchange between Jesus and the crowd in John 6. They asked, “What can we do to perform the works of God” (6:28). They are fixated on what they must do, what they must perform. Surely, they must do some remarkable deeds to find favor with God. But Jesus rejects such notions entirely, saying, “This is the work of God—that you believe in the One He has sent” (6:29). They want to do and perform and work, but what they must do is believe and trust. Believing is a



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receptive activity; it is compared to coming and to eating and drinking (6:35). One eats and drinks to sustain life, and in the same way those who believe in Jesus do so to live. When we consider the role of good works in a later chapter, the fullness of what John means by believing will be investigated further. Suffice it to say here that believing in John is dynamic and full-orbed. It can't be confined to mental assent to truths. True belief dominates a person's life and changes dramatically how he or she relates to God.

## Faith in Acts

In reading the NT it is important to realize that various documents have different purposes. Acts records the spread of the Christian faith in the Roman Empire, and thus its purpose is not to discuss in any detail the matter discussed in this book. Still, we can learn some things from Acts that support the primacy of faith. For instance, early Christians are often designated as "believers" (2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 15:5; 19:18), indicating that trust or belief is characteristic or fundamental to Christian experience. The proper response to the message proclaimed by the apostles was belief or trust in the message and in the Lord. Note the following texts.

- "But many of those who heard the message believed" (4:4).<sup>5</sup>
- "They believed Philip, as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12).
- "Many believed in the Lord" (9:42).
- "All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins" (10:43).
- "We believed on the Lord Jesus Christ" (11:17).
- "A large number who believed turned to the Lord" (11:21).
- "The proconsul ... believed" (13:12).
- "Everyone who believes in Him is justified" (13:39).
- "All who had been appointed to eternal life believed" (13:48).
- "A great number of both Jews and Greeks believed" (14:1).
- "They committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (14:23).
- "By my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe" (15:7).

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<sup>5</sup> When I document many Scriptures in a series, even if the citation doesn't begin with a capital letter, a capital is used to begin the citation.

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- “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (16:31).
- “He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had believed God with his entire household” (16:34).
- “Many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men” (17:12).
- “Some men joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (17:34).
- “Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed the Lord, along with his whole household. Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized” (18:8).
- “He greatly helped those who had believed through grace” (18:27).
- “They should believe in the One who would come after him, that is, in Jesus” (19:4).
- “How many thousands of Jews of there are who have believed” (21:20).
- “The Gentiles who have believed” (21:25).
- “Those who believed in You” (22:19).

The references above make it abundantly clear that faith, belief, and trust are characteristic of Christians. What it means to be a Christian is to believe in Jesus Christ and the apostolic message. One must believe in Jesus to be: saved (Acts 15:11; 16:31; cf. 14:9); receive forgiveness of sins (10:43); be justified (13:39); cleansed (15:9). At the same time, of course, those who heard the message were summoned to repent (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 13:24; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).<sup>6</sup> Faith and repentance were closely aligned, and genuine faith always includes repentance. For example, Acts 20:21 speaks of “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Through a quotation of Jesus that Paul repeats, he describes the aim of his ministry as including faith and repentance: “to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that by faith in Me they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified” (26:18). We should not interpret this to mean that repentance is another thing a person has to do to receive salvation in addition to faith. Rather, genuine faith includes repentance. Faith that doesn’t include repentance is false faith, for those who truly believe turn away from evil. Simon the

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<sup>6</sup> “Turning” toward the Lord is another way of describing repentance (see Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20).

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sorcerer serves as the example of a false faith in Acts, for he allegedly believes (8:12) but shows by his subsequent behavior that he has no inheritance among the people of God (8:21). He remains “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (8:23), so that he needs to repent (truly believe!) to be right with God (8:22).

Two passages in Acts warrant further comment relative to the theme of faith alone. Paul’s proclamation of the gospel in Pisidian Antioch includes near the conclusion these fascinating words: “Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and everyone who believes in Him is justified from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses” (13:38–39). Here we read that forgiveness and justification cannot be obtained through the law of Moses. We aren’t given a full explanation as to why this is so, and part of the reason is likely salvation historical—the era of the Sinai covenant had ended. But it is also likely that the argument is anthropological, especially since Luke was a companion of Paul, and this is a Pauline speech. People don’t receive forgiveness and justification through the Mosaic law since they have failed to obey its precepts. Their sin and disobedience exclude them from life. Forgiveness and right standing with God are only given through faith. On this basis, it seems fair to conclude that justification comes by faith alone and not on the basis of human works. Such a reading fits with the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector we looked at earlier in Luke’s gospel (Luke 18:9–14). There, too, we saw that the tax collector was justified by faith alone.

Peter’s words at the so-called Apostolic Council in Acts 15:7–11 point us in the same direction. Controversy erupted in the early church over whether circumcision and observance of the rest of the Mosaic law was required for salvation (15:1, 5). In the midst of the discussion Peter stood up and reminded the hearers of his previous encounter with Cornelius and his friends (10:1–11:18). Cornelius was uncircumcised, and hence was probably a God-fearer. Since he was uncircumcised, he wasn’t considered part of the Jewish people. Still, Cornelius and his friends clearly became Christians when they heard Peter’s preaching because God gave them the Holy Spirit, the identifying sign that one has become a Christian (15:8; cf. Rom 8:9; Gal 3:1–5). Peter’s point is that Cornelius and his friends did not enter the people of God by virtue of their obedience to Torah.

Indeed, Peter proclaims that the law is a “yoke ... that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear” (15:10). The law can’t save because human beings can’t sustain it (i.e., they are unable to keep it). Instead, human beings “are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (15:11). Salvation isn’t obtained through works but through grace. Grace accords with faith, for God “[cleansed] their hearts by faith” (15:9). In this remarkable text, the law and works are opposed to grace and faith. Salvation is through grace alone and by faith alone, and obedience to the law is excluded as the way to salvation. Though



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there are only a few explicit references, we see that the necessity of faith to enjoy forgiveness of sins is a prominent theme in Acts.

## Faith in Paul

In a previous chapter I noted in Paul the contrast between faith and works for salvation and justification, but a few more comments on faith in Paul should prove clarifying. First, I will make some observations on faith and believing in Paul. Second, we will investigate the nature of faith in Paul. Then, in the next chapter, the meaning of the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” will be briefly explored.

Statistics alone demonstrate the centrality of faith and trust in Paul: the word “faith” (*pistis*) occurs 142 times, and the verb “believe” (*pisteuō*) 54 times.<sup>7</sup> For Paul, what it means to be a Christian is to believe, for often Paul describes his readers as those who believed<sup>8</sup> or those who have faith.<sup>9</sup> Paul declares that “salvation” is given “to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16; cf. 1 Cor 1:21; 15:2; Eph 2:8), and to those who believe in the gospel he proclaimed (1 Cor 15:11; Eph 1:13; cf. Rom 10:8). We are not surprised to learn that “faith comes from what is heard” (Rom 10:17), for one can scarcely believe in the gospel without knowing its content (10:14–16). Similarly, Christians put their faith “in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13), and the truth here is almost certainly the truth about Jesus. Faith is directed toward the gospel message, but the gospel centers on Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 1:1–2), particularly his death and resurrection, which secured forgiveness of sins and justification (Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:1–4).

Believing in the gospel isn’t optional. It is imperative, for those who don’t put their trust in Jesus will face eschatological humiliation (Rom 9:33; 10:11). Conversely, believers are the children of Abraham (Gal 3:6; cf. 3:8) and therefore the children of God (3:26). They belong to God’s family and are members of the true Israel of God (6:16). Those who place their trust in the gospel receive the Spirit (3:14) and eternal life (1 Tim 1:16; cf. Col 2:12) by faith. The reception of the Spirit signifies that they have received the blessings of the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26–27); the promises of the age to come are now theirs in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 2:28–29; 2 Cor 3:1–6; Phil 3:3).

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<sup>7</sup> According to a search of NA<sup>28</sup> in Bible Works. Paul also uses the word “faith,” especially in the Pastorals, to refer to “the faith,” a body of doctrine or teaching that believers confessed (e.g., 1 Tim 3:9, 13; 6:10; 2 Tim 4:7).

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Rom 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 14; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:5; Gal 3:22; Eph 1:19; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10, 13; 2 Thess 1:10; Titus 3:8.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 1:8, 12, 17; 1 Cor 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Cor 5:7; 8:7; 13:5; Phil 2:17; 1 Thess 3:6; 2 Thess 1:3, 4; 3:2; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 2 Tim 1:5; Titus 1:1.

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For the purposes of our investigation, we want to look specifically at those passages that say that righteousness is granted to those who believe,<sup>10</sup> a theme that Paul reiterates often. As noted earlier, in such contexts righteousness by faith is opposed to righteousness by works. This supports the truth that right standing with God is by faith alone since Paul contrasts “working” with “believing” (Rom 4:5); this demonstrates that justification is not granted to those who work *for* God but to those who trust *in* God. This righteousness is “credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:24), that is, to those who confess Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead (10:9–10). If righteousness is by faith and human activity and human works are excluded, we can safely conclude that righteousness is by faith alone.

We should, however, note that the faith that saves us is not just any faith. What makes faith salvific is the *object* of faith. Paul emphasizes that Abraham’s faith was in God (Rom 4:17), but the God that Abraham trusted is not just any God. He is the God “who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist” (4:17). Saving faith is directed to the creator God, the God who made the world and intervenes in it, the God who gives life where there is death.

The faith that saves trusts in God’s promises, just as Abraham trusted that his offspring would be as many as the stars of the sky (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:18). Faith must not be confused with wish-fulfillment, nor do we find faith in faith itself. Abraham’s hope was circumscribed by God’s promise. Still, that promise was astonishing and beyond the capacity of Abraham and Sarah to fulfill themselves since they were well beyond the years where they could have children (Rom 4:19). Faith doesn’t turn a blind eye toward human weakness; it faces the facts and acknowledges that humanly speaking, the fulfillment of the promise is impossible. Faith puts its hope in God instead of the human subject (4:18). Indeed, faith glorifies and honors God, for it confesses that God can do what he has promised (4:20–21).

Paul unpacks for us the faith that is counted for righteousness (Rom 4:22). It is a faith that stakes its life on God’s promises, a faith that puts its hope in God when everything seems to oppose what he has pledged. This is why Christians are those who believe their sins are forgiven (4:25), even though the evidence and proof of that forgiveness isn’t evident to anyone in the world. Nothing in life points to Christians as those who are specially favored by God, for they face suffering and the same kinds of difficulties that strike unbelievers. Still, believers trust that Jesus’ death and resurrection secure their forgiveness and justification (4:24–25).

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<sup>10</sup> Rom 1:17; 4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13; 5:1; 9:30, 32; 10:6; Gal 3:8, 11, 24.

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The faith that saves, then, is dynamic and powerful. It is a faith that expresses itself in love, for a living faith produces love, and such love functions as evidence that faith is genuine and vital. We see the same idea when Paul speaks of the “work of faith” (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11), for in the context that phrase clearly means the work that is the result or fruit of faith. Yes, salvation is by faith alone, but such faith is not inert. Faith that is real leads to works—it displays itself in a new kind of life. Hence, Paul speaks of the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5; 16:26), which likely refers to the obedience that comes from faith. At the same time it also indicates that we are called upon to obey the gospel (10:16). Those who truly believe, then, stand in the faith and persevere in the faith (Rom 11:20; 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 1:24), for those who continue as Christians continue to exercise faith and trust (1 Thess 3:5). Hence, Paul prays that Christians would experience by faith Christ dwelling in their hearts (Eph. 3:17). Christ already indwells believers by his Spirit, and yet the beauty and power of his presence must be experienced afresh and anew by believers.

## Conclusion

The NT writings aren't systematic documents, but the prominence of faith indicates that it is fundamental to one's relationship with God. In the Synoptics Jesus commends people for their faith and regularly declares that their faith has saved them. The centrality of faith is obvious in John, for the verb “believe” pervades the gospel, and in John's purpose statement he declares that life is obtained by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The apostles in Acts call on people to repent and believe to be saved. Indeed, both the Gospel of John and Acts stress that faith saves, suggesting that faith *alone* saves. We also see that Paul emphasizes the necessity of faith for salvation and justification. What it means to be a Christian is to be a believer, one who trusts in God and in his Son, Jesus Christ. Since righteousness is by faith, works are ruled out as a basis for salvation. Though we have covered much territory in looking at the prominence of faith in the NT, there remains one matter left to consider. There is a particular debate today over the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” in Paul, and before we wrap up our discussion we will consider this phrase in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

- Chapter 8 of *Faith Alone — The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters*.

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner, T. (2015). *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters*. (M. Barrett, Ed.) (pp. 112–123). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.