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# Faith as a Holy Embrace

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*“I am crucified with Christ.”*

*—Paul to the Churches of Galatia<sup>1</sup>*

## The Mystery of Faith

Because the fourth article of faith explicitly identifies faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the first principle of the gospel, it is easy to think of faith as an elementary concept and therefore as something simple to understand. But as every serious student of the gospel has discovered, that is far from the truth. Despite its importance, and despite the fact that we hear and read of faith so frequently, faith in the Lord is actually a complex and highly elusive subject. When we study it with care, we are often surprised by what the scriptures actually teach. Consider, for example, these two passages from the Book of Mormon:

- “And he [the brother of Jared, after seeing the finger of the Lord] had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (Ether 3:19).

- “Our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” (Jacob 4:6).

The difference between these passages is striking. The first contrasts faith with knowledge, and we learn from it that faith actually comes to an end once it is replaced by knowledge. Here, faith is only a stepping-stone to something better, to something more complete and certain.

The second passage, on the other hand, equates faith with power. Far from ever ceasing, we learn that such faith actually grows over time until it becomes “unshaken,” permitting the possessor to perform all manner of miracles. This sense of faith is underscored when we read in Hebrews that “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3)—indicating, as described in the *Lectures on Faith*, that God himself “framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power.”<sup>2</sup> Here we are told that God, who has all knowledge, also has faith and that he operates by it as a matter of course.

There is clearly a wide difference, then, in how these two passages use the word *faith*. The idea that God has both all knowledge *and* faith makes no sense at all when read in light of the first scriptural passage, but it makes perfect sense when read in light of the second.<sup>3</sup> This example alone suggests the complexity involved in the concept of faith: different scriptural passages use the word in different ways, and that makes faith a large topic. Despite our frequent reference to it, faith is actually one of the mysteries of God.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I want to examine one of the most profound ways the word *faith* is used in scripture. To do so, I will start by showing that *faith* and *belief* are essentially synonymous in the standard works. This is important to appreciate since an understanding of the relationship between these two terms is necessary in discussing faith-related teachings and episodes. I will then identify one familiar way that the concept of faith appears in scripture and contrast it with another: a concept of faith that, although exceedingly important and profound, may be the one that we as general members actually understand and articulate the least. Finally, I will suggest that appreciating these two uses of the term *faith* illuminates passages of scripture that otherwise would seem confusing; these include Paul’s teachings on faith and salvation and James’s apparent contradiction of Paul on the relationship between faith and works.

## The Relationship between *Faith* and *Belief*

In ordinary discourse, English speakers often use the words *faith* and *belief* in roughly synonymous ways. Both terms, for example, suggest a mental assent or an acceptance that something is true, despite the absence of rigorous proof. On such matters, at least in common usage, we “accept,” we “are persuaded,” we “are of the opinion”—but all of this in the absence of anything that could be called proof.

But there are also clear differences in how we use the words in English. For example, the term *faith* often implies a more actively spiritual meaning than does *belief*. The word *faith* also suggests both trust and hope. On these matters, the difference in connotation between these two words is wide and could be examined at length.<sup>5</sup> It is important to recognize this because our day-to-day experience with such linguistic differences may lead us to assume that *faith* and *belief* are also used differently in scripture. Indeed, I think that is what most readers would assume. Interestingly, that is not the case: in contrast to ordinary discourse, in scripture the terms *faith* and *belief* are effectively synonymous.

*Examples from the New Testament.* Note first how *faith* and *belief* are used in the New Testament. Consider these examples:

- The verb *pisteuō*, meaning to be persuaded or to place confidence in, is translated in the King James Version as *believe*. Indeed, this Greek term appears 248 times in the New Testament and is translated as some form of *believe* in 239 of them.
- However, *pisteuō* itself comes from the Greek noun *pistis*, which is predominantly translated in the King James Version as *faith*. This Greek term appears 244 times in the New Testament and is translated as *faith* in 239 of them. The noun *belief* occurs only once in the entire King James Bible, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, and is translated from the Greek *pistei*, a form of the noun *pistis*—which, as just mentioned, is primarily translated as *faith* throughout the King James Version.
- In contrast, the verb form *believe* occurs nearly 300 times in the New Testament, sometimes translated from the Greek *peithō* but most often from *pisteuō*. *Pistis* itself comes from the Greek verb *peithō*, which also means to be persuaded, to believe, or to have faith.

So an examination of the Greek original and of the English translation shows a tight connection between these terms. Notice, for instance, the interchangeability of *believe* and *faith* in these two brief passages from Paul:

- “But to him that worketh not, but *believeth* [*pisteuonti*] on him that justifieth the ungodly, his *faith* [*pistis*] is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5).
- “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the *faith* [*pisteōs*] of Jesus Christ, even we have *believed* [*episteusamen*] in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the *faith* [*pisteōs*] of Christ” (Galatians 2:16).

In these passages, Paul interchanges the terms seamlessly. Here is another example: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by *faith* [*pisteōs*] of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that *believe* [*pisteuontas*]” (Romans 3:21–22).

In the following passage, the Greek *pisteōs* appears twice, and the text alternates between *faith* and *believe*: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through *faith* [*pisteōs*] in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which *believeth* [*pisteōs*] in Jesus” (Romans 3:24–26). In these contexts, faith equals belief, and belief equals faith.

*Examples from Restoration scripture.* Scriptures of the Restoration present a similar picture. Note, for instance, how *believe* and *faith* are used in these passages to repeat a point.

- “And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their *faith*; wherefore they first *believed* in the Son of God” (Ether 12:18).
- “But, behold, *faith* cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that *believe*” (D&C 63:9).<sup>6</sup>

In this connection, observe how Jacob uses both *faith* and *believe* to identify the conditions required for salvation. “And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect *faith* in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and *believe* in his name, and be baptized in his name, and

endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:23–24). The two sentences are repetitive; Jacob simply uses *faith* in the first sentence and *believe* in the second to identify one of the requirements for salvation.

Owing to the first article of faith, we usually think of faith as the first requirement for salvation, and passages like this come to mind: “Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and remember that they shall have *faith* in me or they can in nowise be saved” (D&C 33:12). But just as often the term *believe* is used in exactly the same way.

- “Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God . . . and they that *believe* in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:9).
- “And if they will not repent and *believe* in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:24).<sup>7</sup>
- “In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall *believe* on my name” (Ether 3:14).

And note how *believing* is used to define *faith* in these passages:

- “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask *in faith*, *believing* that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it” (Enos 1:15).
- “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, *in faith believing* that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26).<sup>8</sup>

We find the same synonymy in other contexts. Mormon, for example, uses the terms interchangeably in his great discourse on faith in Moroni chapter 7. He says that it is “by *faith* that miracles are wrought; and it is by *faith* that angels appear and minister unto men,” but adds that if these things have ceased, “it is because of *unbelief*.” And in the next verse he repeats the point, this time saying that if these things have ceased, “then has *faith* ceased also” (Moroni 7:37–38).

The Lord himself uses the terms interchangeably. During one of his appearances to the Nephites following his resurrection, he remarks: “So great *faith* have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their *unbelief*” (3 Nephi 19:35). He does the same in his account of the brother of Jared in the book of Ether. He says the brother of Jared had been able to see the Lord’s finger “because of [his] *faith*,” and adds, “Never has man come before me with such exceeding *faith* as

thou hast” (Ether 3:9). In verse 15 the Lord repeats the observation, but this time says, “Never has man *believed* in me as thou hast.” Then in Ether 4:7 the Lord explains that the record of the brother of Jared will be withheld until the Gentiles “shall exercise *faith* in me.” But then in verse 14 the Lord says that this record is withheld “because of *unbelief*” and again in verse 15 that it is due to the “veil of *unbelief*.”

More examples could be given, but these should suffice to demonstrate that, at least in scripture, the terms *belief* and *faith* are effectively synonymous. This alone helps us clear up some of our uncertainty concerning the concept of faith: in the same contexts, *faith* and *belief* have the same meaning.

### Faith as Assent: Accepting the Truth Based on the Spirit

One very familiar scriptural meaning of *faith* is roughly synonymous with *mental assent*. It is a “persuasion of mind” that Christ is divine, the Son of God, or, more generally, that the gospel is true. Alma uses this general sense of the term in his famous discourse on planting the seed of faith: “But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27).

As he explains further about this experiment on his words and its spiritual consequences, Alma says, “Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge” (Alma 32:29). This is similar to his question in an earlier verse regarding the relationship between knowledge and faith: “Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it” (Alma 32:18). And he says a few verses later, “And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (v. 21).<sup>9</sup>

In this discourse, then, in addition to treating faith and belief synonymously, Alma specifically contrasts faith with knowledge. We get the idea of a continuum of epistemological certainty, stretching from nonbelief, to belief, to the replacement of belief with certain knowledge. The same sense is indicated by passages like these:

- “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

- “And he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (Ether 3:19).

Faith in the sense referred to in these passages leads to knowledge, and knowledge eventually replaces it.<sup>10</sup>

Although faith of this sort is not certain knowledge, it is of course far from belief without reason. This is because the mental assent of faith, in the scriptural sense, is always in response to the Spirit. Far from belief without reason, it is belief based on spiritual reasons. From a scriptural standpoint, then, this kind of faith is a state of spiritual responsiveness, and it is the very heart of learning the things of God. As Paul says, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).<sup>11</sup>

### **Faith as a Holy Embrace: Living Worshipfully toward the Lord**

Faith as a mental acceptance of Christ, based on the Spirit, is highly familiar. In contrast, a second sense of faith can be easy to overlook and takes a little more explanation.

*A surprising verse in the Book of Mormon.* The best way to introduce this sense of faith is to consider the experiences of the multitude gathered at the temple in 3 Nephi chapter 11. In sequence, here is what occurred:

- The multitude first heard the voice of the Father declaring the Son (vv. 3–7).
- They saw Christ descend out of heaven and, once among them, testify by his own voice, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (vv. 8–10).
- They went forward, one by one, feeling the nail prints in the Lord’s hands and feet (vv. 14–17).
- Finally, the multitude watched as Jesus gave instructions to Nephi and the other members of the twelve (vv. 21–41).

Then, in chapter 12, Jesus again addresses the multitude. In verse 1, he charges them to give heed to the twelve (the first beatitude, by the way) and then speaks of baptism and the Holy Ghost. He then says, “Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am.” I think this is one of the most surprising passages in the Book of Mormon. Notice what the Lord is saying: “Now that you have seen

me, heard me, and have actually felt the nail prints in my hands and feet—in other words, now that you know that I am—you will enjoy divine favor and approbation *if you believe in me*.<sup>12</sup>

If we think of faith or belief in the first sense that we have discussed above—in the sense of mental assent, or acceptance—the passage is startling. How can we talk of believing *after* we already know?

We encounter the same situation in 3 Nephi chapter 19 in the account of Jesus praying to the Father. The twelve disciples are praying at this time to Jesus himself (who is present), “calling him their Lord and their God” (v. 18). It is in this context that Jesus then says to the Father, “Thou seest that *they believe in me*” (v. 22).

Again, this is surprising. Consider that these are the same twelve who had already

- witnessed the Lord descend gradually from heaven in glory,
- felt the prints of the nails in his hand and feet,<sup>13</sup>
- been taught by the Lord face-to-face,<sup>14</sup>
- observed the Lord heal many who were “afflicted in any manner” (3 Nephi 17:7–10),
- witnessed angels descend from heaven and minister unto the little children who were present (3 Nephi 17:23–25),
- been baptized and “encircled about as if it were by fire” (3 Nephi 19:14),
- been ministered to by angels after their baptism (3 Nephi 19:14), and
- been ministered to by Jesus himself, who appeared to them and “came and stood in the midst” (3 Nephi 19:15).

It was *after* all of these events that Jesus commanded the twelve to pray, and it was at this time that Jesus observed to the Father, “thou seest that they *believe in me*” (3 Nephi 19:22).

Again, we have the same surprise. Surely if we could describe anyone as possessing a perfect knowledge of the Lord, it would be these people. Yet the Lord refers to their condition as one of belief and not of knowledge at all. So this is clearly different from the first sense of faith.

*Living worshipfully.* So what does *faith* or *belief* mean in these contexts? If it is not a nascent but growing assent to the reality and divinity of the Lord, what then is it?

The heart of the answer is given by Nephi: “And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, . . . wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul” (2 Nephi 25:29). Here Nephi tells us not only to believe in Christ; he tells us what it *means* to believe in Christ: it is to bow down before him and to worship him with all of our might, mind, and strength and “our whole souls.” Thus to believe in Christ—to have faith in him—is to *worship* him.<sup>15</sup>

This makes sense of the incidents we have just seen in 3 Nephi. In each of these cases we observe people who are not merely assenting to the reality of Christ; we observe people who are expending all the energy of their souls in *revering, venerating, and adoring* the Lord. In the most profound sense imaginable, they are abandoning themselves and embracing him. It is a sacred and moving act of utter devotion and worship. Precisely the same relationship occurs in 3 Nephi chapter 17. There we are told that the multitude bowed at the feet of the Lord “and did worship him” (v. 10). This followed the Lord’s healing of all who were sick among them and throughout his ineffable prayer to the Father. It was in response to this attitude of the multitude that the Lord said to them, “Blessed are ye because of your *faith*” (v. 20). Again, the concept of faith is used not to suggest anything resembling mere mental acceptance of the Lord, but instead—and explicitly—to capture a deep and holy attitude of worship toward him.

Such worship is not a one-time act, of course. In a profound revelation on the topic, the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that the way we worship the Lord is specifically by *living* like him: to worship him is to follow him—to abandon our own path and to adopt his. It is, in short, to *live* worshipfully—in daily devotion and emulation of him.<sup>16</sup>

*Christō synestaurōmai* (“I am crucified with Christ”). I believe that this sense of worship is perfectly captured in Paul’s autobiographical description, “I am crucified with Christ.” To live worshipfully toward the Lord is to give ourselves to him. It is to surrender worldly, selfish concerns and to embrace his. Indeed, it is to abandon *ourselves*. We give up “our old man” (Romans 6:6) and “put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9). In the Lord’s own words, we offer unto him “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20),<sup>17</sup> and in the words of one Book of Mormon figure, we “*offer [our] whole souls* as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26). It is in this spirit that Paul speaks of the Lord as the one “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and

do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). He says further that “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Coming unto Christ means *living* unto Christ.

I know of no better statement on this topic than the following from a modern Apostle. After imploring us to be “changed for Christ,” President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. . . . Men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ. . . . They have Christ on their minds, as they look unto Him in every thought. They have Christ in their hearts as their affections are placed on Him forever. . . . In Book of Mormon language, they “feast upon the words of Christ,” “talk of Christ,” “rejoice in Christ,” “are made alive in Christ,” and “glory in [their] Jesus.” In short, they lose themselves in the Lord, and find eternal life.<sup>18</sup>

In the same spirit, another modern Apostle advised that we “fall in love with the Lord.” He reported of his own desires that “I would like to fall in love with Christ, and live and believe and think and do, insofar as possible, as he did.”<sup>19</sup>

With this in mind, note the words of the angel to Nephi that it is those with faith in the Lamb whose garments “are made white in his blood” (1 Nephi 12:10–11): certainly it is not mere mental acceptance that qualifies one for such sanctification. Note, too, Mormon’s quotation from the Lord: “Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved” (Moroni 7:34). This sequence (repentance–baptism–faith) does not seem accidental—and yet it makes no sense if, for example, the Lord is speaking here of faith as mental assent. The sequence makes perfect sense, on the other hand, if he is speaking of faith as ongoing devotion and worship. Alma speaks in the same way: “Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, *that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God*, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness” (Alma 7:14). Alma speaks here of a faith that comes after repentance; indeed, he says that we are baptized unto repentance *so that* we can have this kind of faith. This seems to me an example of the faith of ongoing worship, the faith of daily embrace. In Luther’s felicitous phrase, it is “the yes of the heart” as we respond to the Lord with devotion and humility.<sup>20</sup>

This worshipful response to the Lord is captured perfectly in Luke's account of the woman ("a sinner," we are told) who, in the home of Simon the Pharisee, bathed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with oil. In response to Simon's protest and challenge at the display of one so unworthy, Jesus said:

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. (Luke 7:44-47)

At this point, the Lord identifies the love and devotion this woman has shown him as *faith*. "Thy sins are forgiven," he says to her. "Thy *faith* hath saved thee" (vv. 48, 50).

Worshipping in the way identified and recorded by Nephi, Mormon, Alma, Luke, and others is what it means to have faith in the second sense. It is a yielding, surrendering, worshipful devotion to the Lord.

## Understanding Paul

When reading the scriptures, it helps immeasurably to have these different meanings of faith in mind. One of the most significant ways it helps is in our understanding of Paul, for Paul focuses almost exclusively on the second type of faith, and if we do not understand this, we will simply not understand *him*. Notice, for example, Paul's statement to the Galatians which we glanced at earlier: "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, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

This passage, I think, is Paul's seminal statement on faith. I believe it is his clearest, deepest declaration of what it means to come unto Christ and to have faith in him. And notice that it is a faith that *begins* with our willing submission to and worship of the Lord—our "crucifixion with Christ," as he puts it. Knowing that this is what Paul means by *faith* is crucial to understanding Paul himself and illuminates everything else he utters on practically every subject. I will consider just two: Paul's concept of the relationship between

faith and salvation, and Paul's and James's approaches to the relationship between faith and works.

### Paul's Concept of Salvation by Faith

Paul explains in Ephesians that “by grace are ye saved through *faith* [*pisteōs*]; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Now, understanding Paul's general conception of faith as described in Galatians, we do not think for a moment that he means by this statement that salvation comes by mentally assenting to Christ. We know he is speaking instead of faith as a deep and wholehearted embrace of the Lord and explaining that it is through *this* faith that we are saved. We cannot be saved by works—the works of the Mosaic law (or any other works, for that matter)—that are separate from this embrace. And even then, it is not the works that save us but the embrace itself—of which the works are but a manifestation.

That is why we are not surprised when Paul goes on to speak explicitly of this: “For we are *his* workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus* unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). In our worshipful embrace of the Lord, we become the workmanship of God's hands, and whatever goodness is found in us is born of this devotion. Moreover, our righteousness *consists* in this act of worship. Salvation, Paul is telling us, is based not on works of the law but on the act of faith in which we embrace the Lord and give ourselves to him. The works we perform in consequence of this devotion are the works of *worship*; that is *why* they are righteous.<sup>21</sup> As he explains elsewhere, goodness and righteousness are “the *fruit* of the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:9), which, of course, is the same relationship that Mormon identifies when he explains that the source of any apparently good act determines whether it is actually good or not.<sup>22</sup>

Consider also Paul's definition to the Romans of “the word of faith” and its relationship to salvation: “If thou shalt *confess* [*homologēsēs*] with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt *believe* [*pisteusēs*] in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Again, understanding Paul's conception of faith, we know he is not talking here of mere mental assent and of mere verbal expression. We know he is speaking instead of belief as worship of the Lord. That is why we are not surprised when he goes on to say, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever

believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 10:8–11). The idea here is simply that faith entails both righteousness *and* outward expression. By definition, one engaged in Paul’s kind of faith is living worshipfully—and obviously, no one engaged in this kind of faith will either fail to live righteously (such faith consists in worshipful living, after all) or be ashamed to confess Christ to others, even under threat of persecution.<sup>23</sup> Faith in this passage has little to do with a mental assent to the Lord and everything to do with a devoted worship of him.

The same deep meaning of faith is found in this passage: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the *faith* [*pisteōs*] of Jesus Christ, even we have *believed* [*episteusamen*] in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the *faith* [*pisteōs*] of Christ” (Galatians 2:16). Here Paul is simply saying that salvation can be found not in the works of the law of Moses but only in living worshipfully toward the Lord—and that is why the Saints live in this way. Again, it is not faith of the first sort Paul is referring to, but faith of the second.

*Paul’s concept of righteousness.* All of this is related to Paul’s concept of righteousness. He says in Romans 10:3, “For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” Paul tells us what he means by “the righteousness of God” earlier in Romans (Romans 4:11–13), where he speaks of the “righteousness of faith.” He explains that this is the righteousness which Abraham possessed and which he obviously possessed without the works of the law—since Abraham lived centuries prior to Moses and thus to the institution of the Mosaic system. Abraham’s righteousness consisted instead in his willing submission to the Lord: that is the righteousness of faith, not of the law, and it is the righteousness of God. So Paul’s worry in Romans 10 is that the Jews were trying to establish their own righteousness through living the law of Moses—they “trusted *in themselves* that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9)—whereas they should have been submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, which is simply the righteousness of faith: embracing Christ and living worshipfully toward him.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, when Paul speaks of the righteousness of faith, he is not saying that we are to mentally assent to Christ and then be righteous *in addition*; he is saying that righteousness *is* the reality and the expression of this worshipful embrace of Christ and of all that it entails: keeping the commandments, loving and serving others, and the like. This is why Paul is able to say of some who

profess to know God that they actually deny him in their works (Titus 1:16). The state of knowing God is the state not of professing a certain way but of living a certain way. That is the righteousness of faith, and our goodness in this state is an expression of this state of faith and of nothing else. This is the consistent theme in Paul's writings.

For Paul, then, the phrase "saved by faith" means "saved by being in a state of devotion to Christ." Those who are in this condition are in a state of righteousness *and* in a state of salvation. There is no difference between them. That is why Paul can speak so confidently of "us which are saved" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who possess such faith—because it is so profound in all the dimensions of discipleship that it assumes—are indeed in a condition of salvation. We can leave this condition, of course, and we do so by leaving this state of faith. But as long as we are in one, we are in the other.

*Salvation-by-faith in Restoration scripture.* Paul is not alone, of course, in teaching that salvation comes through this dimension of faith. Consider Mormon's statement about faith and salvation in his great discourse in Moroni chapter 7: "And after that he [Christ] came men also were saved by *faith* in his name; and by *faith*, they become the sons of God" (Moroni 7:26). Note these similar passages:

- "Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God . . . and they that believe in him shall be saved" (2 Nephi 2:9).
- "And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 9:23).
- "And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God" (D&C 20:29).
- "In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters" (Ether 3:14).
- "And as many as believed in the Son, and repented of their sins, should be saved; and as many as believed not and repented not, should be damned" (Moses 5:15).<sup>25</sup>

All of these passages say what Paul says and mean what Paul means. They presuppose a certain conception of faith and then say that salvation is a

function of that faith. That is why, again, Paul is able to speak of “us which are saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18). To be in this state of faith is to be in the condition of salvation, and we remain in this condition of salvation as long as we remain in this state of faith.<sup>26</sup>

In both ancient and modern times, then, when the scriptures speak of the faith that is required for eternal life, this is the faith that is meant. Indeed, this kind of faith is equivalent to what the Lord himself identified as the condition for salvation—to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself” (Luke 10:27). The second type of faith—faith as a holy embrace—is simply a shorthand way to refer to this condition of soul.

### **Paul and James on Faith and Works**

Understanding this sense of faith helps us understand Paul’s and James’s teachings on the relationship between faith and works—a matter that has long been a source of worry to theologians. It has been frequently noted that James’s insistence that “faith without works is dead” seems to contradict Paul’s apparent dismissal of works and his emphasis on faith alone. Indeed, Roland Bainton—biographer of Martin Luther—reports Luther as saying that he “would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul.”<sup>27</sup>

Luther himself, of course, read the entire New Testament through Pauline eyes. His exclamation “S. Paulus aber ist ein man!” (“St. Paul is the man!”) is priceless and descriptive.<sup>28</sup> This commitment to Paul decisively influenced Luther’s view not only of all other biblical books but also of what constitutes apostolic teaching in the first place—regardless of who the author might be.<sup>29</sup> In particular, while Luther had some praise for the book of James, he regarded it as thoroughly nonapostolic in character, arguing that it is “flatly against Paul and all the rest of Scripture,” and, at least in his earlier writings, that James actually “mangles the Scriptures.”<sup>30</sup>

But Luther was not without his own efforts to reconcile faith and works, sounding at times very much like James. “Both of these articles—that of faith as well as that of works—must be diligently taught and urged, but in such a way that each remains within its bounds. Otherwise, if men teach only works, as they do in the papacy, faith is lost; if they teach only faith, carnal men promptly dream that works are not necessary.”<sup>31</sup> In another place, he observes that faith “is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss

with faith,”<sup>32</sup> and in still another that “if faith is of the right sort, it cannot be without good works.”<sup>33</sup>

So Luther, like others, wrestled with the matter, wondering exactly how to describe the relationship between faith and works and how to reconcile the words of James with the words of Paul. But it seems to me that we are helped immeasurably in this task—and in large part through Restoration scripture—simply by recognizing that faith itself does not appear as a single concept in the standard works; that is, the word *faith* is used in different ways at different times by different scriptural authors. Noting this, we can easily see the primary distinction between Paul and James: they are simply talking about different kinds of faith.

James, for his part, talks about faith specifically in terms of mental assent. He says, for instance, that “thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Here James equates mortals’ believing with devils’ believing—but obviously the only belief that devils can possibly claim is the mental *recognition* of God. Certainly it cannot imply anything that could be called worship. So, at most, James is speaking of the first type of faith, and, without righteousness, such faith obviously *is* dead, just as he emphatically declares it to be.<sup>34</sup>

But Paul, as we have seen, is writing in his letters about a different dimension of faith altogether. The kind of faith he has in mind—faith as worship—just as obviously entails works of righteousness—works that spring from a holy embrace of the Lord and that in their very nature exclaim a resounding *yes* to him. It is a *living* faith, and it is not hard to describe how one lives who feels this kind of devotion. For this reason, Paul does not need to emphasize works in the same way that James does, because he is not talking about the same kind of faith that James is. Nor is he talking to the same audience. James writes “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1), whose issues he can know and address only generally. On the other hand, Paul not only writes to specific audiences but does so against the background of his intimate acquaintance with Jewish life and with Jewish converts’ difficulty in converting to Christianity—a difficulty born of their long commitment, both individually and culturally, to the observances of the Mosaic law. Aware of the confusions they harbored about the role of such works, Paul’s burden is to disabuse any and all of whatever misconception they might hold of this sort. He is eager that no one repeat the Jews’ mistakes about what constitutes righteousness and what qualifies one for salvation. In

preaching faith, Paul wants his readers to understand deeply and emphatically that salvation is in Christ alone and that the only genuine righteousness is the righteousness of devotion to him and all that flows from it. In short, the faith Paul has in mind is not dissociable from righteousness; it actually encompasses and defines what righteousness means.<sup>35</sup>

The doctrinal situation with Paul and James, then, is like the situation in which we ask what color results when all of the colors are present. If we consider this question in terms of light, we know the answer is white. But if we consider the same question in terms of an artist's oil paints, the answer is not white at all, but black. So the two answers that result are not only different but opposite, and yet both are thoroughly correct. The only reason for the distinction between them lies in the framework in which the question itself is posed. Do we assume paint or light to be the subject matter of the query?

So it is with Paul and James on the matter of faith and works. The two are not in conflict; they simply take the framework of the question in different ways. James assumes one kind of faith as the subject matter of the query, Paul another. What James says is true of the type of faith he has in mind, and what Paul says is true of the type of faith he has in mind. The difference between them is a difference not in doctrine but in subject matter. It is not surprising that in addressing dissimilar subjects, they say dissimilar things.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

When we carefully examine the concept of faith, one discovery we make is the interchangeability of the terms *faith* and *belief* in the scriptural canon: episodes and teachings about belief are inherently episodes and teachings about faith. In scripture, they are the same.

Another discovery we make is that the standard works actually use the terms in different ways in different passages. We have looked at two of these usages (though there are others): (1) faith as mental assent—as accepting the truth based on the Spirit, and (2) faith as a holy embrace of the Lord—as living *worshipfully* toward him.

This second sense of faith includes every dimension of loving devotion and discipleship toward the Lord. It is the sense of faith captured in various important passages of Restoration scripture, and it is the sense of faith that Paul emphasizes in his letters. Appreciating this helps illuminate Paul's teachings on important topics, including his view of the relationship between faith and salvation and of the relationship between faith and works. To fail

to understand this sense of faith is to fail to understand Paul: for him, faith is rooted in the adoring and willing submission of our will—indeed, of ourselves—to the Lord, and in nothing else. To have the faith of Paul is thus to utter the words of Paul: *Christō synestaurōmai*. This is the essence of faith in the second sense; it is faith as a holy embrace. **RE**

## Notes

1. Galatians 2:20. Throughout, wherever emphasis appears in scriptural quotations, the emphasis is mine.

2. See Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2000), 3.

3. Other than illustrating the wide meaning of the word *faith*, however, I will not address this sense of the word, since God's faith is obviously different from our own. Whereas our faith is always dependent by nature—we have faith *in* Christ, for example—God's faith is obviously not dependent on another being in this way. As *Lectures on Faith* notes, because God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and because he possesses “all fullness,” the principle of faith exists in him independently. *Lectures on Faith*, 9, 21. My interest here is in the ways that faith operates for mortals—that is, dependently, not independently, as it operates for God.

4. I believe the scriptures speak of faith in four distinct senses; in this essay I am restricting my discussion to just two of them.

5. On spiritual implications, note that if we begin a sentence with “I have faith,” listeners will typically anticipate a spiritual ending, while if we begin a sentence with “I believe,” listeners will typically expect nothing that wouldn't follow from “I think” (for example, “it will rain,” “the Celtics will win,” etc.). On hope and trust, note that it would sound unusual to say “I have faith that the universe is expanding” (which implies a degree of both hope and trust that this is true), while it would not sound unusual to say “I believe that the universe is expanding” (which does not imply any degree of either hope or trust). Much more, of course, could be said. A virtually inexhaustible source for studying the connotations and typical usages of English words is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). This corpus contains more than four hundred million words of text drawn from spoken English, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. The corpus can be accessed online at <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>. One way to examine the relationship between two words is to examine their respective semantic ranges (i.e., the other words with which each is typically associated across a variety of contexts). To the extent these associated words are the same, the semantic ranges of the two words are similar, and vice versa. Such a study helps us appreciate the nuances in usage of words that, though related, are also different.

6. An identical relationship is found in 3 Nephi 26:9. Note also the chiasm structure of D&C 63:9, which further supports the synonymy of *faith* and *belief*.

7. Ether 3:14 and Moses 5:15 use *believe* in this way, too.

8. Similar expressions are found in D&C 11:14; 14:8; and 18:8.

9. Alma continues the contrast between faith and what he calls “perfect knowledge” in verses 26, 29, and 34. He uses this expression to suggest that such knowledge is complete or comprehensive (as opposed to knowledge about a single matter—see Alma 32:26, 29, 34). Moroni also uses the expression, and in a way that is closely (though not in a simple way)

related to the experience of actually seeing the Lord (see Ether 3:19–20). To avoid both connotations, I will speak simply of this far end of the continuum as *certain knowledge*—a knowledge that is absolutely sure through the Spirit but that implies neither comprehensiveness nor visionary experience.

10. The same sense is at work in President Boyd K. Packer’s report that “He lives now, directing personally the operations of His Church upon the earth and manifesting Himself personally to His servants, that belief might be swallowed up in knowledge.” See Boyd K. Packer, *Church News*, November 28, 2009, 10 (first presented as “The Light of Thy Childhood Again,” Brigham Young University devotional address, December 19, 1962).

11. This is why President Packer was able to say, “If all you know is what you read or what you can hear, you will not know very much.” See Boyd K. Packer, “The Twenty-Mark Note” (Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional address, March 12, 2002).

12. I take use of the term *blessed* here to suggest something like “divinely approved.” In the New Testament version of the Sermon on the Mount, where the word *blessed* also occurs repeatedly, the term is translated from the Greek *makarioi*. This term, in all its forms, appears forty-nine times in the New Testament and is translated forty-four times as *blessed* and five times as *happy* (John 13:17; Acts 26:2; Romans 14:22; and 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14). In the usual case, as here in the Beatitudes, the implication is that persons identified as “blessed” are not merely happy but that they are fortunate and actually enjoy divine approval or favor. In this respect, their happiness is a kind of *divine* felicity—a happiness born of union and favor with God. Twice Paul also uses the term to describe Deity, referring to “the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11) and “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). Here the term clearly suggests someone holy, or someone worthy of adoration or worship, and thus implies far more than merely being happy. Indeed, in every case where *makarioi* is translated as *happy* in the New Testament, I think *blessed* actually captures the meaning more fully.

13. We know this because 3 Nephi 12:1 tells us that the twelve disciples were chosen from among the multitude.

14. Some of this teaching was to them personally (see 3 Nephi 13:25–34).

15. Thus John reports of the man who was blind from birth and who was given sight by the Lord—and who then heard Christ testify of himself as the Son of God: “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him” (John 9:38).

16. This occurs in section 93 where the Lord gives us John’s record of how Jesus advanced from “grace to grace” in receiving the “fulness of the glory of the Father” (vv. 13, 16). He tells us that Jesus did not receive a fulness of the Father “at the first” but that he received “grace for grace” (v. 12), suggesting that Christ received endowments of grace from the Father as he himself served with perfect devotion and love and gave “grace” to others. John then tells us that Christ grew by degrees—that he continued from “grace to grace” until he finally “received a fulness of the glory of the Father” (vv. 13, 16); he explains that Christ then “received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him” (v. 17). At this point, the Lord tells us why he has given us this record. It is “that ye may understand and know *how to worship* . . . that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness” just as Jesus himself had. He then says, “For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father.” He adds, “Therefore, I say unto you, you [too] shall receive grace for grace” (vv. 19–20). In short, just as Christ did, we are to keep the commandments, extend “grace” or righteous service to others, and grow by degrees until we are

finally endowed with the fullness of the Father through Christ. We thus worship Christ by following the *path* of Christ. Worship, as defined here, is the worship of daily devotion and emulation. It is identical to Nephi's imploring his readers to keep the commandments and to endure to the end in their "steadfastness in Christ," that is, in "following the example of the Son of the living God" (2 Nephi 31:10–20).

17. This is perhaps the most common way of putting the matter. See, for example, Psalms 34:18; 51:17; 2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20; 12:19; Ether 4:15; Moroni 6:2.

18. Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," *Ensign*, November 1985, 6–7.

19. Bruce R. McConkie, in Mark L. McConkie, ed., *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 43.

20. Martin Luther, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, vol. 1 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1959), 466.

21. An additional dimension of this verse is its emphasis on salvation as a gift (*dōron*), based on God's grace (*charis*). Paul says that we are saved by grace *through* faith. The idea is that, while possession of this kind of faith is the condition the Lord has established for us to qualify for salvation, even this by itself could not save us: we still require God's grace. John Gee very helpfully identifies the wide range of meanings of the word *grace* dating from ancient times. Indeed, its earliest meaning was "good works," and in the Gospels and in the Book of Mormon, such grace always comes as a result of individuals' actions. See John Gee, "The Grace of Christ," *FARMS Review* 22, no. 1 (2010): 247–59. Despite this, however, the grace we receive is still a *gift*—an offering from the Lord we could not earn, even through the kind of faith Paul has in mind. Here is why: the Lord has established the conditions for our salvation (i.e., our devoted embrace of him), but nothing other than his own love and devotion obligated him to make salvation possible for us to begin with. That is why salvation is a pure gift: it is granted on conditions that the Lord has identified and that we have to satisfy, but they are conditions that he didn't have to establish for us in the first place.

22. See Moroni 7:6–11. Martin Luther expresses a similar sentiment: "It is not right to judge a man merely by the kind of works he does; one should judge him on the basis of why he does them . . . on the spring and fountain whence they flow." Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1511.

23. The same type of entailment is found in Samuel the Lamanite's teaching that "if ye believe on his [Christ's] name ye will repent of all your sins" (Helaman 14:13). Belief of this sort entails repentance; if we don't repent, then, by definition, we simply don't believe in the way that Samuel means.

24. Precisely the same sentiment is found in this passage: "And be found in him [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

25. See Moroni 7:38 and D&C 20:25 and 33:12 for similar statement about faith and salvation. Two of the passages quoted in the text identify faith as a necessary condition for salvation (2 Nephi 9:23 and D&C 20:29), two of them identify faith as a sufficient condition for salvation (2 Nephi 2:9 and Ether 3:14), and the last identifies faith as both a necessary *and* a sufficient condition for salvation (Moses 5:15). This wide range of passages connecting salvation to faith indicates that faith-as-embrace is meant. That is the only meaning of faith that is both a necessary *and* a sufficient condition for salvation, as both the Pauline and Restoration passages show.

26. We are told in the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, that the key to our salvation is our endurance to the end "in *faith on his name*" (D&C 20:29).

27. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 331, <http://www.archive.org/stream/hereistandalife0005163mbp#page/n335/mode/2up>.

28. The original German is found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar, Tischreden 3, no. 3862, 666; this English translation is that found in *What Luther Says*, vol. 2, 1027.

29. He says, for example, that “whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic [note: in editions prior to 1530 Luther did not include the word ‘yet’], even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.” Martin Luther, in *Luther’s Works, Volume 35: Word and Sacrament, I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachman (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1960), 396. *Luther’s Works* is the fifty-five-volume American edition of Martin Luther’s writings, based in large part on the mammoth Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke*), which produces Luther in German and Latin.

30. Luther, in *Luther’s Works*, 396, 397 (note 54). After 1530, Luther no longer included this assertion about “mangling,” but he continued in the view that (1) the book was not apostolic in character (nor apostolic in fact, for that matter, holding as he did time-honored reservations about the authenticity of the book), (2) that it contradicted Paul, and (3) that it could not be included among the chief books of the Bible.

31. Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1515.

32. Cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 331, <http://www.archive.org/stream/hereistandalife0005163mbp#page/n335/mode/2up>.

33. Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1517.

34. In the case of devils, faith of the first type is obviously based on their recollection of God from the pre-earth existence rather than—as with mortals—on any spiritual impressions they receive.

35. A secondary difference between Paul and James is that Paul focuses principally on the works of the Mosaic law (often using circumcision as a point of reference for the whole system of observances), while James is more concerned with works of goodness broadly considered.

36. It’s a pity that Luther never explicitly identified this distinction in types of faith, though he certainly had something like it in mind from time to time. One example is this observation from him: “The story is told of a doctor of theology who once met a collier [a carrier or seller of coal] on the bridge at Prague and, moved to compassion by the fact that the fellow was a poor layman, asked: My good man, what do you believe? The collier answered: I believe what the church believes. — The doctor: But what does the church believe? — The collier: The church believes what I believe. — Later, when the doctor was about to die, the devil so severely troubled him concerning his faith that he did not know which way to turn and found no rest until he said: I believe what the collier believes. — A similar story is told of the great Thomas Aquinas. It is said that as his end came on, he could not hold his own against the devil until he said: I believe what stands recorded in this Book. He was holding the Bible in his arms. But God grant us very little of that sort of faith; for if they had no other faith than this, both the doctor and the collier believed themselves into the abyss of hell.” Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 469. Luther’s conclusion is influenced by mistaken doctrines he holds—doctrines that, naturally, are uninformed by the Restoration—but he does grant the possibility of something called faith that is not the same as the dynamic spiritual devotion *he* has in mind when speaking of faith.