

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 70 – THE CHURCH - FAITH]

We have spent quite a bit of time looking at the role of the Holy Spirit in both bringing sinners to Christ and then developing God's holy nature in those believers so that they form the holy temple within which God can dwell.

- ◆ Now it is time to turn our focus on the role of the church.
- ◆ Much has been written on the role and function of the church.
- ◆ The approach I would like to take as we look at the role of the body of Christ is through the five virtues of faith, hope, love, worship and service.
- ◆ When one becomes a believer, one does not glow in the dark, nor to our disappointment does "divine perfection" set in.
- ◆ However with the coming of the Spirit the living God sets up home in our lives and imparts to us "divine infection."
- ◆ It is the role of the individual members of the church then to infect the world with divine life.
- ◆ This is a good disease to have.
- ◆ So the church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

Let's first of all look at the subject of faith.

- ◆ Faith is something that goes back to the early creation event itself.
- ◆ The first sin was so much more than a lack of obedience to a simple command of God. In its ultimate sense, it was a lack of faith.
- ◆ We saw in our earlier sessions on the creation of man that God in creating Adam and Eve exercised two exclusive and comprehensive claims on them as their Creator and Father (Ephesians 3:15).
- ◆ But remarkably, as God's purpose was to create "man in His image" (humans who would think and act only as God would by their own volition), He created them with the ability to reason, to question and to choose, which opened the possibility of them disagreeing with, or worse, disobeying their Creator and Father.
- ◆ In other words, they were given the prerogative to decide for themselves whether they could trust their Creator and Father on how they should think and act as His children, or they could trust themselves and be their own gods.
- ◆ As we saw this independence also opened the door to the possibility of them creating "evil."
- ◆ This was a prerogative God granted them as key to His purpose in creating mankind was to have them share in the very relationship which already existed in the godhead itself, a love shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- ◆ But the decision was for them to make, it would not be forced on them, as then it would not be of "love."

Well, we know what happened. Instead of putting their faith and trust in their Creator and Father, they exercised their God-given prerogative and chose instead to trust themselves.

- ◆ Jesus, in later telling the parable of the prodigal son, knew from firsthand experience what it meant to be told, "Stay out of my life and give me the inheritance which I deserve" (Luke 15:11-13).
- ◆ It's interesting while rejecting his father's claim to him, the prodigal was happy to accept that claim when it came to his inheritance.
- ◆ Modern society does much the same thing when they happily push God out of their lives but then blame Him when disaster strikes.
- ◆ What we witness here on the part of Adam and Eve, is more than a moral failure, it's really a rebellion against the One who had a comprehensive claim on their lives.
- ◆ It was the wilful refusal to acknowledge the Creator's claim on them as both their Maker and Father.
- ◆ This sadly is the mindset of humanity ever since and the one Paul categorizes in Romans 1:18-3:20.
- ◆ ***Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.***
- ◆ And as the root of the human tree called Adam has been poisoned by cutting itself off from the source of true life, humans in their rebellion became dehumanised and perpetuated this lie that we are free agents (our own gods) and answerable only to ourselves (Romans 5:12).
- ◆ All of us are born into this predicament of sin and ultimately shaped by society with no way of extricating ourselves (Romans 8:7-8).

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Fortunately humanity has a God who does not abandon His comprehensive claims on us despite our rebellion.

- ◆ Our Creator does not give up on His creation. Our Father does not give up on His children. We may disown Him, but He does not disown us (Luke 15:11-32; Romans 8:31-39).
- ◆ This is testimony to God's faithfulness to us in contrast to our lack of faith in Him.
- ◆ So what does He do? He sets in motion His plan to add another comprehensive claim on His rebellious children, this time as their Savior.
- ◆ You see, faith is more than just belief; it's a living response of trust, obedience and loyalty to the Creator who has a claim upon one's existence.
- ◆ In addition, there has to be a willingness on the part of the individual to respond to that claim.
- ◆ As fallen humanity was now both unwilling and unable to put their trust, obedience and loyalty in their Maker and Father because of sin, then He would do it for them.
- ◆ And He would do it, not from the safety and security of heaven, rather He would descend and enter into the fallen and rebellious stronghold of His wayward children and do it for them from within their very ranks (Philippians 2:6-8).
- ◆ This of course is the miracle of the incarnation, where Jesus takes on our humanity in order to respond faithfully on behalf of sinful mankind to His Father's claim on them.
- ◆ We need to view the whole life and activity of Jesus from the cradle to the grave as constituting our vicarious human response to the love of God.
- ◆ His whole life is our response to God.
- ◆ His crucifixion becomes our crucifixion; His resurrection becomes our resurrection; His baptism becomes our baptism, His faith becomes our faith, His prayers become our prayers, His worship becomes our worship.
- ◆ That's why He was born human, why he was baptized, why He was born of the Spirit, why He was crucified and why he rose from the dead – in other words He lived the perfect life you and I could not live on our behalf.
- ◆ He became our perfect response to God's love.
- ◆ We are not accepted by the Father on the life we live, but on the perfect life Jesus lived.
- ◆ Jesus absorbs yours and my imperfect life into his own perfect life.
- ◆ ***Romans 6:3-6 (NKJV) 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.***
- ◆ And as we have seen through this series Jesus, on behalf of all humanity, responds faithfully through His trust, obedience and loyalty to the claim God has on His creation.
- ◆ Jesus is the true person of faith. By doing so, He reveals what our humanity should look like and on what basis we are accepted back into relationship with God.
- ◆ We are not accepted back on our legal performance to the law, but rather on the childlike obedience of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Our obedience to the Word of God is simply our response from moving from a condition of distrust to one of trust.
- ◆ We now accept that God as our Creator, Father and Savior knows what's best for us, and therefore will respond in a positive manner in obedience to His Word.

So in a corporate or general sense as with Jesus' sacrifice for all mankind's sins, all humanity benefits from Jesus' faithful response to God on their behalf.

- ◆ But again, like Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, one has to acknowledge what Christ has achieved on our behalf.
- ◆ This is where faith moves from the corporate or general sense and becomes subjective or personal.
- ◆ It is also where saving faith comes in. It's a simple acknowledgement of what Christ has achieved on our behalf not only in paying the death penalty for our sins on the cross, but also acknowledging His faithful response to the Father's claim on His children.

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- ◆ Believers now live their lives not on their feeble faithfulness or obedience, but rather on the faithful trust, obedience and loyalty of Jesus Christ.

So what does all this mean in practical terms for faith?

- ◆ When we face the problems and difficulties of this life do we really think our faith is going to move mountains?
- ◆ No, that kind of achievement is only accomplished by the faith of Jesus Christ – only divinity can move mountains.
- ◆ A number of years ago when I was pastoring in the southern part of Australia, we had a church bonfire party.
- ◆ We had acreage and ran a few cows on our hobby farm.
- ◆ We also leased the property next door that had a stream running through it with willow trees lining the stream.
- ◆ I was slowly clearing the property of the fallen willow branches and amassed five huge bonfires each about twelve feet high.
- ◆ We invited the congregation over for “Sloppy Joes” and a bonfire night.
- ◆ We all know kids love fires and so it was with a great deal of anticipation that we lit the first fire.
- ◆ Fires as they usually do start slowly but eventually they roar into life.
- ◆ The flames started leaping about thirty feet into the air and as they did so the kids started moving further backwards out of respect for the flames and with probably a little bit of apprehension.
- ◆ As the fire roared into life, one of the younger girls, Joanna, worked her way over to me and took me by the hand.
- ◆ As the flames leaped higher and higher she quietly said to me, “Gary, do you think we ought to call the fire department?”
- ◆ It was one of those special moments in life you cherish.
- ◆ I reassured her everything was all right and gripped her hand a little tighter.

The question is, “Was Joanna relying on her feeble grasp of my hand or my strong grasp of her hand for reassurance?”

- ◆ Of course she was relying on my strong grasp for reassurance.
- ◆ This is the picture of faithfulness God wants us to adopt in our lives.
- ◆ In matters of faith, our task is to take the hand of Jesus Christ like Joanna took my hand.
- ◆ Just as Joanna looked to me for reassurance, so we look to Jesus’ faithfulness for our reassurance.
- ◆ It is not our human attempts to conjure up enough faith that is going to move mountains.
- ◆ It is Jesus taking those feeble attempts in his hand, wrapping them in his perfect faithfulness and presenting them to the Father on our behalf.
- ◆ This knowledge should take enormous pressure off us as believers.
- ◆ I feel so sorry for Christian parents who are erroneously told that their terminally ill child would have lived if only they would have exercised more faith.
- ◆ If only they would have been told it is not their faith they are relying on, but rather Jesus Christ’s faith.
- ◆ Our job is to take our feeble petitions and place them in Christ’s perfect hands of faith.
- ◆ Jesus steps in to the actual situations where we are asked to have faith in God and He acts from within the depths of our unfaithfulness and provides us with His faithfulness.
- ◆ The apostle Peter is a good example of this.
- ◆ Peter arrogantly and foolishly assured Jesus he would never deny Him. Jesus responded by informing Peter he would deny Him three times.
- ◆ But Jesus added, **“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32).**
- ◆ Now of course it did fail because Peter was relying on self.
- ◆ But through that fearful failure his faith was restored and strengthened through the unswerving faithfulness of Jesus Christ and Peter went on to become the leader of the New Testament church.
- ◆ And like Peter, we too may let God down, but He won’t let go of our hands. That’s His promise.
- ◆ ***John 10:27-30 (NKJV) 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”***

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- ◆ Jesus takes our weak and faltering faith and holds it securely in His hand.
- ◆ And sooner or later we recognize it is not our feeble grasp of Jesus' hand that matters but his strong grasp of our hand.
- ◆ Faith is placing our petitions in Christ's hands who then wraps them in His perfect faithfulness before presenting them to the Father.
- ◆ And this is the hard part, just as it was for Jesus in the garden, leaving the outcome in the Father's capable hands.
- ◆ Part of faith trusts our Creator, Father, and Savior with the outcome.
- ◆ We know God can move mountains, we know God can heal a terminally ill child, but we also know He does not always give us the answer we want, just as He did not give Jesus the answer He asked for in the garden.
- ◆ Therefore, we have to conclude as we learned earlier in the case of Job; He has more important reasons for not giving us the answers we want.
- ◆ Why? Because sometimes our spiritual well-being and development is more important to God than our physical well-being.
- ◆ *"Keep praying, but be thankful that God's answers are wiser than your prayers!" -- William Culbertson.*
- ◆ What for instance, would have been the consequences of God the Father saying "yes" to Jesus' human request in the garden?
- ◆ **Mark 14:35-36 (NKJV) 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.**
- ◆ Notice the four steps of Jesus' prayer of faith.
- ◆ 1) He takes the Father's hand like Joanna took my hand.
- ◆ **v.36 And He said, "Abba, Father."**
- ◆ *"Dad, I need some reassurance."*
- ◆ 2) He acknowledged God can move mountains.
- ◆ **"all things are possible for You."**
- ◆ 3) He then lets God know what His petition is.
- ◆ **"Take this cup away from Me."**
- ◆ *"We want our terminally ill child to live."*
- ◆ 4) He leaves the outcome in the Father's capable hands.
- ◆ **"nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."**
- ◆ Jesus bent His human self-will into alignment with the Father's will and went on to face the ordeal of the cross.
- ◆ Faith for a Christian is not this big complicated subject we seem to have made it.
- ◆ It is a simple matter of taking the reassuring hand of Jesus Christ and asking Him to wrap our feeble petitions in His perfect faithfulness and present them to the Father. Then trusting God with the answer He gives us.
- ◆ This is why the KJV is perhaps the only translation which correctly translates Galatians 2:20.
- ◆ **Galatians 2:20 (KJV) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,** (i.e., the faithfulness of the Son of God) **who loved me, and gave himself for me.**
- ◆ Nearly all other translations, translate it, and this is from the NIV, **"The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God."**
- ◆ This implies we are living by our faith, rather than Christ's faith on our behalf.
- ◆ It is Jesus' faithful response to God which puts people in right relationship with God, not a Christian's faith in Jesus.
- ◆ This is also why our mustard seed faith can be so powerful as it is really Christ's faith (Matthew 17:20).
- ◆ It also provides us with a right perspective on unanswered prayer. It is not because of a lack of faith on our part when our prayers are not answered the way we would like, as we are not living by our faith but that of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Therefore there has to be a higher spiritual reason why God does not always answer our prayers, as we would hope.

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- ◆ This is why we can join with the father of the boy brought to Jesus when he said, ***“I do believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).***
- ◆ It is not our imperfect faith we live by, but rather on Jesus’ perfect faithful response to the Father.
So we now see how all mankind has been implicated in not only the righteous life Christ has lived for us, and the sacrificial death He has died for us, but now we also see we live by His faithful response to the Father on our behalf.
- ◆ Now to God’s other comprehensive claims on us of being our Creator and Father, He can now add another title, that of Savior.
- ◆ And this is where faith and repentance go hand in hand because repentance is an acknowledgement of our defiant rejection of the claims our God has on us.
- ◆ So even though the “sinner’s prayer” is a very important part of repentance, it also involves an acknowledgement of our rejection of God’s claim on us and a commitment on our part to now live, to the best of our ability with the help of the Holy Spirit, to allow Christ to express His faith through us so that we now become the faithful, obedient and loyal children of our Maker, our Father and our Savior.
- ◆ It is recognition of these three claims on our lives that a believer falls down in worship and acknowledges God is “Lord of all.”
- ◆ There will come a time when all humanity will acknowledge this truth.
- ◆ ***Romans 14:11 It is written: “As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’”***
- ◆ We enter into this new life in Christ through the rite of baptism. This is the believer’s response and acknowledgement of the prior work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in bringing them back into a faithful relationship.
- ◆ Baptism, with its rich metaphors of death and resurrection, re-enacts for the believer the deep association we have with Christ as we have died with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him to live by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:27).

But we now need to go back to Galatians 2:16 as we need to understand another important change involving faith under the terms of the New Covenant.

- ◆ In an earlier session we learned because of Adam and Eve’s sin, God’s relationship with humanity would now have to be conducted purely on a legal basis, hence the introduction of the law.
- ◆ It is under this legal system that all fallen mankind stands accountable and under which we all are judged and condemned because it points out the vast difference between God’s holiness and mankind’s sinfulness.
- ◆ But now, because of Christ’s faithfulness, loyalty and obedience on humanity’s behalf, this legal arrangement has been abolished.
- ◆ This whole new basis in restoring a right relationship with God is revealed by Paul in Galatians 2:16.
- ◆ Remember the context here; there were those who wanted the Galatians to be initiated into Judaism by becoming circumcised, under the old legal arrangement.
- ◆ ***Galatians 2:16 (KJV) Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we (Jews) have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.***
- ◆ It is Jesus’ faith in God that puts people in right relationship with God, not the works of the law.
- ◆ Again, we have to view this from the perspective of Paul moving his churches from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.
- ◆ Under the Mosaic Covenant, righteousness was to be achieved through perfect obedience to the law.
- ◆ We saw how successful this was for the fallen human race.
- ◆ Paul’s argument here goes back to what we just talked about, the repentant believer acknowledging his sin, renouncing his rebellion and faithlessness in God and accepting the faith and righteousness offered by His risen Savior.
- ◆ So Paul’s question to the Galatians was, “Are you going to put your trust in perfect obedience to the law to establish a right relationship with God or in the perfect faith of Jesus Christ?”

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- ◆ And to prove to the Galatians the superiority of “faith” over the “works of the law,” Paul goes right back past Moses (representing the law) and uses the example of Abraham (representing faith).
- ◆ ***Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***
- ◆ Remember, faith is more than just belief; it's a living response of trust, obedience and loyalty to the Creator who has a claim upon one's existence and a willingness to respond to that claim.
- ◆ Trust is the fundamental issue at stake, not dutiful obedience.
- ◆ Abraham was accepted into a right relationship with God through faith as this was prior to his circumcision and prior to the introduction of the law through Moses.
- ◆ God declared Abraham righteous while he was still a Gentile. Abraham only became a Jew once he was circumcised (Circumcision is the initiating rite into Judaism).
- ◆ The lineage of faith therefore is not traced back through Moses and the law but through Abraham.
- ◆ This is why Abraham is called the father of the faithful both of the Jews and the Gentiles.
- ◆ This is Paul's argument in Romans 4.
- ◆ ***Romans 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.***
- ◆ God does not show favouritism, which is what He would be doing if righteousness were only available through the law as the law was given only to the Jews (Romans 2:11).
- ◆ The law was introduced as a temporary measure and a schoolmarm until the true source of life became available (Galatians 3:23-25).

What we see through the New Covenant is the expansion of God's gift of salvation to all people, Jew and Gentile alike based on faith.

- ◆ And as acceptance is now based on faith alone, all humans have the potential of being included.
- ◆ ***Romans 3:21-23 (KJV) But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.***
- ◆ And just to reinforce whose faith it is by which we are accepted and made right with God, it is ***“by faith of Jesus Christ”***
- ◆ But we need to understand the impact Christ's faithfulness has had in relation to God's relationship with humanity.
- ◆ No longer is it conducted on the legal basis of the law, but rather through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

So in relation to the church the faith of Jesus Christ is the defining characteristic that unites all Christians in the body of Christ.

- ◆ It was the law that united Israel, but the uniting characteristic of the New Covenant people that is available to both Jew and Gentile is the faith of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***Galatians 3:26-29 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***
- ◆ All humans have the potential to respond to God and be included on the basis of faith.
- ◆ When the Apostles Creed declares the church to be the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church we begin to see the one characteristic that binds every Christian together, the saving faith of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV) ...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***
- ◆ It is His faith that makes us acceptable to the Father, it is His righteousness which makes us holy, and as we will go on to show, it is Christ working through the Holy Spirit that makes the church catholic as it goes out to all peoples.
- ◆ Next time we look at the subject of “hope” in relation to the role of the church.