

*Sword
of the
Spirit*

SERIES



walking in the supernatural

Living Faith

Colin Dye

Living Faith

The *Sword of the Spirit* series:

- 1 *Effective Prayer*
- 2 *Knowing the Spirit*
- 3 *The Rule of God*
- 4 *Living Faith*
- 5 *Glory in the Church*
- 6 *Ministry in the Spirit*
- 7 *Knowing the Father*
- 8 *Reaching the Lost*
- 9 *Listening to God*
- 10 *Knowing the Son*
- 11 *Salvation by Grace*
- 12 *Worship in Spirit and Truth*

www.swordofthespirit.co.uk

Copyright © 2007, 1997 by Colin Dye
Second edition

Kensington Temple
KT Summit House
100 Hanger Lane
London, W5 1EZ

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written consent of the author.

Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from the New King James Version. Thomas Nelson Inc. 1991.

Sword of the Spirit

Living Faith



Colin Dye

Contents

Introduction	7
1 What is faith?	11
2 Biblical faith	27
3 The operation of faith	39
4 The foundation of faith	53
5 Listening faith	67
6 Seed-faith	79
7 Confessing faith	93
8 Acting faith	101
9 The assurance of faith	111
10 Developing living faith	121

Introduction

This book is called *Living Faith* in order to bring out two essential truths about the nature of faith and how we can walk in it. First, living faith is *genuine* faith. It is real, not 'make believe' or fictional faith. Second, it is *practical* faith, that is, it is productive and fruitful; it results in actions. We are saved by faith, by believing and trusting in Christ alone for our salvation. But God never intended that our faith in Christ should be passive. His desire for us is that we should put our faith into practice and achieve great things for him in our lives through living faith. He has left a space for our names to be entered into faith's roll of honour – the list of people who, like those recorded in Hebrews chapter 11, achieved great exploits by faith.

Everybody knows that Christianity is commonly described as 'the Christian faith', but most people think that this refers to the particular beliefs of Christianity. And many men and women consider committed Christians to be 'believers' because of the beliefs that they hold.

This common idea about 'faith' has led many people to think of Christianity as essentially cerebral. Ideas are deemed to be supremely important, so we quiz people about what they believe, and often withhold friendship and fellowship on the basis of human opinions.

But does the Bible really restrict faith to cerebral understanding? Does the roll of faith in Hebrews 11 commend the Old Testament heroes because of their ideas, or because of their actions, or perhaps both? We need to discover the answer and then work through the implications for our individual and corporate Christian living.

Living Faith

In the past, there have been disagreements within the Church over the relative importance of 'faith' and 'works'. Some Bible teachers have defended faith and denigrated works, while others have insisted that 'faith without works is dead'. We need to check whether the scriptural idea of faith is bigger than either group realised.

More recently, there has arisen a new 'faith' emphasis within the Church. And some have started to insist that faith means we should be able to obtain any and every biblical promise almost immediately. As a result, several different techniques are now taught which are supposed to help us receive everything by faith without any delays.

We all know that we should have faith, and most of us will have had some struggle with doubts and sincere questions. Many believers want to have 'more faith' or 'better faith', but are not sure how to develop it – and several people will wonder quite what 'living faith' can be.

This is a study for believers who are willing to set aside their own ideas about faith, and to study God's Word to discover God's revelation. We need to find out what he means by faith and belief, what we should believe, and – most importantly, how we can develop a life of faith.

There is additional material available to facilitate your learning, which can be found in the respective *Sword of the Spirit Student's Handbook* and on the website www.swordofthespirit.co.uk. In the handbook there is a complimentary study guide for each chapter, along with *Discussion questions* and *Quick quizzes*. After signing up for this module on the website, you will be able to access more quizzes and exams. There is also a *Webtool* (the book text with embedded links to Bible references), and comprehensive audio and video teaching. Using these additional materials will help you test, retain and apply the knowledge you have learnt in this book.

You will also be able to use the *Student's Handbook* with small groups. You may wish to prayerfully select those parts that you think are most relevant for your group. This would

Introduction

mean that at some meetings you might use all the material whilst at others you might use only a small part. Please use your common sense and spiritual insight. Please feel free to photocopy these pages and distribute them to any group you are leading.

By the time you finish this volume, it is my prayer that you will know what you have already received, the assurance which you have been given, and how you can develop your living faith from a tiny seed into something like a strong and very fruitful plant.

Colin Dye

Living Faith

Part One

What is faith?

It is impossible to read the New Testament without noticing that the idea of 'faith', or 'belief', seems to be absolutely central. In fact, it is so fundamental that Christianity has become known as 'the Christian faith', and Christ's followers are usually called 'believers'.

This first impression is confirmed when we study the New Testament. We find, for example, that the Greek noun *pistis*, 'faith', and the Greek verb *pisteuo*, 'to believe', each occurs more than 240 times; and that the Greek adjective *pistos*, 'faithful' or 'believing', appears nearly 70 times. This basic New Testament word must be the starting point for our study of living faith.

Pistis

Pistis, 'faith', means 'firm persuasion'. It refers to a conviction which is based upon hearing, and is closely related to *peitho*, which means 'to persuade'. Used literally, *pistis* means that we can say we have 'faith' only when we have been firmly persuaded by something we have heard.

In the New Testament, *pistis* is always used about:

1. God and Christ's own faith
2. Our faith in God or Christ
3. Spiritual matters.

Pistis is used to refer to these matters in several different ways. It describes, for example:

- ◆ *Faithfulness* – Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 3:23; Philippians 1:25; 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3 & 3:2

Living Faith

- ◆ *Trustworthiness* – Matthew 23:23; Romans 3:3; Galatians 5:22 & Titus 2:10
- ◆ *What is believed, the content of faith* – Acts 6:7; 14:22; Galatians 1:23; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; Jude 1:3 & 20
- ◆ *A ground for faith, an assurance* – Acts 17:31
- ◆ *A pledge given in faith* – 1 Timothy 5:12.

Pisteuo

The Greek verb *pisteuo* is normally translated into English as 'to believe', which sometimes suggests that 'faith' and 'believing' are distinct and different. But *pistis* and *pisteuo* – 'faith' and 'to believe' – are different grammatical forms of the same Greek word. It is unfortunate that there is no verbal form of the noun 'faith' in English, but 'I believe' is exactly the same as 'I faith' or 'I have faith'.

Pisteuo literally means 'to be persuaded of' or 'to place confidence in'. It is vital we grasp that *pisteuo* implies notional confidence *and* relational confidence; it involves reliance and credence; quite simply, *pisteuo* is something 'we do' *as well as* something 'we think'.

This is particularly clear in John's Gospel, which stresses the activity of 'believing' by never using *pistis* but using *pisteuo* almost one hundred times. Jesus' first use of the word, in John 1:50, describes Nathanael's 'believing'. This is a classic example of living faith in action.

We see that Nathaniel:

- ◆ Heard what Philip said about Jesus – 1:45
- ◆ Came to Jesus – 1:46–47
- ◆ Heard what Jesus said – 1:47–48
- ◆ Confessed Jesus' deity and rule – 1:49
- ◆ Began to follow Jesus as a disciple – 21:2.

What is faith?

Pistos

Used actively, *pistos* means 'believing' or 'trusting' – Acts 16:1; Galatians 3:9 & 2 Corinthians 6:15. Used passively, it means 'trustworthy' or 'faithful' – 1 Thessalonians 5:24 & 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

Pistos is translated into English as 'believer' in 2 Corinthians 6:15; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:16 & 1 Peter 1:21. This reminds us that the act of 'believing' or 'faithing' is the main characteristic of Christians. We are 'faithful', 'believing' believers or we are nothing.

Saving faith

The central news of the New Testament is the revelation that God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world, and that Jesus accomplished our salvation by dying a voluntary, sacrificial death on Calvary's cross.

Faith is the attitude whereby we abandon all our own efforts to obtain salvation, and start to trust completely in and on Christ alone for salvation. Acts 16:30–31 reports the jailer's question, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul's reply was simple, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved'.

It is much the same in John 3:16: faith is the one-and-only way by which we receive salvation. This is why it is central to Christianity.

Faith and facts

The verb *pisteuo* is often followed by 'that', which shows that faith is concerned with facts. John 8:24 shows that this is important, but James 2:19 suggests that there is more to faith than intellectual assent.

The idea of faith including intellectual belief is implied in Matthew 21:32, where Jesus reminds the Jews that they did not believe what John said. It is similar in John 8:45–46 & John 5:24. Some translations insist on rendering John 5:24 as 'believe in/on him who sent me', but it should be, 'believe him who sent me'. Of course, if we really believe God we

Living Faith

will act on that belief; but faith involves believing what God says as well as believing in God himself. In fact, as we will see later, to believe the Word of God is to believe in Jesus.

Faith and action

In the New Testament, the verb *pisteuo* is normally followed by *eis*. This literally means 'believe into', and describes a believing which takes us out of ourselves and puts us into Christ. This is one reason why believers are commonly referred to as being 'in Christ'.

This denotes not only an intellectual belief, but also a living faith whereby we go on actively clinging to Jesus with every bit of our being and energy. John 15:4 shows that, when we believe like this, we abide in Christ and he abides in us. Faith is not just accepting certain facts as true – though it includes that – faith is also trusting ourselves into Jesus.

In Part Five, we will see that many verses which, in English versions of the Bible, seem to refer to our faith in God or Jesus actually point to God's faith, or to Jesus' faith. In 60 verses, the noun *pistis* is followed by a construction which is naturally translated 'faith of someone', and is always rendered as this in the 44 places where it describes the faith of a human. There are many good reasons why it seems more likely that the other passages also refer to 'the faith of Jesus' rather than to our 'faith in Jesus'. We can say that, as a general rule, we should read 'believing in Jesus' as 'believing into Jesus', and 'faith in Jesus' as 'faith of Jesus'.

Faith and foundation

The verb *pisteuo* is sometimes followed by *epi*, 'upon', which shows that faith has a solid base. We see this in Acts 9:42, where many 'believed upon the Lord' when Tabitha was resuscitated. The people in Joppa had seen what Jesus could do, and they rested their faith 'upon him'. The same idea is apparent in Romans 4:24.

Summary

To summarise these last three points we can say that:

- ◆ 'Belief that' refers to trusting in *truth* – factual or propositional faith
- ◆ 'Belief in' refers to trusting in a *person* – personal or relational faith
- ◆ 'Belief upon' refers to trusting in a *foundation* – substantial or fundamental faith.

Absolute faith

The New Testament often uses *pisteuo* in an absolute way. In John 4:41, for example, we see that many of the Samaritans believed because of Jesus' word; but John does not then bother to tell us what they believed. We must assume that he considered it to be self-evident.

Faith is so central and so fundamental to Christianity that the New Testament constantly refers to believing without defining the belief, and to 'believers' without clarifying their beliefs. We have much to learn from this simple approach today.

Living faith

When we take an overview of the way that the New Testament uses *pistis* and *pisteuo*, we can say that there are four main elements in the New Testament description of human faith and believing:

1. A firm conviction based on hearing
2. A full confession of God's revelation or truth
3. A personal surrender to Christ
4. An action inspired by that surrender.

We see these elements in John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 5:7 & 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12, and we will develop them in later chapters. We will see how all these elements of faith, as well as being human actions, are the result of a deep work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Living Faith

An overview of faith

Because faith is so central to 'our faith', many Christian people feel under some sort of pressure to create faith. They hear preachers rightly urging people to believe, but think that they need to produce it in ever-increasing quantities.

But faith is not the result of human effort or activity – mental, emotional or physical – faith always has its origin in God. True faith is not believing anything we like, anyway that we like, whenever we like, for true faith is always determined and bound by God's Word. We are not free to simply invent the content of our faith – faith is about dreaming God's dreams and seeing God's visions.

Faith has a source

The New Testament suggests that there are three aspects to the divine origin of faith:

1. Jesus is the author of faith

Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as the 'author and finisher' of faith: the word 'our' is absent in Greek and should be omitted. The Greek word *archegos* is translated as 'Founder', 'Author', 'Prince' and 'Captain', and refers to someone who takes the lead in anything, or to whoever provides the first occasion of something. As *archegos* of faith, Jesus takes the lead in faith. All faith looks to him, and to his faith, and draws inspiration and strength from his faith.

The Greek word *teleiotes* is translated as 'Finisher' and 'Perfector', and means one who perfectly completes something. As *teleiotes* of faith, Jesus is the perfect example of faith who has brought faith to absolute completion in his own person.

This means that we do not believe in a vacuum, instead we believe in the footsteps of the leader of faith. We look to Jesus and to his faith – both as an external model and an inward dynamic – and we go on believing after him to the fulfilment of faith that he has reached. This helps us to grasp that 'faith' and 'following' are different ways of expressing the same idea.

2. Faith is a gift of God's grace

Most believers know that grace and faith are both necessary for salvation; and many have been taught that grace is God's responsibility and faith is ours. This is true, but we also need to recognise that our faith is as much a gift of grace as salvation itself.

Ephesians 2:8–9 shows that the faith which enables us to experience God's gracious gift of salvation is 'not of yourselves; it is the gift of God'. We can also see this idea of 'grace behind faith' in Romans 4:16 & Philippians 1:29.

This is a novel idea to some believers, for most are taught that they need to exercise human faith in order to experience divine grace. But we know that salvation is entirely the work of God, and that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves or to make even the tiniest contribution to our salvation.

We should, therefore, expect faith to be a gift of God's grace, and should not be surprised when we see it set out in the Scriptures. If faith were something that we produced and contributed to the salvation process, salvation could not be entirely the work of God. But if the faith we contribute is itself a gift from God, then salvation really is completely and exclusively the work of God.

3. Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit

This *Sword in the Spirit* series is a school of ministry in the Word and the Spirit. In each volume, we draw attention to the way God calls us to depend on both his Word and his Spirit. Some Christian traditions tend to rely more on the Word, while others favour the Spirit; but God is always calling us into a balanced dependency upon both because, in reality, the two are inseparable.

In some areas that we study, as in the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Ministry in the Spirit*, it is easy to concentrate too much on the Spirit and to neglect the Word; so we have to work hard at studying the biblical principles and authority for 'ministry'. In other areas, such as *Living Faith*, it is easy to become so wrapped up in biblical doctrine that we overlook the Spirit – when it is he who inspired the Word and continues to apply it!

Living Faith

Right from the beginning of our study, it is important that we appreciate the Spirit's involvement in faith. In fact, 2 Corinthians 4:13 identifies the Holy Spirit as 'the Spirit of faith'. (Some translations suggest that 2 Corinthians 4:13 refers to a human attitude of faith, to 'a spirit of faith'. But Paul often uses the phrase 'same Spirit', and it always refers to the Holy Spirit.)

With its quote from Psalm 116:10, 2 Corinthians 4:13 highlights the link between the Word and the Spirit. And its stress that the Spirit of faith causes 'believing' to lead to 'speaking' is entirely consistent with the wider biblical teaching about the work of the Spirit.

Whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon us, he prompts us to speak prophetically – and our prophetic speech is always in accordance with scriptural principles, with the Word. This principle, that the faith we receive from the 'Spirit of faith' causes us to speak, is merely another example of the same eternal, prophetic principle of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:9 shows that the 'same Spirit' gives us faith as a manifestation of himself. This underlines what we have already seen, that the faith we receive from God is an expression of his faith – this is variously described as God's faith, Jesus' faith and, as here, the Spirit's faith.

1 Corinthians 12:3 sets this gift of faith in the context of the Spirit prompting us to speak. This should help us to grasp the key idea that true, living faith from God must be spoken out or confessed.

Faith is our responsibility

As well as suggesting that there are these three divine aspects to the origin of faith, the Bible constantly emphasises that faith is a human responsibility – we see this in Hebrews 3:12, 19 & 11:6.

Our responsibility, however, is for the exercise or activity of faith, not for the creation of faith. We are called to an active believing, confessing and doing of the faith that we have received from God; we are not required to summon up human will-power and bring faith into being from nothing.

What is faith?

In this volume, we will often turn to Hebrews 11, the great biblical chapter about faith. But although 11:6 reveals that we cannot please God without active faith, it teaches nothing about the source of faith.

Hebrews 3:12 shows that unbelief, the absence of faith, is a departure from the 'living God'. This name is not a mere description of God, for 'living God' is one of the most important Old Testament names of God, and has a restricted and precise use. God is known as 'the living God' essentially in the contexts of miraculous deliverance, and of God speaking and acting. We see this in Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Isaiah 37:17; Jeremiah 10:10; 23:36; Daniel 6:20 & 26.

Whenever God is referred to as 'the living God' – and it is a comparatively rare construction – it is a direct reference to the God who speaks face to face to Moses, the God who slays Goliath, the God who defeats Sennacherib, the God who closes lions' mouths, the God who speaks to the prophets. This is why Peter's identification of Jesus in Matthew 16:16 is so significant.

This means that, if unbelief means departing from the living God, faith must mean clinging to the living God – to that facet of God which speaks, acts and delivers so decisively.

Our calling in life is not to work up some amazing level of human faith, it is simply to cling to the living God. And, by clinging to him, we soak up his gracious gift of faith – his self-confidence that he can defeat Goliath, can close a lion's mouth, can speak authoritatively and effectively to people and nations. We are then called to confess or speak that faith, and to act according to that faith.

This volume is called *Living Faith* as a constant reminder that the faith the Bible seeks and encourages is not human faith, it is the human exercise – our living believing – of the living God's active self-confidence.

Living Faith

Faith has an object

When some people speak about faith, it seems that they mean 'faith in faith'. They appear to suggest that it does not matter what we believe, only that we do believe. They give the impression that faith changes things, that faith works miracles, that faith works. But faith, like prayer, changes nothing. It is the living God who acts. He defeated Goliath, not the faith of David; and he closed the lions' mouths, not the faith of Daniel.

We can say that faith is rather like the clutch in a car, it merely engages the engine's power. Without a clutch, a powerful car may make a lot of noise but it will never move; without an engine, however, the newest and best clutch is irrelevant. Like a clutch, faith locks us to the living God, and his words and power can then be seen in action.

This is why Jesus spoke as he did in Matthew 17:20. It is not the size of the clutch that matters, it is the size and condition of the engine. If God is the living God, it is a terrible insult to him to suggest that we need an enormous amount of faith.

Faith always reaches out beyond itself and grips the hand of God; it trusts *into* him and *upon* him – we see this in Mark 11:22 & John 14:1.

Faith has content

Christian faith is not having a goal or ambition, and working steadily towards it. Biblical faith is believing something specific that we have heard from God, and then confessing it and acting upon it.

We have seen that the essence of *pistis* is being persuaded of something which has been heard – and Romans 10:17 describes this process in action. This demonstrates that listening to God is at the heart of faith; in fact, it undergirds every aspect of the Christian life.

Unless we hear from God, and our faith is related to the words that we have heard and tested, we will not have a biblical, living faith. We examine this area of the Christian life in the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Listening to God*. This means that

What is faith?

it is highly presumptuous to believe something, and to act on it, if God has not spoken; and that it is equally disobedient not to believe and act if God has spoken.

Many leaders rightly link faith with the scriptural promises of God, and we consider these later. We must note, however, that God's Word is the 'content' of our faith, and not the 'object' of our faith. Just as we are not meant to have faith in faith, so too we should not have faith in God's *promises*. Passages like Romans 4:20–21 & Psalm 106:12 encourage us to believe God's promises, but we believe them because *he* has spoken them. We have faith 'into' and 'upon' God, and we believe, confess and act on his words and promises because they are *his* words.

Our faith is in him and develops through our clinging to him, but the content of our faith is what we have heard him say to us by his divine revelation. This is the work of the Spirit, for it is through him that the Father speaks to us and teaches us.

Faith has actions

We have seen that faith is not passivity or inactivity, and we will return to this key principle throughout this study. Romans 10:9–10 shows that living faith always involves a confession – a speaking out – of God's Word; and James 2:14–26 reminds us that faith always involves a work or an action based on the Word which has been received from God.

In the past, some church leaders tried to suggest that there was a contradiction between 'faith' and 'works', but this was due to a misunderstanding of biblical faith. Living faith, biblical believing, includes 'hearing', 'receiving the Word', 'confessing' and 'doing'. None of these elements of faith can be considered to be the fullness of faith on their own. They are all equally indispensable aspects of genuine faith.

Faith deals with the unseen

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen'. This teaches that faith deals

Living Faith

with those things in our lives which have not yet been realised or experienced. We see this in Romans 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 4:18 & 5:17.

Faith fulfils its purpose when we actually experience something that we have been believing, confessing and acting upon. At this point, we no longer need faith. But until then, by faith we are seeing truths and embracing realities long before we experience or possess them.

Throughout Hebrews 11, we read about people who lived and died in faith. They had been believing, confessing and acting upon the words that they had heard from God, but they did not actually experience in their lifetimes what had been promised. 1 Peter 1:8–9 points out that it is not so different for us in the most important area of faith.

Faith recognises spiritual truths

In Hebrews 11:1, the Greek word for 'substance' is *hupostasis*, and this is also used in Hebrews 1:3 to describe Jesus as 'the express image' of God's person or substance. *Hupostasis* means the real nature of something as opposed to the outward manifestation. In 1:3, it refers to the divine essence of God which exists and is expressed in Jesus; and in 11:1 it reveals that faith deals with invisible realities.

Faith looks beyond and beneath outward appearances and clings to God's truth about a situation. Appearances may include outward and external facts but God's substantial truth goes deeper than that – and it is faith which enables us to embrace the genuine substance beneath a factual appearance. For example, the substance is that God is love and that the devil is defeated, but the facts seem, at times, to be otherwise. Faith – clinging to the living God – enables us to see the true reality and go on believing, confessing and acting upon the substance when the appearance seems to contradict it.

God knows that he will accomplish whatever he has promised, and he can already see what he has promised. When we cling to him, and receive his gracious gift of faith, we

What is faith?

share in his certainty and vision. By faith, we share in his certainty that the promise will be fulfilled and receive his insight into the substance of what has been promised.

In the New Testament, *hupostasis* is often translated as 'confidence' – for example, 2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17 & Hebrews 3:14. *Hupostasis* is derived from *hupo*, 'under', and *stasis*, 'a standing'. This means that, as well as meaning the substance 'underneath' something which gives it a firm foundation, *hupostasis* also means the quality of confidence which enable us to 'stand under', 'endure' or 'undertake' anything.

Living faith involves both these aspects of *hupostasis* – it enables us to see the substance of what is promised, and it also gives us the confidence to receive the substance before it is experienced. We see this idea of faith as both seeing and confidently receiving the present substance of a future reality in passages like Mark 11:24; Luke 13:12–13; 1 Peter 1:7–8 & 1 John 3:2. We shall return to this discussion and offer a further rendering of *hupostasis* in Part Ten.

Faith fully realises unseen realities

Through faith, the things that we have heard God promise and that we are hoping for, confessing and acting upon, become an experienced reality. Hebrews 4:1–3 shows that, since Christ, we who believe really do 'enter' into the promises of God.

Again, we must understand that our faith does not make the promises come true. It is God who keeps his promises. Instead, faith – like a clutch engaging the engine – enables us to experience the promises and enter into their fulfilment. By faith – by clinging to God, by believing 'into' and 'upon' him – we are in exactly the right place to experience the promised reality at the very instant that God keeps his promise.

Faith is certainty

Hebrews 11:1 states that faith is 'the evidence' of things unseen. This is the Greek word *elegchos*, which is translated as 'reproof' or 'conviction' in 2 Timothy 3:16. *Elegchos* is a legal

Living Faith

word and was used to describe someone who had been tried and 'proved' guilty by the 'evidence'.

The use of *elegchos* here shows that faith brings us into 'full conviction'. Faith deals with solid evidence, and brings absolute certainty – full assurance. This expresses the idea of faith as 'full persuasion based on hearing' in a slightly different way. We consider this aspect of faith more fully later, but – for now – we can see it in Romans 4:16–21; 2 Timothy 1:12 & Hebrews 10:22–23.

The 'things' mentioned in Hebrews 11:1 are not vague mysteries. The Greek word is *pragma* – from which we have 'pragmatic' – and this refers to very practical matters. It was another common legal word in New Testament times and was used to identify a particular lawsuit – much as, today, we refer to 'the matter concerning Brown and Jones'.

This shows that faith deals with the absolute certainty of specific matters. Faith is not aimless, something we have in general. Faith is always about very specific, actual matters, which are as tightly defined as a precise legal action. Faith is about those 'things' – the specifics – that God has spoken; it is about the particular realities that he has revealed to us in our listening, the real truths that he has accomplished. Because he has promised them, we know that they are certain – for God always does what he says, and always says what he does.

This shows that true, biblical faith is not religious wishful-thinking, the product of an uncritical and naïve spirit. Nowadays people tend to denigrate anything that cannot be demonstrated rationally or proved empirically – and this means that the concept of faith is automatically shunned. However, we must remember that – though there are good, intellectual reasons for believing in God – God is ultimately beyond both normal human reasoning and scientific investigation. This means that our quest to demonstrate and prove his existence is ultimately doomed if we rely solely on these two endeavours.

Thankfully, God has provided a third category of knowledge: revelation. At its simplest, revelation is being told what truth is

What is faith?

by someone that has special information, in this case by the ultimate authority which is God. Although revelation places value in both reason and sense perception, it maintains that there exists knowledge that is inaccessible to either human reason or sense perception. Faith is the means to this special knowledge of God, the faculty by which we can understand and apprehend knowledge of God and spiritual matters.

This is not to say that our faith is irrational or has no basis in the facts of science, or even that faith cannot be supported by reason or science. Indeed, the Scriptures understand faith not as a regression into darkness, but as a stepping forward into light, a revelation of the unseen world which God has chosen to make known to us.

Living Faith

Part Two

Biblical faith

We have seen that the word 'faith' is very prominent in the New Testament; however, it is found only twice in the Old Testament – in Deuteronomy 32:20 & Habakkuk 2:4. This does not mean that 'faith' is an unimportant idea in the Old Testament, merely that it is expressed in other words like 'believe', 'trust' and 'hope'.

Faith in the Old Testament

One of the most basic demands of the Old Testament is for people to have a right attitude towards God. This attitude is not identified as faith, but that is what it is. Passages like Psalm 26:1; 37:3–8 & Proverbs 3:5 are as close to the New Testament idea of *pistis* as it is possible to get.

The Psalmist may be appealing to his integrity in Psalm 26:1, to himself and his deeds, but his integrity is the fruit of his trust – and this is fully in the Lord. It is much the same in Psalm 37: the Psalmist may be looking for an upright life, but 'trusting in the Lord' is the basis of the uprightness he seeks. This is identical to the New Testament call to 'live by faith', and shows that Jesus' call for faith was not new.

People are sometimes urged in the Old Testament to trust 'the Word of God', as in Psalm 119:42, but this is because it is *God's Word*. We can say that 'the Word' was the content of their faith, and that God – the source of the Word – was the object of their faith.

Proverbs 3:5 contrasts 'trusting the Lord' with 'relying on our own understanding'. The call for people to reject 'trust in self' is almost as common an Old Testament cry as the plea for them to 'trust in the Lord'. We see it, for example, in Proverbs

Living Faith

28:26; Ezekiel 33:13 & Hosea 10:13. In other passages – for example, Isaiah 42:17 & Habakkuk 2:18 – people are urged not to trust in idols or false gods; and Jeremiah 17:5 warns us against trusting in anything which is human.

The Old Testament presents God as the only one who is fully worthy of human trust, he is the only being who is completely reliable and able to do everything that he promises. In the Old Testament, God is given over 300 different names and titles, and these express distinct facets of the divine nature which his people called upon to meet particular needs and to keep specific promises.

We examine this idea more fully in the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Knowing the Father*, but we can glimpse it now in passages like Psalm 28:2 & 86:15. Faith may be confidently rested on a God like this. When we believe into ‘the fortress God’, we know that we will be physically safe; and when we cling to the compassionate, merciful, gracious God we know that we will be kept safe – or saved – in a quite different way.

This means that living faith is not just a set of religious propositions to which we assent, it is a faith in the living God who reveals himself in actions, in words, and – most importantly – in Christ.

Abraham

It is impossible to think about biblical faith without considering Abraham, whose whole life evidenced an attitude of trust. Genesis 15:6 is the fundamental description of Abraham’s faith, and this is taken up in New Testament passages like Romans 4:1–25; Galatians 3:6–14; Hebrews 11:8 & James 2:23.

Throughout the Scriptures, Abraham is always considered ‘the pioneer of faith’, and God is often called ‘the God of Abraham’: this underlines the centrality of faith in the relationship between God and humanity. God introduced himself to Moses this way, in Exodus 3:15.

When we examine the story of Abraham, we quickly see that the four basic elements of *pistis* are present: he heard God; he believed God; he confessed God's promise; and he acted on the promise. For example, we see in Genesis that Abraham:

1. Heard God's word:
 - ◆ In close fellowship – 12:1, 7; 13:14–17; 18:33; 22:1–2 & 24:40
 - ◆ In visions – 15:1–21
 - ◆ In some physical form – 17:1–22 & 18:1–33
 - ◆ Through angelic messengers – 22:11–18.
2. Confessed his faith in God as:
 - ◆ *Yahweh* – 12:8
 - ◆ Eternal – 21:33
 - ◆ The Most High – 14:22
 - ◆ God of heaven and earth – 14:22 & 24:3
 - ◆ Lord – 15:2
 - ◆ Judge of all humankind – 18:25
 - ◆ Just – 18:25
 - ◆ Provider – 22:8 & 14.
3. Trusted God:
 - ◆ He worshipped God and called him by name – 12:8; 13:4 & 18
 - ◆ He believed in the Lord – 15:6.
4. Acted in faith by:
 - ◆ Leaving Ur – 11:31 & 15:7
 - ◆ Leaving Haran – 12:1–4
 - ◆ Accepting a nomadic 'pilgrim' life even when Canaan had been promised him – 13:15 & 15:18
 - ◆ Being ready to sacrifice Isaac – 22:2–18.

It is important we recognise that Abraham's faithful obedient actions were his response to God's promises and revelation.

Living Faith

He simply heard God's word and responded with faith – there is no hint of 'a law' or any demand for some sort of ethical standard. There is, however, a development, or progression, in Abraham's faith-based relationship with God, and we consider this in Part Ten.

Abraham's faith – his clinging to God – led him to leave his home and family. Genesis 15:6 reveals that it was Abraham's faith, not his 'good' behaviour or his obedience to any law, which resulted in him being reckoned as righteous by God. This is a foundation principle of biblical faith, and shows us that it is faith which God is seeking in our lives.

Faith in the New Testament

We have considered the Greek word for faith, *pistis*, and have taken an overview of faith. We know that faith, the action of believing, is very prominent in the New Testament, and that the specifically Christian use of *pistis* is committing oneself to Christ – clinging and surrendering to him. In this section, we see how the different parts of the New Testament explain and apply this commitment.

The Gospels

Jesus' first words, in Mark 1:15, immediately link faith, or belief, with repentance. Because God's kingdom had come, Jesus' hearers were expected to change the way that they thought about God and to commit themselves wholeheartedly to all that Jesus stood for – to his whole mission. To believe in the gospel simply meant to believe in Jesus himself.

The Gospels record that Jesus' ministry was a series of challenges to faith. For example:

- ◆ Straight after Mark 1:15, the first disciples were told to leave their fishing and follow Jesus – Mark 1:17
- ◆ The faith aspect is strong in all the healing stories – Matthew 8:10, 13; 9:22, 29; 15:28; Mark 9:24; 10:52; Luke 7:50 & 17:19

- ◆ At the stilling of the storm, the disciples were rebuked for their unbelief – Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40 & Luke 8:25
- ◆ Jesus promised remarkable achievements to people of faith – Matthew 17:20; 21:21–22 & Luke 17:5–6.

Mark 9:23 suggests that faith is an assertion of possibilities in the face of impossibilities – of substance over appearance, of divine truth over human facts. Jesus' mission was based on the conviction that what God expected of people was impossible through human effort, but became possible when faith linked them to God and to his way of doing things.

This 'impossible' aspect is comprehensible only when it centres on a visible person, in and on Jesus. It is in and through Christ that God does the seemingly impossible.

We have seen that Jesus' demand for faith was not new, as the Old Testament called people to trust in God. We see this in Luke 1:45 & 1:20, which compare the faith and unbelief of Mary and Zechariah.

We know that faith involves hearing the Word of God; and this is underlined by Luke 8:11–15, which equates 'believing' with 'receiving the Word of God'.

And we have grasped that faith must always have active consequences; in Matthew 21:22 & Mark 11:24, Jesus taught that faith expresses itself in prayer, and that communication with the Father must be 'believing' for it to be real and effective.

John's Gospel

We have seen that the verb 'to believe' appears almost 100 times in John's Gospel, and 20:30–31 shows that the purpose of the whole book is that the readers might 'believe'.

Many of the principles about faith that we have already noted in the Scriptures are also emphasised in this Gospel, for example:

Living Faith

- ◆ Faith involves hearing the Word – 2:22
- ◆ Faith means believing in Jesus – 4:50; 8:30; 12:11 & 14:1
- ◆ Faith is prompted by Jesus' works – 2:11 & 10:37–38
- ◆ Salvation comes as a result of faith – 1:12 & 3:16.

John's Gospel, however, adds two insights to our understanding. First, it shows that faith in Jesus involves a radical transformation and a renunciation of the world. The crowds in 6:60–66 left Jesus when they realised that his view of life was essentially different from theirs. In 6:15, they had wanted to make Jesus an earthly king, whereas he had wanted them to respond to his spiritual teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Second, this Gospel reveals that faith has varying degrees. We may not have attained fullness of faith, but we are very different from unbelievers who have no faith at all. Thomas was already a believer, but Jesus told him to be 'believing', 20:27. And the faith of the Samaritans in 4:40 was different from that required in 20:30–31.

This suggests that faith is not a static once-and-for-all experience; instead, it is an on-going exploration of living in Christ which develops as we go on abiding in and with him.

Acts

It is in Acts that the Christian community is first identified as 'those who believe' – 2:44; 4:4, 32; 9:42; 11:21 & 14:23.

Throughout Acts, the exercise of faith is shown to be the essential accompaniment to repentance, and it is always faith 'in the Lord' or in 'the word' which was preached about him – 4:4; 11:17; 14:23; 16:31; 17:11–12; 19:4; 20:21 & 24:24.

This proves that personal faith in the resurrected Jesus was an indispensable hallmark of the first Christians. The message of Jesus had to be heard, received and believed before all that

he had done for people could be experienced and appropriated. This idea of faith is so central to the early church that the expression 'the faith' is sometimes used in Acts to denote the Christian message – 6:7; 13:8 & 14:22.

Paul's letters

Paul's letters (1 Corinthians – Philemon) teach much about faith, and show that faith was central to Paul's life and thinking. He uses the idea of faith in a rich and varied way, and we can identify seven complementary applications of faith in his letters.

1. *God is faithful*

Paul's teaching about faith is founded on the faithfulness of God – on the fact that God is *both* full of faith *and* completely trustworthy in all his dealings with people. We see this in Romans 3:3; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:24 & 2 Timothy 2:13.

God is understood to be entirely reliable in keeping everything that he promises, which means that we can trust God's words when we recognise his voice without any hesitation. This is why Paul refers to 'faithful sayings' in passages like 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11 & Titus 3:8.

2. *Faith is acceptance of God's message*

In Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21 & Ephesians 1:13, faith is presented as the correct human response to the preaching of the gospel. As we have seen, the object of faith is Christ, and Christ has meaning only through faith.

Romans 10:8–13 shows that the evidence of this faith-response is a spoken confession that Jesus is Lord. This must, therefore, involve a definite, personal decision about Jesus.

3. *Justification comes only through faith*

The central message of Romans 1–8 is that justification (the establishing of a right relationship between God and men and women) can be achieved only through faith. Romans 1:17 bases this in Habakkuk 2:4.

Living Faith

Paul sees righteousness as a divine gift which we can do nothing to earn, but which must be received. This receiving is a faith-action, and is set out in Romans 3:21–26. It is this belief which leads Paul, in 3:27–31, to refute any possibility that justification can be by human works. For Paul, faith is the opposite of self-achievement: to believe in Christ is to stop believing (in the sense of clinging) to oneself. Boasting is, by definition, automatically excluded by faith.

4. Faith is a continuing process

We have seen that faith is an on-going process, and this is underlined in Romans 1:17. Faith is not simply the accepting of a justifying act of God, it is also the establishing of a new relationship with Christ. Paul expands on this in all his 'in Christ' teaching. In Part Ten we consider the development of faith, but we need to grasp here that faith really does develop.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 shows that faith is dynamic, not static. And Galatians 2:20 makes it clear that our new life should be a continual faith action, an on-going exploration and appropriation of what Jesus has done for us.

5. Faith is commitment to our new life

We have seen that there are degrees of faith, and Paul sets out some implications of this idea.

- ◆ Faith can be lacking, and prayer should be offered to remedy the deficiency – 1 Thessalonians 3:10.
- ◆ The increase of faith leads to further opportunities to preach the gospel – 2 Corinthians 10:15–16.
- ◆ Abraham's developing faith is an example for others – Romans 4:20–21.
- ◆ Individuals and whole communities may become known by their faith – Philemon 1:5; Romans 1:8; Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:4 & 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

This does not mean faith is so vague that it can ever escape detection in someone who is believing. Rather, it shows that

faith is far more than mere assent to the Christian message. For Paul, faith is a full commitment to following Christ, and to living and thinking in his way.

6. Faith is a gift from God

We have already noted 1 Corinthians 12:9 and seen that the faith of the Spirit is a special gift to believers. This is one of 'the gifts of the Spirit' that we examine in the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Knowing the Spirit*. Like all the gifts, this is given to Spirit-filled believers when they need the Spirit's faith to help them build up the church and do Jesus' works more effectively.

This is God's own faith, which is given for particular service – as in James 5:15. But 1 Corinthians 13:2 reminds us that faith is worthless when it is divorced from love. There is no category of 'superfaith' which is superior to all other types of faith, it is just that the Spirit graciously gives us a temporary boost of his faith when we need it most.

7. Faith is only activated when the will of God is known

A noticeable feature in Paul's letters is that Paul doesn't usually pray for his churches to get faith, but gives thanks that they are believers and already have faith. What he prays rather is that they will receive knowledge, as in Ephesians 1:15–19. Similarly, in Philemon 6 Paul prays 'that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus'. Again, Paul does not pray for Philemon to get faith – he tells him he already has faith. This is because Paul understood that faith is made active through the knowledge of God's will.

It is clear that God has given to every person a measure of faith. However, this faith can be either active or passive, effective or ineffective – Paul prays that it may become effective, so that it can begin to produce results. And how will faith become effective? Through insight, through knowledge, through the Word – faith is made active only when the will of God is known.

Living Faith

Hebrews

We have studied the 11:1 definition of faith, and seen that Hebrews 11 illustrates the persistence of faith in the face of considerable difficulties. This theme appears in 6:12 & 13:7, and is hinted at in 3:6 & 10:23.

As well as offering examples of faith, Hebrews also illustrates the effects of unbelief in chapters 3 & 4. Unbelief barred the way into the promised rest for the Jews, and, by implication, only faith could secure them entry. 4:2 shows that the message the Israelites heard did not benefit them because it did not meet with faith in the hearers.

Other epistles

James 2:1 states that his readers hold the faith of Jesus; 1:3 teaches that faith needs testing; 1:6 shows that we must pray in faith without doubting & 5:15 states that faith-filled prayer is effective in healing.

But it is the concept of faith in James 2:14–26 which is particularly important. This passage is not discussing the idea that we can be justified by the works of the Law; rather, it is describing the kinds of works which are an indispensable element of living, productive faith.

James 2:24 is the key verse, and it proves that James is not contradicting the doctrine of justification by faith. Instead, James is insisting that faith which shows no practical results is not living, fruitful or productive faith. He teaches that faith without corresponding practical actions is useless, that is, dead, fruitless and unproductive.

The whole Bible unites in opposing the idea of faith as mere intellectual assent; 2:19 reminds us that even demons have this kind of belief, and it benefits them not one bit.

Both James and Paul quote Genesis 15:6: yet while James 2:21–23 suggests that Abraham was justified by works, Romans 4:2–4 states that he was justified by faith. These are

not in opposition. Paul points to Abraham's faith which led to his justification, while James describes the same justifying faith in action.

James and Paul are both looking at the same thing – at Abraham's total response to God's word. Paul, however, stresses the invisible element of faith – *belief*; while James emphasises the visible or fruitful element of living faith – *actions*.

We also see in the epistles that:

- ◆ Faith is firmly linked with salvation – 1 Peter 1:5 & 9
- ◆ Faith must be tested – 1 Peter 1:7
- ◆ Faith is more valuable than gold – 1 Peter 2:7
- ◆ Persecuted believers must trust the faithful Creator – 1 Peter 4:19
- ◆ Those faced by the devil must stand firm in faith – 1 Peter 5:9
- ◆ Faith is the starting point of development – 2 Peter 1:5–7
- ◆ Faith overcomes the world – 1 John 5:4
- ◆ Faith is believing in Jesus – 1 John 5:1 & 5
- ◆ Faith brings assurance of eternal life – 1 John 5:13
- ◆ Faith is linked to love – 1 John 3:23
- ◆ Faith involves confessing – 1 John 4:15.

We can see above that 1 Peter 5:9 says that those faced by the devil must stand firm in faith. Here we must also keep in mind James 4:7, which shows that when we submit to God, we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. In what way are we to resist the devil? 1 Peter 5:9 gives the answer: 'resist him, steadfast in the faith'. This means that as soon as faith becomes a steadfast conviction in our heart, the devil will have to flee. Ephesians 6:16 confirms this: 'above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one'.

Living Faith

Revelation

The last book in the Bible presents Jesus as 'the faithful witness' – 1:4–5 & 3:14 – and as, when he appears as final victor, 'Faithful and True', 19:11; and it shows that his words are always thoroughly trustworthy – 21:5 & 22:6. It is no surprise, therefore, that people in the churches are urged to be faithful, 2:10; and are described as faithful, 2:13 & 17:14.

Faith is linked with love, 2:19, endurance, 13:10, and Jesus, 14:12. If our faith is not rooted in love, is not patient and long-lasting, and is not 'the faith of Jesus', it is not living, biblical faith. It will not enable us to overcome in the last days described in the book of Revelation.

Part Three

The operation of faith

Living faith does not operate by human action or willpower, only by divine enabling. We receive faith from God and operate in faith only through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Bible consistently contrasts faith with works – the working of God with the futile efforts of men and women. Works come through human effort, but faith is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of faith. Faith is simply responding to God, and this means that faith cannot be created, developed or used by fleshly self-effort or psychological manipulation.

As we see in *Knowing the Spirit*, the Holy Spirit is entirely outside our control, he is the holy wind of God who blows where and how he wills. This means that there are no techniques or 'magical' formulae which facilitate the operation of faith, and that there are no invisible or mechanical 'faith-laws' which God must obey.

We have seen that God has established some principles of faith, but – as with all biblical principles – he is not controlled or limited by them. God is sovereign and is not subject to anyone or to anything.

Many leaders teach about faith in a way which appears to suggest that certain results happen automatically when particular rules are obeyed. But we cannot use the Holy Spirit in this way, for it is he who uses us. Anyone who insists on a mechanical system, technique or formula that claims to equip us with faith-power is leaning dangerously close to the occult and the demonic.

Living Faith

The Spirit of faith

Biblical faith arises out of a living, breathing relationship with the Spirit, whom we have seen is called 'the Spirit of faith'. Living faith is only possible 'in' or 'by' the Spirit, which means that no non-Christian – no 'unbeliever' – can possibly practice true faith.

Of course, all people exercise a human faith which is based on experience. For example, people exercise human faith every time they bend to sit on a chair, stand in a queue, eat a plate of food, take medicine, wait for a train, and so on. These actions, however, are faith in a person or object, and not faith in the living God.

This 'human faith' is one type of faith, but it is not *living* faith. The human trust that we place in an object or person may help us to experience their benefits, but the object or person does not, themselves, provide us with the faith to experience them. This type of faith is, in itself, either totally powerless or of only psychological benefit. In contrast, the living God comes to us, speaks to us, and gives us the faith we need to respond to his words and actions.

As well as 'human faith', there are also evil 'spirits of faith' at work in the world. They encourage different forms of 'religious faith' which may involve trusting in a god, a book, a spirit, and so on. This type of faith may be powerless, or it may have a psychological impact, or it may be a clinging to evil powers.

This wrong type of faith operates through demonic spirits – through false 'spirits of faith'. Obviously, they seek to embroil true believers, as well as ordinary people, in false-faith, so we need to be able to recognise the typical signs of their activity. There are many signs or ideas which help us to identify this type of faith. For example:

- ◆ The promise of power on demand
- ◆ The motive is not the main point
- ◆ The power is seen as an impersonal force or energy
- ◆ It involves communication with spirits or guides

The operation of faith

- ◆ Spiritual powers are accessed or manipulated
- ◆ It operates through formulae, mechanisms and techniques
- ◆ Power is channelled through physical objects, places, acts, rituals, and at special times and seasons
- ◆ There is an emphasis on thought or mind power – on visualisation, concentration and non-biblical forms of meditation
- ◆ There is a rejection of the reality of the material world
- ◆ The creation of a personal reality by spiritual laws and powers.

We must avoid this false-faith, and keep on clinging only to God – which we do by living in and with the Holy Spirit. As we live in partnership with him, so true, living faith develops within us which is far removed from false, ungodly, manipulative, self-seeking faith.

The word of faith

Living faith is actively believing in the living God, who speaks his Word with power, authority and clarity. We have seen that *pistis* faith means being fully persuaded by what we hear God say to us, and this is made clear in Romans 10:17.

Faith is completely wrapped in God's Word and promises; this means that living faith not only comes through hearing God's Word, but it also operates within the limits of God's Word. True faith is not believing anything we like, anyway that we like, whenever we like, for true faith is always determined and bounded by God's Word.

This means that faith always begins with, 'God says'. Faith cannot operate if God has not spoken, for that is presumption. Many people think that 'disobedience' is the opposite of 'obedience', but we must appreciate that 'presumption and disobedience' are the two equal aspects of the opposite of

Living Faith

obedience. It is as sinful to do what God has not said as it is not to do what he has said. This means we can sin by *presumptuously* acting on something we presume God has said but, in fact, he has not said it. And we can sin by *contemptuously* ignoring what he has said.

Faith draws its power and content from God's Word, and Hebrews 4:12 describes its inherent power. This means we can be sure that every promise of God carries within it the power of God which is necessary for its own fulfilment.

2 Corinthians 1:18–22 describes God's faithfulness – his 'full-of-faith-ness' – and illustrates the inherent reliability of God's Word by stating that all God's promises are 'Yes' and 'Amen' because they are in Christ. This passage suggests that we should never think about God's Word apart from Christ.

As we will see, this association between God's Word and Jesus must be fundamental to our understanding of 'the Word'.

Logos and rhema

The New Testament uses two distinct Greek words for 'the word', and we need to understand the difference and significance of these words. The simplest way of appreciating the difference is by thinking of *logos* as God's 'general' Word and of *rhema* as his 'specific or particular' word. *Logos* and *rhema* are often used interchangeably in the New Testament, and their distinctive meanings are not always clear in every context.

Some leaders have suggested that *logos* refers to the Bible, and that *rhema* refers to prophecy, but both words are used in much broader ways than this in the New Testament. Technically, we can say that *logos* denotes the idea behind a word whereas *rhema* describes the word as it is spoken or written. For example, the *logos* of, say, 'chair' refers to the general idea of all chairs – to something we sit on, whether it has three legs or four, and is wooden, plastic or metal; while the *rhema* of 'chair' points to the particular chair which we have referred to in our speaking or writing.

The operation of faith

Logos is used in Hebrews 4:12 to make it clear that all of God's words are alive and active; while *rhema* is used in Romans 10:17 to show that faith comes from hearing a particular word from God. It is the same in Ephesians 6:17: 'the Sword of the Spirit which is the word of God' uses *rhema* to point to the specific word which the Spirit brings to us in a time of need. We may 'hear' this word as part of a sermon, a prophetic message, or in our spirits. Or we may 'see' the word through a passage in the Bible, a vision, or creation – as in Genesis 15:5.

No matter how we receive God's word, it will always be in line with biblical principles. We look at this more fully in Part Four, but for now we need to grasp that living faith comes from hearing or seeing a 'particular' word from God to us individually.

Faith is always activated by *rhema*, not by *logos*; and *logos* must become *rhema* for faith to be able to operate. Faith is the result of the specific word of God into a particular situation. God's 'general' Word to all people for all time must become his 'particular' word to us for faith to operate in our lives, not just God's Word for everyone, but 'God's word for me'. Faith operates at the level of the personal, not the general – only then can one enjoy the benefits of the promise.

Dual action

In the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1–23, the seed, 'the Word of God', has to be received by the soil, 'the human heart', before its benefits, its 'fruitfulness', can be experienced, and before it becomes active. This corresponds to faith.

God's particular word to us must be received into our lives, it must be truly believed, before it can start to become active – to operate and bring about its promised benefits. This does not mean that faith makes the Word alive and active, for it is that already. Instead, faith – which we receive from God – enables the Word to be living and active in our lives.

This is a wonderful example of the partnership that God seeks with his people. Our faith comes from God through hearing or seeing his Word, and then our on-going exercise of

Living Faith

this faith enables us to experience his Word. We see this dual action of the Word – bringing faith and then being activated by that faith – in passages like 1 Thessalonians 1:5–6 & 2:13.

The confession of faith

We have seen that faith and confession are inseparable, and must realise that there simply cannot ever be true faith without some form of confession. Passages like Romans 10:8–10; Psalm 19:14 & Joshua 1:8 illustrate this important truth.

The Greek word *homologeō* is translated in the New Testament as ‘to confess’: this is derived from *homo*, ‘same’, and *legō*, ‘to speak’, and literally means ‘to speak the same thing’. This means that, when we confess the word of faith, we are saying exactly the same thing as the Word of God. True confession, however, is not just paying ‘lip-service’ to the truth, it is speaking from our ‘hearts’. Matthew 15:8 reveals what God thinks about people who repeat the Word, or make empty confession, without deeply believing it and trusting it completely.

The faith-confession of the Word is based in the biblical teaching about the ‘heart’ of men and women. In the Scriptures, the phrase, ‘the heart’ does not refer to the organ which pumps blood around the human body; instead, it is a poetic reference to the reality of a person, to the inner person. We see this in Proverbs 4:23; 23:7 & 27:9.

The Bible teaches that the heart, the inner truth, has an overflow in the human mouth. Matthew 12:33–37 shows that whatever our hearts are filled with will automatically overflow out of our mouths. If our hearts – our inner lives – are full of faith, it will overflow through our mouths, in our words. We will naturally speak faith-words and faith-ideas, and our speech will reflect the attitude of faith which dominates in our hearts.

This principle of heart confession is so important that, in Matthew 12:37, Jesus says we will be judged by our words, for these accurately reflect the condition of our inner lives, of our

The operation of faith

heart. This follows the creation principle of 'trees and fruit' which crops up throughout the New Testament. A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears either bad fruit or no fruit. If our hearts are full of faith, our thoughts, words, attitudes and deeds will be consistent with this faith. What we think, say and do is always based on what we deeply 'believe' in our hearts.

Empty confession

The 'heart' principle demonstrates the futility of trying to turn confession into a kind of 'faith technique'. We can confess a truth forever with our lips, but nothing will come of it if the truth is not in our hearts.

Although confession is an essential part of faith, we must remember that it does not create faith. This distinction is particularly apparent in Romans 10:9–10. If faith really does exist in our lives, however, it must be spoken – for faith cannot operate without confession. We see this principle at work in Matthew 4:4–10.

True confession is not merely intellectual or verbal agreement with the Word, it is something which arises from a heart conviction that God has spoken specifically and directly to us – and that his word cannot fail.

Some people find that speaking about the Word, meditating on it and praying about it, often leads to a release of faith. But this is not confession-created faith, it is merely the initial process of seeking the Lord, waiting for him to speak to us, opening our hearts to receive a word of faith, and fulfilling our responsibility to listen to him. We must avoid the wrong idea that simply repeating verses from the Bible is the same as operating in faith. 2 Corinthians 4:13 shows that we believe and then we speak; we do not speak so that we will believe.

The actions of faith

We have seen that living faith is an active faith which produces verbal and visible results. Genuine faith is both seen in actions

Living Faith

and heard in words. What we do shows what we believe as much as what we say; it is the 'tree and fruit' principle again.

Faith and obedient action are closely related. Faith without obedience to the heard word is not genuine faith in that word; and obedience without faith is legalism. Hebrews 11:6 shows that we cannot please God without faith; so, to please God, our obedience must come from a believing heart.

Hebrews 11 has been called faith's 'roll of honour'. Without exception, everyone mentioned in this chapter is described as demonstrating great deeds which were carried out in faith. It is simply impossible for living faith to be secret and not worked out in faith-actions.

Living faith affects the way we live; it determines our choices and actions; and it establishes the very course of our lives. Living faith is what distinguished the heroes of Hebrews 11 from their unbelieving contemporaries.

A careful reading of Hebrews 11 should be enough to convince us that James 2:17–20 is correct in stating that faith without actions is dead. We have seen that James is not talking about the works of the Law, or good deeds, as a basis for gaining acceptance by God. Instead, he is talking about the kind of actions which accompany genuine, living faith, and is pointing out the vital link between faith and actions.

Faith and action work together

Faith and actions, like faith and confession, are an indissoluble partnership. Neither can operate without the other. On its own, faith produces nothing – it is dead and inert; in fact, it is not living faith. To be living faith, it must be accompanied by faith-actions. This means that faith is never a pious, passive matter; it is always active.

But, just as faith without works is dead, so works without faith are pointless and futile. Actions without faith achieve nothing – they are no more than fleshly human self-effort which cannot produce anything of any eternal value.

The operation of faith

Faith is completed by action

Many believers think that faith means believing God and then sitting back and doing nothing except praying. But faith never operates like this. With faith, there is always a corresponding action which must accompany believing God and confessing his Word.

James 2:2 shows that faith is completed by works. The Greek verb *teleioo*, 'make perfect', means 'to bring to end by completing or finishing', and its use proves that faith is incomplete without works.

James 2:21–23 states that Abraham was considered righteous when he offered his son. The verse that 2:23 quotes, Genesis 15:6, was spoken by God many years before Isaac's sacrifice, and was God's response to Abraham's faith that God's 15:5 word would be fulfilled.

As we will see in Part Ten, Abraham's action in Genesis 22 was a specific test of his 15:6 faith – hence the saying in James 2:23 that the Scripture was fulfilled when Abraham offered Isaac on the altar.

Abraham's 15:5 faith developed throughout Isaac's conception, birth and early life; but it was completed or finished when Abraham did what God told him to do in 22:2. His works completed his faith, and he was called 'a friend of God'. Without actions, our faith will remain a mere theory; it will be just an intellectual idea or an empty dream.

The action must be appropriate to the faith

A faith-action is not doing anything which comes into our minds; it is performing an appropriate action which corresponds to the specific expression of faith in the Word. We can say that every faith-word has a corresponding faith-confession and a corresponding faith-action.

In James 2:15, it is easy to see what the appropriate action is that corresponds to the faith. If the faith is living faith, the faith-confession, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled', will be

Living Faith

matched by the appropriate faith-action of sacrificial giving from personal resources. We can see this matching of actions to confession, belief and hearing the Word in passages like Joshua 3:14–17; Matthew 12:13; 14:28–30; Luke 17:13–14; John 9:6–7; Acts 9:34; 1 Thessalonians 5:18 & Hebrews 11:17–19.

The testing of faith

Testing is an integral part of the way that faith operates, for faith must be tested if it is to triumph. We have seen this in the story of Abraham; and Jesus always tested the faith of the people who came to him to ensure that they were ready to receive the promise. We see this, for example, in John 4:46–53; 11:6, 32, 40 & Matthew 15:22–28.

James 1:2–4 shows that clinging to the promises and goodness of God during times of suffering is one of our greatest challenges to faith. 1 Peter 1:6–7 demonstrates that fiery testing both establishes the genuineness of our faith and refines it. Testing proves whether we really are believing in the ‘substance’ or in the ‘appearance’, whether we are trusting in God or in circumstances.

Testing assesses our willingness to stand firm on God’s word to us when that word does not seem to be effective in our situation. This means that testing is targeted at the word, and that persevering in faith means clinging to God and his Word whatever the circumstances.

It seems that testing comes in two main ways:

- ◆ Through apparent delays
- ◆ Through apparent contradictions.

Delays

Habakkuk 2:3 shows that God’s vision, his word, will be accomplished; but that – from a human point of view – it may tarry and we may have to wait for it. As we see in John 11, these apparent delays are divinely purposed to test our faith.

The operation of faith

It is the same in Hebrews 10:35–37; the promise of God comes after we have endured. The Bible constantly emphasises that God wants to develop patience and persistence in us, and we consider this in Part Ten of the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Effective Prayer* and Part Six of *Ministry in the Spirit*.

There may be times when the delay is due to the opposing forces of the devil, as in Daniel 10, but the principle of 'trusting God's Word and enduring until the promise is realised' still applies. We see this in Part Seven of *Effective Prayer* and Part Ten of *Ministry in the Spirit*.

Contradictions

Time and again, the appearance of a situation seems to contradict the substance of the situation which has been revealed by God's Word. This leads some people to a crisis of confidence, others to theological confusion, and still more to a simplistic rejection of the appearance. God, however, really wants to test and mature our faith so that we genuinely understand what is happening in the spiritual realm.

As we see in Part Seven of *Ministry in the Spirit*, Satan constantly tempts us to doubt God's Word and goodness. He delights to point out contradictions with the aim of making us doubt God and blame him for the difficulties.

But, as with seeming delays, we are simply called to patient endurance and to an intelligent, reasoned, faith-developing devotion to God's Word. If God has spoken, we can be sure that his word will be fulfilled. This is the reality, no matter what the delays and contradictions may appear to imply.

We have already seen that faith is concerned with invisible, unexperienced matters, so we must realise that delays and contradictions are, by definition, an integral part of the operation of faith. If there were never any delays, we would not need any faith.

In fact, all tests of faith are part of the very process ordained by God to develop our faith and bring it to maturity so that we

Living Faith

can receive what he has promised. Without these tests our character would not grow and become capable of carrying the promised blessing. Faith is never to be perceived as instant blessings on demand. This spirit of 'demandingness' has to do with childish immaturity, and is not genuine faith. Only tested faith is triumphant faith!

Faith and facts

Living faith does not ignore facts or the truth; it recognises that they are realities, but it knows that they are not the end of the story. For example, Abraham recognised that he was almost one hundred years old and that his wife was barren and long past the age of child-bearing. But Abraham also knew that God had spoken his word and he would be the Father of many nations.

The test of faith is simply whether we will continue to believe God's word when the facts as we know them do not witness to it. By faith, Abraham passed the test – and carried on believing, confessing and acting according to God's word.

In Genesis 17:1, God introduced himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai*. Some English versions of the Bible translate this as 'Almighty God', while others render it as 'the Mountain God', but these do not reflect the full meaning of this name.

It is not possible to know the original meaning of *shaddai*, or its derivation. Many teachers think that it comes from the Akkadian word *sadu* for 'mountain', and use this to justify 'Almighty'. Others, however, argue that it is derived from the Aramaic word for 'to pour'; while a few point to the similarity of *shaddai* to the Hebrew word for 'breast'. Still, others have said that *shaddai* may be related to the primitive Hebrew root *shadad* meaning 'to deal violently with', 'despoil', 'devastate', 'ruin', 'destroy', or 'spoil'. This would signify the God who is manifested by the terribleness of his mighty acts.

The Septuagint – the Greek version of the Old Testament – translated *El Shaddai* as 'the Sufficient', and this makes excellent sense when we see that *El Shaddai* is almost always used in the Old Testament in the context of God's extravagant covenant provision.

The operation of faith

As we see in *Knowing the Father*, the divine name *El Shaddai* is always used in the context of God providing children, food or wisdom. The simple issue for Abraham, and for most of the patriarchs, and for Job in Job 33:4, and Naomi in Ruth 1:20–21, was whether they would trust *El Shaddai* to provide for them when their circumstances seemed to insist that he was not living up to his all-providing name.

The facts facing us may, at times, seem grim, but they should fade into insignificance when they are set against the glorious but testing words of *El Shaddai*. If he has promised to provide something, we can rest assured that his word will be fulfilled. Our faith is resting upon his certain, proven and unchanging nature.

Living Faith

Part Four

The foundation of faith

We have seen that faith comes from hearing a specific and particular word from God, and that faith is fully intertwined with the Word of God. We need, therefore, to be completely sure that we understand what the Scriptures mean by God's word.

Dabar

The Hebrew word *dabar* is used almost 400 times in the Old Testament to describe 'the word' of God. *Dabar* almost always means a *spoken* communication from God to men and women in the form of commandment, prophecy, warning and encouragement. *Dabar* refers to the *written* Word of God only in Psalm 119, where it is used as a synonym for 'the Law', for the first five books of the Old Testament.

Dabar literally means 'that which lies behind', and when it is translated as 'word' it points to 'a meaningful sound which reveals whatever lies behind the sound'. We must understand that this 'self-revelation' is the very essence of biblical teaching about God's 'word'.

In Hebrew thought, a person's *dabar* – their word – was regarded as being an extension of their personality and also as having a substantive existence of its own. This means we can say that, in the Old Testament, the word of God was God's self-revelation through the prophets which – when uttered – then existed in its own right for all time.

Self-revelation

We are so used, today, to referring to the Bible as 'the Word of God', that we tend to think about 'the Word' only as something which is separate and independent of God. We need to recognise that 'the Word' is also an aspect of God's nature and personality.

Living Faith

We can see this dual element particularly clearly in Proverbs 8 & 9. The Wisdom of God is the creative power of God and an essential part of his divine character; however, in 8:22–30, ‘Wisdom’ is also clearly presented as being distinct from God in some way.

God’s Word and God’s Wisdom are almost synonyms, for they are both self-revelations and they are both fulfilled in Jesus – who is the ultimate self-revelation of God, is eternally part of the triune God, and yet is also quite distinct from the Father.

The only difference between ‘the Word’ and ‘the Wisdom’ is that there is an inherent spoken element in the idea of ‘word’ which is not present in ‘wisdom’. We can say that God’s word reveals God’s wisdom – just as Jesus appears in John’s Gospel as ‘the Word’ who perfectly fulfils the Proverbs 8 & 9 ‘Wisdom’ passages.

When we think about the Word in terms of self-revelation, we can appreciate why God’s Word is always invested with his authority and must be obeyed – as in Psalm 103:20 & Deuteronomy 12:32. Isaiah 40:8 shows that, like God, the Word is eternal; Isaiah 55:11 states that God’s word cannot return unfulfilled once it has been uttered; and 1 Peter 1:23–25 reveals its living, incorruptible, eternal nature.

Dabar is usually translated into English as part of the expression, ‘the word of the Lord came to’. Again, we are so used to thinking of the Bible as the Word that we often speak about ‘going to the Word’ and ‘turning to the Word’. The biblical emphasis, however, is always that the word turns to us and that the word comes to us. The initiative is always with God, he breathes his word to us, and the coming of God’s word and wisdom is always a dynamic, active, flowing revelation. There is nothing static about God’s word.

We have noted that there is a common biblical association between the Word and the Spirit: now we should be able to appreciate that this is because God’s Word flows out from his mouth on God’s breath – the Word is breathed out, it is expired, by, on, in and through the Spirit.

Logos

In the Old Testament, *dabar* is used to describe both single messages from God to particular people and also the whole content of the total self-revelation of God. We have already seen that two Greek words are used in the New Testament for these twin aspects of God's 'Word': *rhema* denotes 'particular' words from God, and *logos* refers to the complete or 'general' revelation of God.

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, *logos* is always used to translate *dabar*; and this sense of a full divine self-revelation is taken into the New Testament where *logos* is also used as a title of Jesus – who is both the perfect self-revelation of God, and yet is also quite distinct from the Father.

Jesus

Jesus is revealed as 'the *logos* of God' in John 1:1–18; 1 John 1:1–2; 5:7 & Revelation 19:13. Following on from the ideas that we have seen to be inherent within *dabar*, this immediately points to:

- ◆ Jesus' distinct personhood
- ◆ His relationship with God within the Godhead
- ◆ His unique creative power and authority
- ◆ His fulfilment of the 400 Old Testament 'word' passages.

Once we have firmly grasped that Jesus is 'the Word of God' – the distinct, total self-revelation of God – we can begin to think about the relationship between 'faith' and 'the Word' more biblically. When we say that living faith comes through hearing or seeing the Word – and that it involves believing, seeing, confessing *and* acting on the Word – we are really saying that faith comes through receiving Jesus and that it means believing Jesus, confessing Jesus and acting with Jesus.

Faith is not a dry and academic idea which is only an option for literate, educated people who have an intellectual grasp of the Scriptures. It is a living relationship with Jesus – which involves

Living Faith

clinging to him, listening to him, and living and serving with him – which is open to all people, regardless of education and intellect.

This does not mean that the Scriptures are unimportant – far from it. But we must not forget that the biblical emphasis of faith is that it comes more from hearing in our hearts than from reading with our minds; that it is centred more upon the person of Jesus than the mere words of Scripture; and that it is a clinging to the living God rather than just a cerebral understanding of the Bible.

It is possible to read the Bible with only the aid of our human minds and to study the Bible with only our personal intellects. Many people do this and profess that, through this, they know God's Word. But we can only truly 'hear' or 'see' God's Word with the help of the Spirit.

We have already noted that the Word comes to us on God's breath, and that we cannot separate the Word from the Spirit. All believers should study the Scriptures, but we only 'see' God's Word through our studying when the Spirit highlights God's Word to us in our spirits.

Much biblical teaching about 'the Word' is rooted in Psalm 119. This magnificent Psalm does illustrate the importance of the written Word, but we must not forget that the purpose of 'the Word' in that psalm is that we should receive it in our hearts as a spoken, living revelation from God.

This means that our understanding of 'the word' must include the Scriptures, but it must not be restricted to them; and that our understanding of 'receiving' should include 'reading', but it must extend beyond this to include 'understanding', 'hearing' and 'seeing'. The Scriptures are a very important element within God's word, but they are important because they point us to Jesus – to the one who is 'the Word'.

Other uses

In the New Testament, *logos* does not point only to Jesus, it is also used in the following ways to describe:

The foundation of faith

- ◆ A spoken idea – Luke 7:7; 1 Corinthians 14:9 & 19
- ◆ A statement by God – John 15:25; Romans 9:9; Galatians 5:14 & Hebrews 4:12
- ◆ A statement by Christ – Matthew 24:35; John 2:22; 4:41; 14:23 & 15:20
- ◆ Spoken spiritual instruction – Acts 2:40; 10:36; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 12:8; 2 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:15 & Hebrews 6:1
- ◆ Spiritual doctrine – Matthew 13:20; Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9 & 1 John 2:7.

The phrase, 'the *logos* of the Lord' is often used in the New Testament to describe the revealed will of God in much the same way as the phrase 'the Word of God' is used in the Old Testament. This phrase is used to describe:

- ◆ A direct revelation from Jesus – 1 Thessalonians 4:15
- ◆ A message from the Lord, delivered with his authority and made effective by his power – Acts 8:25; 13:49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:8 & 2 Thessalonians 3:1
- ◆ The good news or 'gospel' about Jesus – Acts 13:26; 14:3; 15:7; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2; 5:19; 6:7; Galatians 6:6; Ephesians 1:13; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 1:5 & Hebrews 5:13.
- ◆ The sum total of God's utterances – Mark 7:13 & John 10:35.

The gospel

When *logos* describes the 'good news' or gospel message, it is usually used absolutely – as in 'to preach the word', Acts 11:19; 14:25 & 16:6. But it is also used descriptively, for example:

Living Faith

- ◆ The word of God – Acts 4:31 & 13:5
- ◆ The word of Christ – Colossians 3:16
- ◆ The word of the cross – 1 Corinthians 1:18
- ◆ The word of life – Philippians 2:16
- ◆ The word of reconciliation – 2 Corinthians 5:19
- ◆ The word of salvation – Acts 13:26
- ◆ The word of truth – 2 Corinthians 6:7 & Ephesians 1:13
- ◆ The word of righteousness – Hebrews 5:13.

These phrases show that, in the New Testament, the gospel story is essentially a presentation of Jesus himself: he is the Word which is preached in total dependence on the power of the Spirit. In fact, we can say that, in the early church, 'the Word' always meant a self-revelatory message from God, in Christ, through the Spirit. This had to be preached and ministered with the help of the Spirit – and obeyed by those who heard it – as if the spoken Word were Christ himself.

Rhema

We have seen that *rhema* points to a specific word from God, as opposed to the general totality of God's Word represented by *logos*. We see this in, for example, Matthew 26:75 where Peter did not recall the general words of Jesus, he remembered the specific message to him that, 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times'.

When we grasp that Jesus is the *logos* of God, it comes as no surprise to realise that Romans 10:17 refers to the *rhema* of God and not the *logos* of God. The *rhema* of God is not something different from the *logos* of God, it is an aspect of the *logos*. By a *rhema* word, God highlights one element within his *logos* – the 'word' which, in this case, is his direct message giving salvation to those who hear it.

We have noted that there are over 300 names and titles of God in the Old Testament. *Yahweh*, 'I am who I am' or 'I will

The foundation of faith

be who I will be' is the general, personal name of God which describes the totality of his nature and appears 6828 times in the Old Testament; but *Yahweh* – or *Jehovah* – is often qualified by one particular aspect of his nature – for example:

- ◆ *Yahweh Yireh* – the Lord who provides, Genesis 22:14
- ◆ *Yahweh Rapha* – the Lord who heals, Exodus 15:26
- ◆ *Yahweh Nissi* – the Lord who is a battle ensign, Exodus 17:15
- ◆ *Yahweh M'qaddishkem* – the Lord who sanctifies, Exodus 31:13
- ◆ *Yahweh Shalom* – the Lord who sends peace, Judges 6:24
- ◆ *Yahweh Sabaoth* – the Lord of armies, 1 Samuel 1:3
- ◆ *Yahweh Rohi* – the Lord who is a shepherd, Psalm 23:1
- ◆ *Yahweh Tsidkenu* – the Lord who is righteousness, Jeremiah 23:6
- ◆ *Yahweh Shammah* – the Lord who is there, Ezekiel 48:35.

These names do not each describe a distinct God, they highlight the specific aspect of God's nature which is relevant to the particular situation. We can think of *Yahweh* as being rather like the *logos* of God, and the other 300 names as being like *rhema* of God: we see this link between the Word and the name of God in Psalm 138:2.

Each one of God's names and titles is completely consistent with the full nature of God. When he acts, for example, as *Yahweh Rapha* he is acting consistently with his nature as *Yahweh Shalom*, *Yahweh Rohi*, *Yahweh Yireh*, *Yahweh Shammah*, and so on.

It is the same with the *rhema* of God. By definition, every word from God is always completely consistent with both the full self-revelatory *logos* of God and also with every *rhema* of God.

Living Faith

This means that every individual message from God – every command, prophecy, promise, prompting and so on – is by nature always fully consistent with the whole *logos* of God, and also with every *rhema* word of God which has ever been uttered.

This shows how important it is to test everything that people claim as a word from God – and that it is not too difficult to test these words. If every genuine *rhema* word is a self-revelation of God, it means that every word must be consistent with all we know about God, all we know about Jesus, and with the full revelation of the Scriptures.

When God, by the Spirit, breathes or speaks his *rhema* word to us, it is as if he uses a divine 'highlighting pen'. By his *rhema* word, God underlines one aspect of his *logos* Word and reveals his 'now' word.

We see examples of a *rhema* word in: Matthew 4:4; 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 1:38; 2:29; 3:2; 5:5; 24:8; John 5:47; 6:63; 8:20; 8:47; 12:47–48; 14:10; 15:7; 17:8; Acts 2:14; 10:37; 11:16; Romans 10:8, 17–18; Ephesians 6:17; 1 Peter 1:25; Jude 1:17 & Revelation 17:17.

The Word of God

As we know that the Word of God, the Bible, is the foundation of faith, we should not find it surprising that the biblical teaching about the Word is particularly rich and varied. It would take several books to consider all the scriptural material about God's Word, and it will take us all eternity to explore and experience the full extent of the Word. We can, however, establish an overview which helps us to understand how the Word operates – and how to approach it and receive it with awe and enthusiasm.

The integrity of God's Word

Although 2 Timothy 3:16–17 does not use the phrase 'God's Word', it reveals that Scripture is God's Word by describing its

The foundation of faith

unique inspiration and authority. The Greek word *theopneustos* means ‘God breathed’ – expired rather than inspired – and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. This word shows us that the Scriptures are, in some special way, uniquely expired by God’s breath, by the Spirit.

Passages like Psalm 33:6 & 2 Peter 1:19–21 underline the truth that God’s Word always comes by the Spirit, by God’s breath. They also underline the fact that, because the Word is God-breathed, it is the very Word of God – it is ‘the breath of his lips’.

More importantly, by using the present tense – ‘is God-breathed’ rather than ‘was God-breathed’ – 2 Timothy 3:16 shows that the Scriptures were not merely breathed once-and-for-all when they were first written down, or when they were collected together. Instead, the Scriptures are also still being breathed by God to us today by the Spirit.

This means that the whole Bible is a living book for living faith, and not just a historical document for academic dissection. Of course, we must recognise that 2 Timothy 3:16–17 refers only to the Old Testament, for the New Testament had not then been written. But this teaching applies to the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 also points to the principle that living faith is built upon the foundation of the Word and involves works by showing that all Scripture – not just a few favoured passages – are meant to equip us for every good work.

We have noted that Psalm 119 is the only Old Testament passage to refer, like 2 Timothy 3:16–17, to the written Word of God. Verse 89 makes it clear that the written Word of God is eternal, and verse 160 stresses that it is true.

In Luke 21:33, Jesus promises that his *logos* words – the totality of Christ’s words – will never fade away. This shows us that his words are eternal and unchanging, but it also points us to the New Testament – for it is through the New Testament that his words have been preserved for all time.

Living Faith

The New Testament

In the first century after Christ's resurrection, many men of widely different backgrounds wrote down the story of Jesus as they understood it. They based their work on their memory, living eye witness testimony, oral tradition, other people's written records, and – in some cases – their sanctified imagination.

The documents we call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were not the only accounts of Jesus' life to circulate among early believers, but they were always pre-eminent. Most scholars believe that there was a gap of less than one generation between Pentecost and the writing of the first Gospel, and that most of Paul's letters were written before the Gospels. It seems that John's Gospel was the last to be written, and within a few decades an unknown Christian had gathered the four Gospels together and begun circulating them as one collection of four Gospels.

By AD 150, the four Gospels had been generally accepted as authoritative records of Christ's life, teaching and death, but it was another hundred years before they were formally recognised as the only authoritative accounts. Towards the end of the second century, churches in different parts of the world began to gather together the writings of the first century Christians. At first, there was a great deal of disagreement about some of the letters, especially James, Hebrews and Revelation; but there was total agreement about Matthew, Mark and Luke, and general agreement about John.

The task of the church was to discern which writings should be recognised as carrying the authority of the Scriptures. And a Gospel or letter was considered only when there was outstanding evidence that it had been written by an apostle or by a member of the apostolic circle.

During the third century, Eusebius, a church leader at that time, summarised Christian opinion by dividing Christian writings into three categories: those that were 'spurious', those that were 'disputed', and those that were 'acknowledged'.

The foundation of faith

The New Testament was finally fixed in AD 367 by the Eastern Church, in Athanasius' thirty-ninth Paschal letter; and in AD 397 by the Western Church, at the Council of Carthage. Both churches agreed that the twenty-seven books known today as the New Testament should be recognised as God's Word – as God-breathed, eternally unchanging, fully authoritative Scripture.

It is vital to recognise that the canon (that is, the books that we have in the Bible) was determined by God. Each book's authority was established by God and merely discovered by the early church leaders. However, we owe an eternal debt of gratitude to the early church leaders who prayed and studied and tested men's words to establish which writings carried divine authority as God's Word. Through their faith, industry and openness to the Spirit, Jesus' words really will never fade away.

The power of the Word

We have recognised that the Spirit and the Word work together, and that God's words are breathed and effected through the Spirit. We see this, for example, in Genesis 1:1–3; Psalm 33:6–9; John 6:63 & 2 Timothy 3:16.

When God breathes his Word, it is an expression of himself and is vested with his power and authority; it, therefore, will not fail to achieve its purpose. What God speaks will come to pass. We see the inherent divine power of the Word in 2 Chronicles 6:14–15; Isaiah 55:10–11 & Romans 4:18–21.

Hebrews 4:12 is a famous verse which describes the Word of God as living, active and sharper than any sword. This teaches that the Word is so powerful it does an inward and spiritual work in our lives.

- ◆ The Word exposes our thoughts and attitudes; it cuts through the 'appearance' of our outward behaviour to expose the 'substance' of our 'heart'.
- ◆ The Word penetrates into, and divides, or lays bare, our soul and spirit.

Living Faith

If we want our faith to develop, one of the most important things we can do is to allow God's Word to go beyond our souls and have access into our very spirits.

Many leaders disagree about the precise definitions of the human soul and spirit. The simplest way of understanding them is as follows:

1. Our 'soul' refers to our areas of intellect, will, motivation, reasoning, appreciation, emotion, feeling and the experience of our five 'natural' senses.

These soul areas often inhibit God's work. Reason, for example, rejects what it cannot understand; and our emotions, and what we perceive through our five senses, often contradict God's Word. Faith is not based in the human intellect, emotions or will. True faith includes these but operates out of the human spirit ignited by the Holy Spirit working in us.

2. Our 'spirit' refers to the area of our human personality which, once awakened by God, communes with God.

It is important we appreciate that the spirit is trans-rational, not irrational. When we pray in tongues, for example, our spirit prays but our soul does not understand what is happening.

Our spirits are more 'naturally' in tune with God's Word and are not as dominated by physical circumstances as our souls. Living faith develops as we allow our lives to be controlled more by our spirits than our souls.

Of course, our souls and spirits are not easily distinguishable as, together, they form the eternal element of our 'self'. It is the state of our spirit, however, which determines the eternal destiny of our 'self', not the condition of our soul.

This distinction underlines that hearing God's Word is much more than just reading the Scriptures with our minds. The truth is that we can read the Scriptures with our minds, or 'souls', and not hear God's Word, and not be built in faith and matured

in our spirit. As we see in the next part, 'listening faith' does involve reading and studying the Scriptures, but we must also allow God to speak his *rhema* word from his *logos* Word, and to apply it deep in our spirits.

The promises of the Word

In past generations, many Christian families possessed a 'promise box'. These contained a pair of tweezers and all the different scriptural promises, with each one printed on a small, individual piece of paper. Most people plucked a verse from the box each day, and deemed that to be God's word for them for that day.

The infinite grace of God means that he sometimes honoured these boxes and spoke powerfully to people through the words they read. But this is not how God intends us to use his Word.

There are many specific promises in the Scriptures, and God may highlight one to us at any time – by prompting us to recall it, for example, if we have read the Bible thoroughly, or by reading the promise at that time. It is more important here, however, to recognise the biblical promise that the whole *logos* Word of God ministers to us in a variety of ways.

For example, the Bible teaches that the Word brings:

- ◆ Faith – Romans 10:17
- ◆ New birth and new life – James 1:18 & 1 Peter 1:23
- ◆ Spiritual food – 1 Peter 2:1–2 & Matthew 4:4
- ◆ Revelation and direction – Psalm 119:105 & 130
- ◆ Cleansing and holiness – Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5:25–27; 2 Peter 1:1–4 & John 17:17
- ◆ Reward and blessing – Psalm 1:1–3 & 19:11
- ◆ Healing – Psalm 107:20
- ◆ Victory over sin – Psalm 17:4 & 119:11
- ◆ Victory over Satan – Luke 4:4, 8, 12; Ephesians 6:17; 1 John 2:14 & Revelation 12:11
- ◆ Freedom from judgement – John 5:24 & 12:47.

Living Faith

All these wonderful promises about the powerful effects of the Word of God are glorious aspects of living faith. God can use any element of his Word – Jesus, personally in the Spirit; or the Scriptures; or preaching and prophecy – to minister any of these promises to us.

We cannot do any of these things to or for ourselves, instead we need to respond to God's Word with the faith that the Word brings to receive the promise from God. In each of the next four parts, we consider the different elements of faith which enable us to experience these promises of the Word.

Part Five

Listening faith

Romans 10:17 teaches a basic faith principle, and demonstrates that faith first comes by hearing. Unless people hear the word of God, they will never believe in God and will never have living faith.

We have already seen that faith does not come by a human striving to believe; instead it comes from God as he works within us by the Word and the Spirit and helps us to believe. No matter how hard we try, we can never produce true faith by our own efforts.

Living faith begins when we hear God speak. This faith-hearing is not a vague awareness that God has spoken generally, it is an acknowledgement that God has spoken personally, intimately and directly to us – and so his word begins to work deep within us.

The faith-process

Many of the disagreements between leaders about the nature and working of faith stem from a failure to recognise that faith is a process.

Much teaching about faith identifies one element within the faith-process as true faith and overlooks the other elements. For example, the barren discussions about 'faith' and 'works' are largely based in the idea that 'believing-faith' and 'acting-faith' are two distinct activities rather than two inseparable aspects of living faith.

Although faith begins with hearing God's word, it does not end there. Faith continues alongside the full progression of the word as it works and develops in our lives – until the full process of faith is completed.

Living Faith

Each element in the faith-process is a different aspect of our response to the *rhema* word that we hear from God; and, at every stage in the process, the Holy Spirit works actively with the Word empowering us to respond with faith to God's purpose for our lives.

We can say that the faith-process involves:

- ◆ Hearing the word – Romans 10:17 shows how much attention we must give to listening out for God's word.
- ◆ Believing the word – Romans 10:10 suggests that believing means receiving the word deep into our beings so that it takes root in our hearts and affects the whole of our lives.
- ◆ Confessing the word – Romans 10:9 is an important promise which illustrates how faith influences what we say and enables us to begin to speak according to God's word.
- ◆ Doing the word – we have seen that there is an appropriate action for every confession of faith which must accompany and complete it – as in James 2:17–22.
- ◆ Standing firm on the word – we know that faith is tested by God to help it develop and mature. This requires us to stand firm on the promises of God's word: we can see this in James 1:3–4 & 1 Peter 1:6–7.
- ◆ Rejoicing in the word – the developing attitude of faith is reflected in the positive outlook set out in 1 Peter 1:8. This attitude is characterised by genuine thanksgiving for what God has done, is doing and will do – as in Psalm 50:14, 15, 23 & 106:12.
- ◆ Persevering in the word – the faith-process is completed when we continue to cling to the truth of God's *rhema* word until it has been fulfilled, as in Hebrews 6:11–12; 10:35–36 & James 1:4–7.

Listening for God's word

The first and foundational element of the faith-process is listening for God's word; and we do this by giving God our attention, by making time to listen to him and to read his Scriptures.

We fully consider this aspect of the Christian life in the volume *Listening to God*, and we touch on it in almost every other book in this *Sword of the Spirit* series. Listening to God, hearing his word, recognising his promptings, discerning the Spirit's directings – no matter how we describe it – this spiritual discipline is fundamental to every aspect of our individual and corporate Christian lives.

The prophets

Although we learn from every part of the Old Testament, the prophets are particularly relevant because they were the special few who were anointed with the Spirit and who ministered in and with the Spirit. Listening to God was the basis of all the Old Testament prophets' lives and service, and the principles they followed remain fundamental to the living and serving today of all believers who are likewise anointed with the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament suggests that the prophets heard God speak to them in four main ways.

1. *The word of God*

Amos 3:8 shows that 'the word of God' had a dynamic impact upon the prophets. As we have seen, the Old Testament insists that the word 'came to' the prophets. This expression describes an internal, growing awareness of God's message which developed in the prophets' minds over a period of time – as in Zechariah 1:1 & 7.

Jeremiah 1:11; 18:1–4; 24:1–10 & Amos 7:7 show that God sometimes used quite ordinary events to speak his word to the prophets. It seems that God often unveiled his word in the intimacy of private fellowship with his servants, rather than through sudden flashes of illumination. This is listening for the

Living Faith

word through meditation, reflection, observation, reading and studying the Scriptures.

2. The burden of God

Habakkuk 1:1 refers to the *massa* of the Lord. Some translations render this Hebrew word as 'message' or 'oracle', but it literally means a 'load' or 'burden'. It shows that God allowed the prophet to feel what he was feeling about a particular matter.

This refers to an internal growing awareness of God's concern about a specific matter, person or group of people. We see this in Isaiah 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1 & Jeremiah 23:33–40.

3. The Spirit of God

Throughout this series, we have seen that the Bible teaches there is a very strong link between the Spirit and prophetic activity. We see this, for example, in Numbers 11:29 & 1 Samuel 10.

In the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 19:18–24 shows that the descent of the Spirit led to a spontaneous speaking of God's words; Micah 3:8 suggests that the Spirit both inspired the prophets and gave them the necessary courage to speak the revelation that they heard; and Joel 2:28 makes it clear that receiving the Spirit should result in the activity of speaking God's words, to particular people, in God's power.

This refers to an instant hearing of God's word which is for immediate confessing and acting. Sometimes it came to the prophets as an external audible voice, but was also, and perhaps more frequently, an internal 'hearing' of the voice of the Spirit in their hearts.

4. Dreams, visions and angels

The Scriptures record that prophets often heard God's word through visions by day and dreams by night – as in Numbers 12:6; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 12:8; Daniel 7:1 & Zechariah 1:8. And,

on rare occasions, angels were sent to prophets with God's word, for example, 2 Kings 1:3–15; 1 Chronicles 21:18; Daniel 9:21 & Zechariah 1:9.

Hearing today

All these four prophetic ways of hearing God's word are still relevant to anointed believers today. As we live in the Spirit, so we also become aware of God's specific word or message to us as it develops in us over a period of time. We can say that we may 'hear' God's word while we are worshipping, listening to preaching, reading the Bible, meditating, praying, looking at creation like Abraham, and when we are just out-and-about in the world like Jeremiah.

What seems to happen is that the Spirit supernaturally highlights to us something like a sentence in a sermon, a verse in a hymn, a phrase in a prayer, a passage in the Bible, a message from God, and so on. Through these means, the Spirit goes on patiently and persistently drawing our attention to God's *rhema* word for us until we really 'hear' it, recognise it as God's Word, and respond with faith.

But 'hearing God's word' is not restricted to receiving messages from God through the Scriptures, teaching, natural events and prophecy. We know that Jesus himself is God's *logos* Word, and hearing him clearly and consistently involves establishing and developing an intimate personal relationship with him.

When we go on clinging to Jesus, we gradually become aware – like the Old Testament prophets – of his special concerns and burdens. By the Spirit, Jesus slowly reveals to us those particular elements of his concerns that he wants us to deal with by faith.

Just as God has specific 'words' for different people, so his *massa* burden may vary from person to person and church to church. This is the starting point of faith, as we become aware of God's message or concern, but then we need to allow the Word and the Spirit to develop this faith towards completion – until the word is fulfilled and the burden accomplished.

Living Faith

We do not always 'hear' God's word by becoming aware of it gradually. Sometimes we hear his word clearly and instantly, almost audibly, when God speaks to us in our spirits by the Holy Spirit. Like the Old Testament prophets, our anointing with the Spirit and our intimate relationship with God means that there are times when God's word is more like thunder than a whisper. We must not expect God always to speak this clearly, but we must not doubt him when he does.

Joel 2:28 states that God will still speak to his people through dreams and visions when his Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, and Acts 9:10; 10:3; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9 & 18:9 illustrate the truth of this prophecy. At times, God does speak his word to some believers through dreams and visions, but our minds need to be cleansed and renewed for us to hear God's word clearly in this way.

'Faith-hearing' is the simple act of responding to what God is saying, irrespective of the manner in which God chooses to speak to us. We 'faith-hear' God's word in the same way when God speaks to us through a dream, or the Scriptures, or a work of art, or a sermon, and so on.

If God has not spoken, there can be no real hearing and no genuine faith. As all true faith comes from God, it is the nature of living faith to focus on what God has said rather than on human ideas or desires. 'Selfish' or 'self-centred' faith is not true faith, and we must be wary of any teaching which concentrates on obtaining things from God.

The cross-life

In Luke 8:4–15, Jesus likens the word of God to a seed and the human 'heart' to soil. This image reinforces the concept of the word 'coming' to us rather than of us 'turning' to the word. In this parable, we see that the soil must be fertile if the seed is to be productive – if it is to become 'mature' and achieve its purpose. This suggests that the word of God must be received into lives which are ready to allow the word to bear its own

fruit for God, rather than into lives which are seeking to reap the word for any selfish end.

We must recognise and remember that the incorruptible, living seed of the Word cannot be perverted, altered or manipulated into something which it was never intended to be.

The faith of Jesus

Galatians 2:20 demonstrates that our life of faith begins with the cross. This is an important verse, and it is one of ten New Testament passages where 'faith' is followed by a grammatical construction called 'the genitive' which refers to Jesus. The verses are: Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 2:16 (occurs twice), 20; 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; Philippians 3:9; James 2:1; Revelation 2:13 & 14:12.

This construction is naturally translated as 'faith of Jesus', but most versions of the Bible render it as 'faith in Jesus'. Many leaders insist that these passages point to the faith that we exercise rather than to the faith of Jesus. There are, however, 44 verses in the New Testament which use the genitive construction in relation to faith and a human person, and every one of these is translated as meaning 'faith of the person' – for example, Matthew 9:2, 22, 29; Mark 10:52; Luke 22:32 & Romans 4:16. As not one of these 44 instances is translated 'faith in the person', it seems more likely that the eleven passages about Jesus refer to his faith rather than to our faith in him.

Furthermore, there are 32 occasions in Paul's letters when faith is followed by a genitive construction. Twenty of these refer to the faith of a Christian, one to the faith of God, two to the faith of Abraham, and one to anyone who has their faith reckoned as righteousness. As all of these are translated 'faith of', it is probable that the other eight passages also refer to the faith 'of' Jesus.

There are many more excellent biblical and grammatical reasons why it seems likely that these ten passages point to our faith being sourced in and anchored to Jesus' faith. This idea is

Living Faith

particularly clear in Galatians 2:20, which bases everything in Christ. This verse clearly points to *his* death, *his* life, *his* love and *his* giving, so it surely makes most sense to admit that it is also referring to *his* faith.

We have already recognised that faith comes from God; these verses – and others, like Mark 11:22, Romans 3:3 & Colossians 2:12, which use ‘the genitive’ to point to the faith of God – underline this truth and reveal that the faith God gives us is drawn from his faith. This should not surprise us, for we know that all the gifts we receive from God are, in some way, aspects of his nature. If we do not find it difficult to accept the ideas of loving with the love of God, serving with the power of God and ministering with the gifts of God, we should not find it hard to accept that we are also called to believe with the faith of God.

Self-death

Galatians 2:20 shows that we need to reach the place where we can say with honesty that we have been crucified with Christ – and that we are depending on his life, his love, *his faith* and his sacrifice. We must recognise, however, that we will not be fully released into a life of faith until we have been crucified with him.

Crucifixion with Christ means that all the inner passions and desires that the Bible calls ‘the flesh’ have been put to death – as in Romans 6:6. This frees us from the world’s pressures and constraints which try to make us conform to its standards and values. This self-death to ‘the flesh’ and ‘the world’ is vitally important for the life of faith, and we need to share in Paul’s Galatians 6:14 prayer if we are to progress in the faith-process. We are able to follow God’s desires, rather than our self-centred demands, only when we are dominated by the cross-life.

Resurrection relationship

Galatians 2:20 reminds us that, in Christ, resurrection always follows on from crucifixion. We will know that we are beginning to move into the realm of faith when we can say this verse with passion and truth. Living faith is experiencing the resurrection life, power, love and faith of Christ deep within us.

This reminds us that faith is a cross relationship not a crass formula. We must ensure that we never forget that 'hearing the Word' means hearing a person not reading a rule-book; it is listening to God, not looking in a book for a law to follow, not even for a law of faith.

Galatians 2:20 describes a life of faith which is based in a relationship of simple trust to the Son of God. This is possible only because of what Jesus has done in loving and giving himself for 'me' – which must be just about the highest possible expression of God's love.

John 3:16 describes God's love for the world, and Ephesians 5:27 records Christ's love for the Church. But Galatians 2:20 is as personal as possible and reveals that God loved 'me' and gave himself for 'me'. It is our 'hearing' of this foundation truth by the Spirit living in us which releases us more deeply into the faith-process.

Living faith develops when we hear, when we deeply grasp and realise, that God is genuinely, favourably disposed to us – and that he could never be more in favour of us than he is at this moment.

The faith-process – which we can think of as our life of faith – commences when we 'hear' that God is totally for us, and that his grace is available to lift us, to strengthen us, and to release us into his purpose for our lives.

The Spirit of faith

Galatians 2:20 is one of a tiny group of verses which are responsible for the evangelical and pentecostal emphasis on 'receiving Jesus into our hearts' and 'Jesus living in our hearts'. We need to recognise, however, that the wider New Testament emphasis is overwhelmingly on us living 'in Christ'.

We know that, physically, Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of the Father, and that he is only 'in us' spiritually by the Spirit. Galatians 2:20 refers to the presence of Christ in our lives through the Holy Spirit – who empowers and equips us

Living Faith

for a life of faith because he is ‘the Spirit of faith’ described in 2 Corinthians 4:13.

The Holy Spirit must be involved if faith comes by hearing and seeing the Word, for the Spirit and the Word belong together. We have seen that the Word comes from God on the breath of God; and, in John 6:63, Jesus claims that his *rhema* words are spirit and life – which means that we must have the Spirit when we have the word.

We see this relationship in 2 Corinthians 1:20–22. Some translations of the Bible suggest that Christ is both the ‘Yes’ and ‘Amen’ to all God’s promises. But several modern translations help us to understand the Greek more accurately. Verse 20 actually states that the ‘Yes’ to all God’s promises is found in Christ, and that ‘through him’ we answer ‘Amen’ to give praise to God. Verses 21–22 then show that God has given us a place in Christ and the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.

This means that God has spoken his promises to us, and that Christ has come to us as the witness and fulfilment of the promises. The Spirit in our hearts then causes us to add the ‘Amen’ of faith – to line us up with Christ and the Word, and to live in agreement with the promises.

This is why, as in Acts 6:5, the life of faith is presented as a Spirit-directed life: these are merely two different ways of expressing the same reality. Living faith is produced in us by the Spirit of faith who works in us alongside the Word of God. When we hear the Spirit we see the Word. When we see the Word we hear the Spirit. No matter how we describe it, the result is always the same – the beginnings and development of faith.

We see in *Knowing the Spirit* that it is the Spirit who enables us to hear the Word, who provides us with the power to respond in faith, and who keeps our faith alive – as we embrace his presence in our lives. As we live in and with the Spirit, so we should listen to him and attend to his promptings; and we consider these in almost every book in this *Sword of the Spirit* series. We know that living faith is not based in our

emotions, intellect or will. True faith includes these, but it operates essentially from our spirits as the Word of God is ignited by the Spirit's work in us.

We must *all* be ready to hold out for the genuine working of the Word in our hearts by faith. Since Pentecost, God's work on earth is done by all believing people, not just by a few special men and women. This means that the whole believing community of God's people must move forward in the faith-process to fulfil the will of God.

We all need to open our ears and hearts to the Word, and to allow the Spirit to pour God's faith into us, so that we can develop genuine lives of living faith in the Church. Quite simply, we need to know Jesus as the author of our faith – and, therefore, we need to make listening to him our priority. This will not happen by human struggling and striving, but by clinging to Jesus – by taking his hand and trusting him as he leads us into his life of faith.

Living Faith

Part Six

Seed-faith

Many modern 'believers' appear to have a rather vague and incomplete understanding of faith. They seem to think that 'faith' is simply the act of believing, and that – therefore – the content of their faith is not particularly important. Like so many people today, they value sincerity without realising that there is no merit in being sincerely mistaken.

Contemporary western society is full of people who have faith in human ideas, and who believe in their personal dreams. As Christian believers, however, we are not free to invent the content of living faith – for our faith involves believing only what God says, not what we dream in our minds or borrow from other people.

When we genuinely hear God's word, we must either believe or disbelieve what he has said. If we reject or ignore or adjust God's word to us, it means that we are trusting our own thoughts and opinions.

The faith-process begins when we hear God's word, but living faith then develops in three parallel ways – by *believing* God's word, by *confessing* his word, and by *acting* on his word. These are not a series of steps of faith which lead on from one to another; they are complementary aspects of faith which co-exist alongside each other.

The seed of faith

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus likens faith to a tiny mustard seed. Using this image of faith, we can say that we receive God's 'seed of faith' when we hear his word, but that the seed remains dormant until we take it deeply into the soil of our lives and allow it to grow.

Living Faith

It is important we recognise that this small 'faith-seed' does not grow into a bigger and bigger seed, which eventually becomes an enormous seed of faith. Instead it matures by developing into a 'faith-plant' which involves a root, a stem and leaves.

The seed does not first change into a full-grown root, which later adds a mature stem, and then develops perfect leaves. Instead, the root, stem and leaves go on developing alongside each other until the plant has matured enough to bear fruit.

In the same way, 'belief', 'confession' and 'actions' are parallel elements of the faith-process which develop together from the seed-faith we receive through hearing and seeing God's word, into the complete-faith God intends for us.

Although we will examine these elements of faith independently in consecutive chapters, we must continually recognise that – in reality – the elements are fully interwoven with each other within the faith-process. As with the root, the stem and the leaves in a living plant, so 'believing-faith', 'confessing-faith' and 'faith-actions' mutually nourish and support each other to allow living faith to develop to completion.

Believing the Word

We have seen that God's *rhema* words are always fully consistent with his *logos* Word. They are all based in Jesus and conform with his nature, and they are all founded on scriptural principles and agree with God's total self-revelation through the Word and the Spirit.

This means that all God's faith-plans for us are based in the promises which God has recorded in the Bible, and that they are all rooted in the person and nature of Christ. Believing-faith is simply believing – completely trusting – God's self-revelation in and through the Word.

2 Peter 1:1–4 illustrates this by teaching that God has given us many precious promises, and that they have all come to us by Christ's own righteousness. This underlines the principle

that biblical promises are made available through Jesus' faith – his actions, obedience and death – demonstrating that living faith is not about believing just anything, it is about believing what has been revealed in Jesus: we must never forget that God's blessings are available only in and through him.

God's name

Living faith is not merely believing in God, it is believing the right things about God – it is trusting that God is who he says he is, that he is the sort of God he has revealed himself to be.

In the Bible, the name of a person reveals their nature, and God's nature is revealed through his more than 300 names. These are often summarised in the phrase 'the name', and we are often encouraged to be 'in God's name' – as in Matthew 18:20. This means that we enter fully into, and completely depend on, what God has revealed about himself through his name.

The Bible teaches that God's name is full of power, which is why Jews never dared utter the name *Yahweh* – even though they were urged to glory in this name in 1 Chronicles 16:10. We see this power in passages like Exodus 9:16 & Acts 4:30.

In particular, the Bible stresses the absolute power of God's name:

- ◆ To heal – Acts 3:6–16; 4:10–18 & James 5:14
- ◆ To defeat and destroy the enemy – 1 Samuel 17:43–51; Psalm 60:12; 91:13; 108:13; 118:10–13; Zechariah 10:5–12; Mark 16:17; Acts 16:18; 19:13 & Romans 16:20
- ◆ To protect – 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 20:1; 91; 124; Proverbs 18:10; Isaiah 26:4 & John 17:11–12.

This means it has been revealed in God's Word that it is basic to God's nature to heal, to defeat and to protect. Living faith, therefore, means fully trusting that our God is a healing God, that he is a protecting God, that he does overcome our enemies, and so on.

Living Faith

After *Yahweh*, God's second most common biblical name is *Elohim*. This is used 2,550 times, and refers to 'the one to whom all power belongs'. *Elohim*, and its shortened form *El*, are qualified in many ways to reveal different facets of God's powerful nature. For example:

- ◆ *Elohim Qodesh* – the holy, Joshua 24:19 & Isaiah 57:15
- ◆ *Elohim Tsur Yesha* – the rock of salvation, 2 Samuel 22:47
- ◆ *Elohim Tsur Israel* – the rock of Israel, 2 Samuel 23:3
- ◆ *Elohim Maoz* – the shelter, Psalm 43:2
- ◆ *Elohim Melek* – the king, Psalm 44:4
- ◆ *Elohim Olam* – the everlasting, Isaiah 40:28
- ◆ *Elohim Erets* – the God of the whole earth, Isaiah 54:5
- ◆ *Elohim Magen* – the shield, Psalm 84:9
- ◆ *Elohim Machseh Metsudah* – the refuge and fortress, Psalm 91:2
- ◆ *Elohim Emeth* – the truth, Jeremiah 10:10
- ◆ *El Elyon* – the most high, Genesis 14:19
- ◆ *El Roi* – the all-seeing, Genesis 16:13
- ◆ *El Shaddai* – the almighty provider, Genesis 17:1
- ◆ *El Qanna* – the jealous, Exodus 20:5
- ◆ *El Channun Rachum* – the merciful and gracious, Nehemiah 9:31
- ◆ *El Gibbur* – the mighty, Nehemiah 9:32
- ◆ *El Aman* – the faithful, Deuteronomy 7:9
- ◆ *El Emunah* – the reliable, Deuteronomy 32:4
- ◆ *El Chay* – the living, Joshua 3:10
- ◆ *El Deah* – the all-knowing, 1 Samuel 2:3

- ◆ *El Yeshua* – the salvation, Psalm 68:19
- ◆ *El Moshaoth* – the deliverer, Psalm 68:20
- ◆ *El Asah Pele* – the wonder worker, Psalm 77:14
- ◆ *El Shamayim* – the heavenly, Psalm 136:26
- ◆ *El Tsaddiq* – the just, Isaiah 45:21
- ◆ *Elah Elahin* – the God of gods, Daniel 2:47

These names, and many more, reveal differing aspects of the nature of the all-powerful God who speaks to us, they show us what God is like and what he typically promises to do. We know that God's words are always consistent with his revealed nature, and so we are called to believe the content of what he says because it comes from who he is.

Living faith is based in God's *rhema* word, but it develops when we actively trust that word because we are persuaded that it comes from *Elohim Yahweh* – from the Lord God who is like his Word, and who consistently acts like his words.

We can say that believing-faith is clinging to the particular name of God which most closely coincides with the word he has spoken. This understanding helps us to grasp that living faith is a relationship with the living God and that we develop faith by getting to know God more intimately.

Jesus' name

As all God's names are revelations of his infinite faithful nature, we can say that they are all perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. It is he who has perfectly accomplished God's salvation for us by achieving the three fundamental functions of the name – our eternal healing and protection, and the defeat of our enemy.

Because of this, Philippians 2:9–11 shows that God has awarded Jesus the name which is above every name. It is this name, and only in this name, that we can now come and enjoy the promises of God's Word. We see this in 2 Corinthians 1:20.

In the Old Testament, many titles prophetically point to the name and nature of Jesus. For example:

Living Faith

- ◆ The Shiloh – Genesis 49:10
- ◆ The Star and Sceptre – Numbers 24:17
- ◆ The Prophet – Deuteronomy 18:15–19
- ◆ The Anointed – 1 Samuel 2:10 & 35
- ◆ The Mediator – Job 33:23
- ◆ The Rejected Stone – Psalm 118:22
- ◆ The Wisdom – Proverbs 8:22–31
- ◆ The Beloved – Song of Solomon 1:16
- ◆ The Branch of *Yahweh* – Isaiah 4:2
- ◆ The Immanuel – Isaiah 7:14
- ◆ The Wonderful Counsellor – Mighty God – Eternal Father – Prince of Peace – Isaiah 9:6
- ◆ The Servant – Isaiah 42:1
- ◆ The Man of Sorrows – Isaiah 53:3.

Revelation 19:11–16 reveals that Jesus is also known by the names:

- ◆ Faithful and True
- ◆ The Word of God
- ◆ King of Kings
- ◆ Lord of Lords.

Revelation 19:12 also states that he has a name which is known by nobody but himself. This suggests that there are wonders and depths to his nature which will take us eternity to explore and enjoy.

Jesus' righteousness

When God speaks to us, it is with words of grace and love, of promise and blessing. And his *rhema* words of blessing bring with them the necessary seed of God's faith which develops into the faith we need to experience the blessing.

We must remember, however, that God can bless us only through the righteousness of Jesus – as we have none of our

own. Because Jesus was without sin and lived without sinning, he perfectly fulfilled God's righteousness. This rightness, Jesus' righteousness, is now freely available to us through his sacrificial death at Calvary. We can say that the cross is God's key which unlocks the door of the storehouse of God's blessing.

We can say that all the promised blessings of God are available to us through Jesus' faith – his actions, obedience and death. We can say that we can obtain every divine promise, every *rhema* word, by living faith in Jesus – into and upon his holy, faith-filled name and nature.

Just as, in Matthew 13:19, an enemy tries to snatch the word of the kingdom which is sown in the heart, so the same enemy tries to ensure that the seed of faith remains dormant in our lives. Many 'believers' hear God's gracious word to them, and then hear the enemy's suggestion that they do not deserve it. This evil suggestion is not another demonic lie, for none of us do deserve anything from God except judgement. Our personal worthiness, however, is not the basis on which God gives or we receive. Instead, he gives because his divine nature is gracious, loving and merciful; and we receive because Jesus' atoning death has provided us with unlimited access to the grace of God. We all are too unworthy to receive even the tiniest divine promise, but we have received Christ's own righteousness, and – in him – *all* the promises of God to us are 'Yes' and 'Amen'.

Yet the enemy does not give up. His next tactic is to try and persuade Christian believers that they will never have enough faith to receive a significant blessing from God. The enemy's success with this tactic is seen by the widespread acceptance in the Church of the mistaken idea that great faith is needed to receive from God. It is a terrible distortion of divine truth to suggest that the promised blessings of God's name and nature, which have been made freely available in Christ, are – in fact – withheld by God because of the smallness of our faith.

The devil has convinced many people that it would require far more faith than they could ever possess to see God's

Living Faith

promises fulfilled in their lives. But this conviction is based on the error that we create our own faith, whereas the truth is that we obtain it from God. If we really had to summon up the faith to receive from God, we would not be able to manage it. Throughout this book, however, we have seen that God graciously gives us a seed of his faith – and this living, mustard seed faith is entirely sufficient.

2 Peter 1:1 is an important verse which underlines the truth that precious faith is obtained, not created or self-manufactured, and that it is obtained by the righteousness of Jesus. More importantly, it reminds us that the faith we obtain from God today is exactly the same as the faith which Peter obtained in his day – because it all comes from the faith of Jesus.

The faith which Peter, and the other believers of his generation, received to obtain the promises of God is exactly the same type of faith as we receive from God today. We must not think or teach that we need a greater faith than we have, for this suggests that the faith which God has given us is faulty. Instead, we simply need to accept that the faith God has given us is adequate, and to use it by believing, confessing and acting on the truth that *Elohim Yahweh* will act according to his nature and Word.

Levels of faith

Yet though it is clearly not about the quantity of our faith, we must appreciate that the Bible speaks about levels of faith: little faith, great faith and even mature or perfect faith. On many occasions Jesus marvelled at the unbelief of his disciples, such as in Matthew 8:26 where he rebuked them with the phrase 'O you of little faith'. Here, Jesus was not so much referring to the size of their faith, but rather to the undeveloped seed of faith which – because it was not developed – caused them to listen to the voice of fear and not the words of Jesus.

This description of weak or faltering faith may be applied to many Christians today. Many of us live roller-coaster lives – when things are going well we are praising God and full of faith, but when we encounter the slightest difficulty we allow

everything to cave in, and the first thing to go is our faith in God. But we must remember that our faith is not founded on circumstances but on the Word of God which lives and abides for ever, as we can see from Isaiah 40:8. When we face difficulties, this is the precise time that God is calling us to believe him in a strong way, expecting him to fulfil his word to us and all the time growing in faith.

The opposite of weak faith is great faith. Jesus said of the centurion in Matthew 8:10, 'I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel'. He said of the Gentile woman of Canaan, 'O woman, great is your faith. Let it be as you desire'. What was it about these two individuals that caused Jesus to comment on their 'great faith'? We see a recognition on the part of the centurion as to who Jesus was and the power of his word to heal, even at a distance. We can see that the Canaanite woman would not be put off and was persistent. Refusing to be discouraged and holding on to the principle that God was willing to bless, she just was not going to take 'No' for an answer. This is the essence of great faith. And as a result, both the centurion's servant and the woman's daughter were healed 'at that very hour'.

As we go through the New Testament, we find that there is yet a further level of faith: perfect or mature faith. This is the kind of faith that moves mountains, overcomes obstacles, is triumphant through trials and holds on, not weakened by circumstances, but presses through for as long as is necessary to receive the answer from God. This is breakthrough faith, and is what Jesus is referring to in Mark 11:22 when he says, 'Have faith in God' or better, 'Have the faith of God'. Here we see perfect faith at work. It has the power to move mountains and yet, as Matthew 17:20 shows, it is only mustard seed faith. The emphasis is on the quality of faith, not on how much faith we can muster up ourselves. This is because it is the God-kind of faith, the faith that God gives through his Spirit which is perfect, powerful and pure, not mixed with doubt or supposition but clinging to the revealed will of God.

Living Faith

Believing the promises

2 Peter 1:3–4 explains that, as a result of the work of Christ, God has made provision for our every conceivable need. This means that there is no situation we can face for which God has not already made provision. As God is the all-powerful *Elohim* and the all-providing *El Shaddai* that we have considered, this should not surprise us.

In fact, God's personal name *Yahweh*, 'I am who I am', or, 'I will be what I will be', means that God will himself be whatever his people need in order to meet that need. This is exactly what he has done for us in Christ, and is why 2 Peter 1:4 describes receiving the promises as partaking in God's nature.

Life and godliness

2 Peter 1:3 promises God's provision through his power for everything we need for *zoe* and *eusebeia*, for 'life' and 'godliness'. In the New Testament, *zoe* usually refers to spiritual life – in contrast to *bios*, physical life. This is the life that God has within himself, which he gave to the incarnate Jesus, and which Jesus revealed in the world: we see this in, for example, John 5:26 & 1 John 1:2.

According to John 3:15, *zoe* is the life of which we partake through faith in Jesus; and Acts 3:15 shows that Jesus is the author of this type of life to all who trust in him. Colossians 3:4 describes Jesus as the *zoe* of believers, and John 6:35 & 63 teach that Jesus goes on maintaining the *zoe* life that he gives.

All this suggests that God's provision for 'life and godliness' is actually Jesus himself – hence the reference to partaking of the divine nature. As we have seen, the promises of God are not something independent of God and exterior to him, they are aspects of his name and nature and can only be received and experienced in Christ.

This is what Peter means when he speaks of God's Word as 'seed'. Just as a seed carries within itself all the capacities and attributes relating to the plant to which it belongs, so God's Word, his seed carries all the capacities, characteristics and

attributes of God himself. God's seed carries his very nature and, by faith, we receive the seed of the Word into the soil of our hearts, and this in turn, grows and brings the fruit of God's life in the world. That's how we experience God and his blessings in our lives, and that's how by faith we become partakers of the divine nature.

When Peter says that we have received 'like precious faith' as the apostles of the first century, he means that we have the same Word they had and, if we receive this into our hearts, we can experience the same manifestations of God – the signs, wonders and miracles – that they saw in their lifetimes. Seed-faith is faith which receives the seed of God's Word and which cultivates that seed into a fruitful plant. The seed, or promises of God's Word, which Peter describes as 'exceedingly great and precious' and, as we have seen, carry in themselves the promise of God's own very nature.

This means that, when God promises something to us, he is promising *himself* to us. We can truly say that, in Christ, *Yahweh* is whatever his people need in order to meet that need. Believing-faith is no more – and no less – than trusting the revealed nature of God. In Christ, the Word of God releases within us the power to live the life God provides, and everything we need to develop this life is contained in the promises of God.

2 Peter 1:3 promises that God has given us not only spiritual 'life', but also 'godliness' – the outworking of this life. *Eusebeia*, godliness, refers to an attitude towards God which thinks and does only whatever is pleasing to him. It means thinking and acting like God in every situation – and God's promises enable us to be truly godlike at all times.

Obtaining the promises

God's promises are fully intertwined with living faith, for they are a vital source of faith, a means of developing faith, and the goal of faith. Faith operates on, around and through the promises of the Word, and we must know how to grasp hold of them.

Living Faith

1. Find the promises

When believers do not know the revealed names of God, and do not know the permanent written promises of God, it is difficult for them to act on them and derive faith from them. This means that we need to search the Scriptures for God's names and promises, to read and remember them, and to receive them into our lives and begin to ask for their fulfilment by God. We need to do this personally, by reading and studying God's Word for ourselves, and not by trying to take any supposed short-cuts.

2. Believe the promises

It is not enough merely to read the names and promises, and to know them in only an academic or intellectual way. We also need them to be deeply inscribed in our hearts. Believing the promises means trusting them fully, it means being persuaded that they really are true for us personally. Many people believe that God is love, but are far from sure that he genuinely and deeply loves them. We need to move on from the general theory to the personal application. We do this by developing an intimate, trusting relationship with God and depending more and more on his revealed nature and Word.

3. Fulfil the conditions

God wants us to believe in him in a way which means we align our thoughts and actions to his will so that he personally rules in our lives. Most of his promises are conditional in some way. For example, the promises of Luke 11:9–10 are conditional on persistently asking, seeking and knocking – we cannot claim the promise if we merely ask once and then wait for the answer. And the promise of 'all these things shall be added to you' in Luke 12:31 is conditional on seeking the kingdom, on not seeking material things, and on not being anxious about them.

In many places, the condition is implied. For example, the wonderful promises of Psalm 23 depend on the Lord being 'my' shepherd. We cannot claim the benefits of verses 2–6 unless we are being shepherded – being ruled, guided, protected and provided for – exclusively by God.

4. *Receive the promises*

We have seen that faith is a relationship with the Word which develops like a tender plant from a seed. This means that we do not receive the promises from God in the way we obtain something from a machine. The 'believing' element of the faith-process does not simply involve finding a relevant promise or name of God, fulfilling the appropriate conditions, and believing that God will fulfil it. We have already seen that God tests our faith both to prove that it is genuine and also to develop it. And we know that the enemy persistently and aggressively opposes all developing faith.

To receive God's promises, we need to persist in our belief, to go on clinging to Jesus, to keep on depending on God's faithfulness. We need to be determined to press on in faith until we receive God's promise.

God's Word contains vast areas of promise for us to explore and inherit. God is beckoning us forward to receive him and to receive from him. Most believers rejoice in the initial benefits of salvation, but God longs for us to all to go deeper into him and to share his blessings which cover the rest of life.

We should not search for what God has not promised, and we must not disregard what he has promised. As we get to know him better, in all the richness of his name and nature, we will develop believing-faith in his gracious character and will go on to receive his *rhema* words for his whole range of promises in his *logos* Word.

Living Faith

Part Seven

Confessing faith

We have seen that confession, or confessing-faith, is an indispensable element of living faith which should exist and develop alongside believing-faith and acting-faith. We do not believe to create confession, or confess to create belief; instead they both develop together from the seed-faith that we receive from God through hearing his word. We see this association in Romans 10:10.

The popular prayer of Psalm 19:14, which is offered to God at the start of so many sermons, illustrates the importance of holding 'the words of our mouth' and 'the meditations of our hearts' together. We should confess what we believe and believe what we confess: neither is more important than the other; both must be in place for living faith to develop to completion.

Joshua 1:8 shows that acting-faith must also be added to confession and belief. God told Joshua that his word must be in Joshua's mouth, and that he must meditate on God's word continually – we can think of these as 'confession' and 'belief'. But this was not enough, and God also instructed Joshua to act on his word.

We will consider this acting-faith element in the next section, but here we focus on the confessing-faith element of living faith – on ensuring that God's word really is in our mouths.

The power of the tongue

We have seen that living faith is inextricably linked with the Word of God, that the Word comes from the Father on the breath of God, and that our faith comes from God himself. If God's faith involves the speaking of his Word, and his gift of faith is wrapped in the speaking of his Word, we should surely expect that his faith in us will involve us in speaking his Word.

Living Faith

We have learnt that the Greek word *homologeō*, which is translated as 'confession' throughout the New Testament, literally means 'to speak the same thing'. This means that confessing-faith is 'speaking the same words' as God speaks.

We know that we receive God's seed-faith when we hear his Word. This seed-faith develops into the mature, fruitful plant of living faith when we believe what we hear God speak without altering his words in any way, and when we speak God's words with faith without adjusting or qualifying his *rhema* word to us.

The Bible repeatedly stresses the power of the tongue for both good and evil. We can see this, for example, in passages like James 3:1–12 & Proverbs 18:21. And we consider this particularly carefully in Part Ten of *Ministry in the Spirit* when we examine the biblical teaching on speaking with prophetic authority.

Words are not just sounds, they carry the meaning and intention of the speaker and have more power than we realise. Our words – our confession – can build people up and tear them down; they can curse and they can bless; they can encourage and hurt; they can minister life and they can minister death. What we say influences events and affects other people; therefore, as believers, we should surrender our tongues to the Holy Spirit and allow him to direct our speaking.

Throughout this *Sword of the Spirit* series, we have continually stressed the prophetic streak which runs through biblical Christianity. Whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon people, he enables them to speak God's words – he provides them with both the words to say and the power to speak them in God's authority. We see this prophetic principle in the lives of all the Old Testament prophets, in incidents like Numbers 11:24–30; 1 Samuel 10:6; Luke 1:67–79, and – most clearly of all – at Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts.

This principle is extremely relevant to the confessing element of faith. Not only does God in his grace provide us through his spoken word with the seed-faith we need to receive his

promises, he also gives us his Spirit to help us to speak his words; this confession develops and strengthens our faith towards maturity.

God's Word

We know that God's words have immense power. He speaks, and it happens: we see this in Creation, and in passages like 2 Chronicles 6:15; Isaiah 55:10–11 & Hebrews 4:12.

Whenever God speaks, he has complete faith that his words will be effective. We can say that he 'believes' in what he says and in his power to fulfil his words, that he 'speaks' or 'confesses' his words, and that he 'acts' according to his words. The three basic elements of living faith are always present whenever God speaks.

God never makes great promises which are beyond his ability to keep. His words always reflect his nature and power. This is why we can say that he is always 'faith-full', for he is completely confident in his word and in his own ability to fulfil it.

When God speaks his word, he calls us to confess – to say the same as him. This means that our confession is based in God's Word and in his 'faith-full-ness'. Our confession is not a statement of our opinion or capacity to perform a task; instead it testifies to the reliability of God's word and the ability of God to carry it out.

Using the faith we receive from God, we grasp hold of the intrinsic power of God's Word, we believe it, and we respond to what God has said by agreeing with it in our speech. God's Word does not affect people's lives until they respond with faith, until they believe and confess and act on his Word. This is why Romans 10:8–10 states that we must confess and believe to receive God's promised salvation.

Partnership

The principle of relationship and partnership runs through the Bible. God takes every opportunity in his Word to underline that he wants a relationship with men and women which

Living Faith

reflects his own relationships within the Godhead – and we consider this in the *Sword of the Spirit* volumes *Knowing the Spirit* and *Glory in the Church*.

Romans 10:8–10 illustrates this important principle in three ways:

- ◆ It is God's word in our mouths and hearts
- ◆ We believe and confess, God saves
- ◆ We preach, but it is God's word of faith that we proclaim.

Our confession, our preaching, is our expression of our verbal agreement with God's Word. But we must appreciate that it is based in our relationship, our partnership and fellowship, with God. Confession is not a mere repetition of God's Word, instead it must be interwoven with a genuine belief from the heart that what is being confessed is God's Word, and that God can – and will – deliver his promises.

Confession and conviction

Confessing-faith is not an empty, religious recitation of God's Word, for it must arise out of conviction. God is not impressed when we speak his Word mechanically, for he looks into our hearts to ensure that our confession is linked to our belief.

In Matthew 15:8, Jesus makes it plain that it is possible to speak words which seem to be God's, but which – in reality – are not God's because they bear no resemblance to the speaker's inner life. This means that confessing-faith involves a double agreement.

Not only must our confession be the same as God's Word, it must also be the same as our heart. Some people suggest that 'confession brings possession', but this misunderstands the faith-process and over-emphasises the confessional element of living faith. While it is true that we need to go on confessing until we experience God's promise, this confession does not stand alone. It is equally true that we must go on believing and acting.

More importantly, however, we must appreciate that 'we confess because we possess'. It is the confession of the faith which is already within our heart which helps the faith develop to completion. Put simply, we are not saved because we 'talk saved', we 'talk saved' because we are saved; and we are not healed because we 'confess God's healing promises', we confess healing because we have received God's promise of healing in our heart.

This is a very important distinction, as living faith is not a spiritual version of positive thinking: endless confession does not make anything happen. We confess with words of faith because God's Word is true and because God is who he is; and it is God who – by his Word and through our living faith – keeps his promise to us.

The heart conviction

Many people are convinced that the Christian faith is true and have made some kind of commitment to follow it. But, without a heart relationship with God, they are concerned with an outward confession and outward behaviour.

Passages like Proverbs 4:23; 23:17 & 27:19 stress the importance of heart conviction. They urge us to watch our hearts because everything we say and do flows from our inner personality. If our heart is right, our confession and actions will also be right – and it is our hearts which count with God.

Matthew 12:33–37 develops this by showing that the mouth is the overflow of the heart. If our heart contains God's seed-faith, it will flow out of our mouths in confession: our speech will reflect the attitude of faith in our hearts. This is so important that verses 36–37 reveal that we will be judged by God for every careless word we speak. Jesus emphasises here careless words as well as our regular speech. This is because it is the unguarded words which, at times, reveal the truth of our hearts. Of course, Matthew 7:20–21 shows that we are not judged only by our words, but 12:33–37 demonstrates how important our heart confession is to God.

Living Faith

This is important because 'being', not 'doing', is at the heart of the gospel, and is what sets Christianity apart from other religions. This is why passages like John 3:3–18 are so fundamental to the faith.

New life

Following Jesus is not a matter of merely changing the way we behave, or even holding a new set of beliefs; it is about receiving a new and different life from God, and allowing his life to find expression in our beliefs, thoughts, motives and external lifestyle.

Other religions try to work from the outside in, but Christianity works from the inside out. Other religions suggest that we can gain a new, spiritual life by doing certain actions and practices, and by believing particular ideas. Christianity does not denigrate these actions and ideas, it merely insists that they are unable to provide new life.

Christianity uniquely claims that men and women are unable to produce new life by their own resources, and maintains both that we need to receive from God all we need for a new life, and that it is only this new life from God which enables us to think, speak and act in a way which is pleasing to God.

Tree and fruit

This is no more than Jesus' tree and fruit principle. Good trees bear good fruit, and bad trees bear no fruit or bad fruit. Until we believe into and upon Jesus, we are a 'bad tree'. No matter how impressive we may appear on the surface, underneath we are different. Jeremiah 17:9 is an eternal Christian principle which we disbelieve at our peril.

God is not concerned with our outward actions, he is pre-occupied with the need for our evil, inner nature to be uprooted, and for his nature to be planted within us. This is 'being born again' with God's nature inside, and is what was promised in Ezekiel 36:26–27.

This should convince us that it is pointless to turn confession into a faith technique. We can confess a truth with our lips for

ever – as nominal Christians do repeatedly when they recite the Apostle's Creed or the Lord's Prayer every Sunday – but nothing will result if that truth is not deep in our hearts.

Speaking the Bible

This stress on the importance of confession from the heart does not mean that we should overlook or downplay the benefits of memorising the Scriptures and reciting the Bible.

In fact, as we read, study and learn the Scriptures, so we give the Holy Spirit a greater opportunity to speak to us through the written Word. But we must always approach the Scriptures humbly, and depend on God to reveal his word in our hearts.

Speaking with faith

We have seen that living faith operates from the heart; and if God's faith really is in our hearts by his Word, it must be spoken out. The effective working of faith always leads us to confess the Word.

If we have heard God's word, and are believing in our hearts, our confession will be the same as the Word of God. This means that we have all the power of God's Word operating through our confession, through our lips.

When we speak our confession, with living faith and according to God's Word, we can cause our circumstances to line up with God's will and purposes. We examine this aspect of our faith-filled spoken confession in Part Seven of *Effective Prayer* and Part Ten of *Ministry in the Spirit*.

In Matthew 17:19–20; Mark 11:22–23 & Luke 17:5–6, Jesus taught his disciples to speak with faith 'to move mountains'. This idea is based in Isaiah 2:11–16; 40:1–5 & Zechariah 4:7.

Mark 11:22 is one of the passages we considered earlier which is usually translated into English as, 'Have faith in God', when a better translation of the Greek words is, 'Have [the] faith of God'.

Living Faith

Some people have difficulty understanding what the phrase 'God's faith' really means. But if you understand that faith is confidence in God's Word, then you can ask, who has greater confidence in God's Word, other than God himself? When God speaks his Word, he speaks it with his faith. God's Word, then, carries his power and authority to see it fulfilled as Isaiah 59:11 makes clear. It stands to reason, that if God calls us to confess his Word, then his Word in our mouth carries exactly the same power and authority as God's Word in his own mouth. That's what Jesus meant when he said, 'Have the faith of God', and that's what true confession is all about.

We know that mountain-moving is not a problem to the living God, to the all-powerful *Elohim*; and when – through hearing God's *rhema* word – we receive a seed of God's faith, we should realise that we too can speak to mountains and see them moved.

Matthew 17:20 & Luke 17:5–6 remind us that we do not need much faith to speak to mountains, just the genuine article. It is quality, not quantity, that counts. On its own, our faith can achieve nothing – it is God who moves the mountains. The faith we receive from God merely engages us with the great power of God, and we release this by our confession.

When a 'mountain' of opposition is standing between us and God's will for our life, we have the power and authority, by faith, to speak to the mountain and order it to move. God can accomplish all the changes which are necessary to align our circumstances with his will. As we see in *Effective Prayer and Ministry in the Spirit*, the mountains must be identified to us by God, and the purpose behind the confessing must be the revelation of God's glory.

Living faith is not a spiritual credit card which means that we can have anything we like from God, whenever we want it. Faith deals only with the revealed Word of God. But when we have heard God's Word, and have believed in our hearts, we have 'the faith of God' to speak – and to go on speaking – to the particular mountain which is preventing God's Word from being fulfilled and his glory from being seen.

Part Eight

Acting faith

We know that true faith develops from the divine seed-faith which we receive from God through hearing his particular *rhema* words to us. And we have seen that living faith involves believing that word deep in our hearts, confessing that same word with our mouths, and acting on it in our lives.

Believing-faith, confessing-faith and acting-faith are the three complementary aspects of living faith which co-exist like the roots, stem and leaves of a plant, and which mutually nourish and strengthen each other so that the faith can develop to completion. They are not sequential steps of faith; rather, they are complementary aspects of faith, they all need to be present in our lives, and they all need equal emphasis in our teaching.

Living faith is not only a matter of sincere beliefs, it also involves strong actions; nor is it just to do with spiritual language, for genuine faith also has a godly faith-lifestyle. True faith affects what we think, what we say and what we do.

The acting-faith element of living faith is stressed in James 2:14–26; verse 17 identifies works – actions – as the essence of discipleship.

Faith and obedience

As we know that living faith comes from God, we should be able to appreciate that faith is meant to be active in the same way that God is active. And, because living faith is directly linked with the Word of God, we should also be able to grasp that true faith should be as powerfully active as the Word is shown to be in Hebrews 4:12.

We have seen that living faith affects the way we speak, that whatever is contained in our hearts inevitably overflows from

Living Faith

our mouth. Faith, however, has visible as well as verbal results – it is seen and heard. It is Jesus' tree and fruit principle over again.

The fruit that a tree produces is determined by the kind of tree that it is. In the same way, our lifestyle, our actions, are shaped by our inner nature. If, in and through Christ, we have received God's name and nature, the faith we receive will develop into prophetic faith-actions as well as into prophetic faith-speech. Without this operation of faith, we will have dead faith and an empty religion.

As James 2:17 makes clear, belief without actions means that there is no living faith. We should note that errors often creep into our understanding when we casually conclude that either the corollary or the reverse of a biblical statement must also be true, but this is rarely the case. For example, God may be love, but love is not God; and, although Deuteronomy 13:1–5 & 18:21–22 establish that the failure of predictive prophecies identifies a false prophet, the fulfilment of prophecy is not necessarily a proof of genuineness.

In James 2:17, however, the reverse of the statement really is true: actions without belief also means that no living faith is present. In fact, no matter how hard it may be for unbelievers to accept, actions without belief are not biblical, God-acceptable actions.

Faith and love-inspired obedience are two different ways of spelling the same scriptural concept. In the New Testament, we can substitute 'faith' for 'obedience' and 'obedience' for 'faith' wherever they occur. Faith without obedience is not faith, it is merely empty words. And obedience without faith cannot be true obedience, it can be only an empty work. This is a very important principle to grasp, as the world believes that 'good works' are intrinsically valuable; it considers that the exterior action is all that matters, and that an unworthy motive cannot nullify a worthy work.

Without faith, however, we know that it is impossible to please God. Like true faith, true obedience must also be based on hearing God's *rhema* word – otherwise it is merely sinful presumption. And, as with believing God's Word, to obey God we must also believe that he is who he says he is, and that he rewards those who seek him and his ways.

True obedient actions must be accompanied by inner faith, and genuine belief must always be accompanied by an obedient action. If we say that we believe and yet do nothing about it, we do not really believe what we say.

We must note, however, that doing nothing may, at times, be the obedient action to which we are called by God. Presumptuous actions, as with Abraham in Genesis 16 and David in 1 Chronicles 21, cannot be signs of living faith, for they are as sinful as disobedient actions.

Living faith is always manifested in an obedient, positive, faith-action – even if that action means refusing to do what we would normally do. And this faith-action will correspond exactly with the operation of faith which is happening internally.

Hebrews 11

We have seen that Hebrews 11 is an important chapter about faith, and now we can see that it reveals the sort of practical actions which are a fundamental part of living faith.

The faith-actions which are listed in this chapter are all obedient-actions to God's *rhema* word. In every case, we can swap the words 'by faith' for 'by obedience' and not change the meaning of the passage.

In each case, however, it was not a legalistic, robotic obedience to God, it was a loving-relationship of obedience with God. The men and women of Hebrews 11 'faithed', they obeyed, because they knew that God was who he said he was, and because they were clinging to him and their lives were 'into' and 'upon' him.

Living Faith

By faith:

- ◆ Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice
- ◆ Enoch was taken from this life
- ◆ Noah built an ark
- ◆ Abraham left Ur
- ◆ Abraham travelled not knowing where he was going
- ◆ Abraham lived in tents
- ◆ Abraham waited for God's city
- ◆ Sarah conceived and bore a child when she was past the age of childbearing
- ◆ Abraham offered his son as a sacrifice when God tested him
- ◆ Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau
- ◆ Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and worshipped
- ◆ Joseph spoke about the future Exodus and gave instructions for his bones to be taken from Egypt to the promised land at the time of the Exodus
- ◆ Moses' parents hid him
- ◆ Moses refused to be identified with the Egyptians
- ◆ Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God
- ◆ Moses kept the Passover and left Egypt
- ◆ The Israelites passed through the Red Sea
- ◆ The walls of Jericho fell
- ◆ Rahab was preserved as she welcomed the spies
- ◆ Kingdoms were conquered
- ◆ Promises were obtained
- ◆ Lions' mouths were shut
- ◆ Flames were quenched
- ◆ People escaped death by the sword

- ◆ Weakness was turned to strength
- ◆ People became brave and effective in battle
- ◆ Armies were routed
- ◆ The dead were raised
- ◆ Tortures were endured
- ◆ People accepted mockings, beatings and imprisonment
- ◆ They were stoned, sawn in half and slaughtered
- ◆ They were destitute, afflicted and tormented
- ◆ They wandered in deserts and across mountains, and lived in caves.

All these different actions were 'by faith'. The works were the outworking of God's particular *rhema* word to a person, and each faith-action was appropriate to the word given to that person. It is not what the people did that it is important, it is why and how they did it.

Throughout the ages, many people have tried to emulate the works of faith of other believers. They have been pre-occupied with the supposed benefits or value of external actions, and have used the faith-actions listed in Hebrews 11 to justify their actions.

But these actions were all 'by faith', and this means that the men and women involved had heard God speak to them personally, had taken his word deep into their hearts, and had believed, confessed and acted upon the specific word.

Unless our works are motivated by living faith as an obedient response to God's word to us personally, they are dead works and quite useless.

Faith and actions

James 2:17 & 2:26 show that our faith is dead, and totally useless, if it is not being demonstrated by actions. We have seen that Ephesians 2:8–9 does not contradict James 2, for

Living Faith

they are both expressing the same truth in different words: we are not saved by good works, we are saved for good works – but good works which are carried out in faith.

Ephesians 2:10 shows that we have been created in Jesus expressly for good works, works which God has prepared for us to do. James 2 reinforces this idea and teaches that we have been justified through faith, but James also points out that we demonstrate living faith by what we do.

Christians are not people who can live as they choose. God's great grace may never be closed to us, no matter what we do, but living faith involves obedient actions. As Christians, we are called to hear and obey God, and our new life in Christ means that we have received the spiritual freedom to hear and obey God. In fact, only those people who have been redeemed by God, and released from sin and Satan's grip, have the possibility of obeying God.

We cannot believe in the Word of God and live independently of the Word. When we believe into and upon Jesus, and cling to him, we receive God's power to live God's life. This involves a complete lifestyle of faith, not just one or two actions of faith every now and then.

In God's plan, believing-faith, confessing-faith and acting-faith are the essential elements of living faith. If any one of the elements is absent, the faith is dead, not living; and if any element is under-developed, the faith will be weak and unlikely to reach completion.

Actions complete faith

In James 2:22, we see that Abraham's faith was brought to maturity by his actions. Genesis 22 describes Abraham's faith-process:

1. Abraham heard God's *rhema* word to him – Genesis 22:1–2
2. He responded with belief – 22:1

3. He confessed his faith in the all-providing God who had promised to make him a father of many nations – 22:5 & 22:8
4. Over several days, he carried out a series of obedient actions which corresponded to God's word to him – 22:3, 6 & 9–10.

Abraham's heart-belief, mouth-confession and body-actions went together. In this situation, his faith – his response to God's 22:1–2 word – would have become fruitless without any one of them. But we can see that in some special way it was his faith-actions which completed the faith-process.

Many people begin to believe and to move forward in faith, but then do not complete their faith with the appropriate action. With every expression of faith there is always a corresponding action which God wants us to perform in faith – in expectation of God keeping his word.

In every situation in which God calls us to believe his word, there is always something for us to believe, something to confess and something to do. As we have noted, this faith-action may occasionally be doing nothing – especially doing no worrying and much trusting.

Appropriate actions

Our faith-actions should exactly correspond with the specific word of God we have received and confessed. For example, if we confess faith in a God of love, our actions should reflect that faith, and we should love others too. If we do not care practically for others, it shows that we do not really believe in God as a God of love.

This is underlined by James 2:1–9 & 14–18, which shows that our faith-actions must match our faith-confessions. If we have the resources to help the needy, words alone are not enough – they are empty and fruitless! But true faith-confession will always be accompanied by faith-directed actions which correspond with our words, in the way that our confession should be 'the same' as God's word to us.

Living Faith

We have seen this principle in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. All his actions in Genesis 22 were appropriate to the specific word that he had received from God in verses 1 & 2.

The Gentile prostitute

Many people find it hard to relate to Abraham's faith-filled offering of Isaac; they mistakenly think that this requires an amount of faith which is beyond them – when we know that we do not need a great quantity of faith, just a speck of the right quality of faith. Perhaps because of this, James 2:25 uses Rahab as an example of acting-faith.

Rahab was the Gentile prostitute who hid and protected the Israelite spies in Joshua 2:1–21 & 6:22–25. The Scriptures teach that Rahab's actions were faith-inspired and faith-filled. She was a believing woman, and her actions were the outworking of her faith, and a visible sign to others of her repentance as she chose a new direction for her life.

Rahab believed that God was fighting for Israel, and that he would give them the whole land, and she confessed this faith to the spies in 2:9. But more than that, she wanted to join the winning side – to cling to the God she named as *Yahweh*. Her belief in God was not a religious theory, she really believed in what God was doing, she confessed this, and she acted upon it. Wonderfully, Matthew 1:5 records how God honoured her faith and incorporated her into his people and into the birthline of the Messiah.

We can now begin to see what James meant when he said that Abraham and Rahab were justified by works. He is not talking about being justified before God. This happens through faith alone and is totally independent of the works of the Law or any actions on our part. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 2:8–9 & Romans 4:1–8. James is talking about our good works, or the actions that correspond and complete our faith once we have been justified before God.

What, then, does James mean when he says that Abraham and Rahab were 'justified by works'? Quite simply, he is talking

about how our works done in faith show to others or justify to them our claim to have living faith. This is in line with Jesus' command in Matthew 5:16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'. Our good works, done in faith, validate our claim to faith in the eyes of others. That is how Abraham earned the reputation of being the friend of God, and that is how Rahab earned her renown as a woman of faith. In this way they both proved to others that their faith was truly alive. Their actions vindicated or 'justified' their claim to faith in the eyes of others, especially those who benefitted from their actions.

And for our part, if we really believe that Jesus is Lord, we will act upon this belief. If we genuinely believe that Jesus wants to reach the lost, heal the sick, set the captives free, and so on, we will be ready to carry out the appropriate faith actions. And not only will we benefit from the fruits of our faith personally, but others too will be blessed. They will see our faith in action and glorify God as a result.

We do not need much faith, for, in Christ, God has given us all that we need. We simply need to do whatever we hear God saying – and we can be completely sure that we have enough faith of the highest possible quality to say and do God's word.

Living Faith

Part Nine

The assurance of faith

Throughout this book, we have focused on the way that faith operates, and have concentrated on the very important association between living faith and the Word of the living God. In this chapter, however, we consider the relationship between 'faith' and 'the blood of Christ', and see how his blood is the vital assurance of our faith.

The power of his blood

In some sections of the Church there is a considerable emphasis on the blood of Christ, and much use is made of terms like, 'washed in the blood', 'empowered by the blood' and 'covered in the blood'. These expressions can be confusing, misleading and off-putting – especially to unbelievers – and we need to understand the biblical truths which lie behind the different terms. There is no value in saying something without understanding correctly the truth behind it.

What is 'the blood'?

Obviously, the phrase 'the blood' refers to the blood which poured from Jesus' wounds at the cross; but it points to more than that, as it is a short-hand expression for the complete sacrificial death of Jesus, as well as everything it achieved for us. We can say that Jesus died as a voluntary sacrifice for sinners, and that his blood represents the totality of his sacrificial death: the blood is the sign or proof of his death.

We read in Leviticus 17:11 that God says, 'The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls...' Because the blood of Jesus has made atonement for us, we must remember that the phrase, 'the blood of Jesus' is not merely metaphorical, but

Living Faith

actually applies to the real substance of Jesus blood. But we also need to understand how that blood does operate to save us and to bind God in covenant to us.

Romans 3:21–26 uses technical words like ‘justification’, ‘redemption’ and ‘propitiation’ to describe the results of Christ’s death – and we consider these fully in the *Sword of the Spirit* volume *Salvation by Grace*. But verse 25 simply shows that God appointed Jesus as a sacrifice for reconciliation, through faith, by the shedding of his blood. It is the blood of Jesus, shed in his faith-filled death, which brought about all the wonderful achievements of the cross – achievements which we receive by grace through our faith in Christ.

The New Testament teaches that the blood of Jesus performed what the ancient Jewish rituals of sacrifice could only symbolise – total and permanent purification from sin. In fact, everything that the Old Testament records about blood is significant for the new covenant. Old Testament sacrifices foreshadow the cross, the place where Jesus shed his blood as the full, final and perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Sacrificial blood

In Exodus 12:1–14, the blood of the unblemished sacrificial animal – it could be a male lamb or goat – was placed in faith on the door-posts and lintel of Jewish homes as a sign of being God’s people. When God saw the blood, he ‘passed over’ the house and did not destroy the occupants when he struck the first-born of Egypt. This is why Jesus is referred to as God’s ‘Passover lamb’, for it is through our faith in his blood that God passes over us and does not punish us for our sin.

Leviticus 16:1–34 describes the events of the annual ‘Day of Expiation’ or ‘Day of Atonement’ when a bull was sacrificed for the sin of the High Priest and his family, and two goats were sacrificed for the guilt and sin of the people. One goat, the scape-goat, was driven into the desert and symbolically carried away the people’s guilt; the other goat was sacrificed for the people’s sin. The blood of the bull and the goat was then

The assurance of faith

sprinkled by the High Priest on and before the mercy-seat and the altar as an act of atonement for the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites.

In the same way, throughout the New Testament, Jesus' death is recognised as essentially sacrificial for human guilt and sin. We see this, for example, in 1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 5–10; 1 Peter 3:18 & 1 John 2:2.

We know that Jesus died once-and-for-all for us and for our sins to bring us to God. And we can say, in general, that his death:

- ◆ Appeased God's anger
- ◆ Satisfied God's sense of justice
- ◆ Earned our forgiveness
- ◆ Purchased our freedom
- ◆ Declared our righteousness, our justification
- ◆ Cleansed us from sin
- ◆ Forged our new relationships with God and other people
- ◆ Achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying
- ◆ Fully atoned for all sins so that there is now no need for sin and guilt offerings.

However, the New Testament identifies ten particular ways that 'the blood' assures us of God's saving work in our lives. We can confidently say that the blood assures us of our:

- ◆ Forgiveness – Ephesians 1:7
- ◆ Cleansing – 1 John 1:7
- ◆ Righteousness – Romans 5:9
- ◆ Redemption – Ephesians 1:7
- ◆ Sanctification – Hebrews 10:10 & 13:12
- ◆ Purchase – 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Living Faith

- ◆ Deliverance from the curse of the Law – Galatians 3:13
- ◆ Promised inheritance – Hebrews 9:15–18
- ◆ Freedom from inherited bondages – 1 Peter 1:18–19
- ◆ Victory over Satan – Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14 & John 12:31–33.

All these achievements are wonderfully summarised, and implicitly referred to, in the timeless phrase – ‘the blood of Christ’. His blood is the visible assurance of all these achievements.

Whose sacrifice?

Isaiah 53 is an important prophetic chapter about the cross, but verse 10 is very difficult to translate. The second clause could mean, ‘though God offers his servant as a guilt offering’, or ‘the the servant offers himself as a guilt offering’. It is unclear in Hebrew whether it is God or the servant who makes the offering.

At first sight, the New Testament appears to be equally ambiguous on this point. Mark 14:27; John 3:16; Romans 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 32; 2 Corinthians 5:21 & 1 John 4:9–10 all stress that *the Father* sent the Son to be a sacrifice. Yet, elsewhere in the New Testament, the voluntary nature of Christ’s sacrifice is stressed: Matthew 20:28; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2, 25; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:14 & 26 all affirm that *the Son* sacrificed himself.

The truth is, of course, double-sided. The Father gave the Son and the Son freely gave himself. The Father did not make the Son endure an ordeal he was unwilling to bear, and the Son did not surprise the Father by his selfless action. This paradox is neatly stated in Galatians 1:4 & John 10:17–18.

We have considered the relationship within the Godhead in the *Sword of the Spirit* volumes *Glory in the Church* and *Knowing the Spirit*, and have seen that the Father, the Son and the Spirit

are not three distinct individuals, but three self-distinctions within one being. They reveal their oneness in a threefold diversity of persons, characteristics and functions.

If this divine tri-unity is misunderstood, we are likely to fall into error when we gaze at the cross. If we stress that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are *separate individuals*, we inevitably caricature Calvary as either God punishing an innocent Son or as Jesus persuading a reluctant Father. Whereas 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 makes it clear that the sacrifice was not made by Christ alone or God alone, but by God acting in and through Christ with his full agreement.

And if we stress God's *absolute oneness*, we can wrongly conclude that God died for us. But we must realise that God could not have died because he is immortal. To solve this problem, God, in the person of Christ, became man so that he could die in our place: so that he could inflict and receive his own punishment; and simultaneously be both Judge and innocent victim. Hebrews 2:14–18 & Philippians 2:6–8 state this clearly.

The God of sacrifice

This means that we must believe in, have faith in, cling to, a God of blood sacrifice; and that we must consider 'the blood' as not only central to Scripture but as also the very heart of God's nature. His sacrifice on the cross eternally achieved our salvation, but it is also the greatest act of self-disclosure of God's personal nature.

Because of the cross, we can say that 'the blood' is the supreme revelation and assurance of God's:

- ◆ Goodness
- ◆ Mercy
- ◆ Grace
- ◆ Truth
- ◆ Patience
- ◆ Forgiveness

Living Faith

- ◆ Righteousness
- ◆ Peace
- ◆ Self-control
- ◆ Gentleness
- ◆ Self-effacement
- ◆ Trustworthiness
- ◆ Faith
- ◆ Justice
- ◆ Love.

We see this in Romans 3:24–26 & 5:8, and can say that ‘the blood’ is the assurance of God’s nature, that it is the ultimate assurance of faith in the God who revealed himself through his blood as infinitely loving and gracious.

The New Testament always defines love in terms of God’s sacrifice on the cross, for example, Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:15–20 & 4:7–21. At the cross, God gave everything because of his love for those who deserve nothing. The Father gave the Son for those who prefer to worship other gods; the Son gave himself for those who steadfastly ignore him; and they both surrendered their relationship with each other because of their unimaginable love for us all.

Since the dreadful agony and divine separation of the Calvary blood sacrifice, nobody can look at a cross and question God’s love – because nothing reveals God’s love more clearly than ‘the blood’. The blood is the assurance of God’s love, and of our faith in the love of God. The blood proves that God loves us.

This means we can say that Christ’s blood is the assurance of both:

- ◆ Who God is
- ◆ What God has done for us.

Throughout this book we have seen that our faith is bound up in both God's revelation of himself and God's word to us. Now we can see that the blood of Christ is the assurance of both these foundational aspects of faith, and should be able to grasp why the cross is so central to the Christian faith.

The blood covenant

If we are to understand the biblical link between faith and 'the blood', we need to appreciate the scriptural teaching about blood covenants. We see this quite clearly in the story of God's dealing with Abraham.

God's initial *rhema* word to Abraham was spoken in Genesis 12:1–3, and Abraham responded in faith by leaving Haran for Canaan. Many years later, God confirmed his word to Abraham in Genesis 15:1. But this time, in 15:2–3, Abraham questioned God about the way the promise would be fulfilled. The word of the Lord replied to Abraham in verses 4–5, and – through seeing the stars in the sky – Abraham saw God's promise to him and believed. Verse 6 reports that Abraham put his faith in God and that this was credited to him as righteousness.

In verse 8, however, Abraham asked God for a token of assurance, for a sign which would confirm God's word to him. He was asking God to enter into a binding agreement with him. In his sinfulness, Abraham wanted to be sure that God's promise would be fulfilled.

God responded to this by setting up the blood covenant which is described in verses 9–21. The actual covenant resembles the ancient covenantal rituals described in Jeremiah 34:18. In these, the contracting parties passed between the parts of the slaughtered animals and called down on themselves the fate of the sacrificial victim should they break the agreement.

We see that God alone passes between the animal parts because his blood covenant is a unilateral pact: it is a divine initiative. The flame is *Yahweh*, as in Exodus 3:2; 13:21 & 19:18.

Living Faith

And the darkness and length of time points to Calvary when God made a similar covenant through the shed blood and broken body of Jesus.

In the blood covenant with Abraham, God was saying, 'Let me be as these broken pieces of animals if I fail to fulfil my word to you'. This covenant anticipated – it prepared the way for – the oath that God gave in Genesis 22:16–17 at the completion of Abraham's faith. God of course never breaks his Word, but the New Testament shows that Jesus did die as a sacrifice, not for God's unfaithfulness, but for ours.

In this way, we can say that Christ's blood is God's solemn pledge that he will keep his Word to us: it is the God-given aid to faith – the assurance of his Word – that we need because of our sinfulness and unbelief. We should also be able to see how the blood prepares the way for the fruit of God's sealing oath to us, for the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.

God's witness

1 John 5:5–9 describes 'the water and the blood' as witnesses which coincide with the Spirit. (The water is the water which flowed with blood from the side of Jesus when he was pierced by a lance on the cross.) We have seen in *Knowing the Spirit* that the Holy Spirit is the witness to Jesus, and that everything he does is meant to focus attention on him and 'witness' or 'agree with' Jesus' nature.

And here we see that the blood and the water are similar witnesses to the Spirit. The three witnesses rivet our attention on Christ, and reveal his gracious nature.

God's grace

God's Genesis 15 personal blood covenant with Abraham reveals the grace of God. God makes no request for obedience and Abraham offers no promise of obedience. These come later, in 17:1 & 22:12, as God calls Abraham into an even closer relationship and more God-like lifestyle, but the blood covenant itself is an occasion of pure grace.

Abraham's lapses and doubts are not mentioned, and do not hinder the covenant. The covenant is made when Abraham has shown faith, but is not free from doubt; and is made before obedience has been invited, tested or confirmed. God follows the same grace principle at Calvary.

The blood covenant with Moses, in Exodus 23:20–24:8, was also a divine initiative of grace, but this time men and women had to respond with obedience. The nation of Israel was obligated to keep God's Law to obtain God's blessing.

The New Testament, especially Galatians 3, looks back to the blood covenant with Abraham as the foundation of Christian faith, and establishes the 'New Covenant' of the cross on the basis of the Abraham covenant of pure grace and faith.

1 Corinthians 11:25 & Hebrews 8:6–10 describe the cross in terms of a new covenant, which means that 'the blood' is God's ultimate oath to humanity. God had never broken his Genesis 15 promise, yet he let what happened to the animals then happen to himself at Calvary.

At the cross, there was no demand for obedience, only an offer of forgiveness. Our lapses and doubt did not hinder the covenant, for it was another occasion of pure grace. Since the cross blood covenant there is nothing more that God can do. He has made his promise, and his blood witnesses to God's total sincerity and faithfulness. In fact, we can say that the blood binds God to keep his Word.

Overcoming by the blood

We now know that we have a double guarantee or assurance of our faith – God's Word and the blood of the covenant. In fact, we can say that the Word of the covenant is sealed by the blood of the covenant and the Spirit witnesses this to our hearts. God's Word is now enshrined in a covenant which was both made in the blood of Jesus *and* put into effect by the blood of Jesus as the Spirit applies this to our hearts. We see this in Hebrews 9:20 & Romans 8:32. The context of these

Living Faith

two passages helps us also to appreciate that the blood deals with the consequences of our failure and places us in a victorious position over our enemy.

Hebrews 9:27–28 makes it plain that Christ's blood completely deals with everything – all our sin, guilt, doubts, weaknesses and failings. The first coming of Christ had to do with dealing with our sin through his blood, as we see in Romans 8:3 & 2 Corinthians 5:21. The second coming of Jesus will have no connection with sin because redemption, by the blood, is complete. By faith, we wait for this coming which will take place at the Judgement – Romans 2:6 & 1 Corinthians 1:8.

Romans 8:34–39, perhaps the climax of the New Testament, shows that the blood, the death of Christ, guarantees that we are in a triumphant position over death and demons, over the present and the future, and over all heavenly powers. The blood – the total work of the sacrificial death of Jesus – guarantees that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God, which we know in Jesus.

We understand that our faith is bound up in who God is, and that we know God as grace and love because of all that he has revealed about his name and nature in Jesus. But even though we understand and know all this, we still doubt and look for signs to convince us that we can depend on God's Word. So God has given us the sign that we are seeking, the proof we need for faith, all the assurance we need to believe, the guarantee of his Word.

The blood of Christ is the assurance of faith; it is the guarantee that *Yahweh* is who he is, that he has become on the cross what we need in order to meet our greatest need. When we really appreciate the grace and power of the blood, we will finally understand why we do not need a great amount of faith, just that which is the size of a tiny seed.

Part Ten

Developing living faith

We have seen that testing is an integral part of the faith-process, and that Jesus always tested the faith of those who came to him in order to make sure that they were ready to receive from him.

This testing is part of the strengthening of faith, which enables the 'seed' to develop into the mature plant. We do not receive a fully developed plant of faith from God when we hear his word, for that could not be faith. Instead we receive a seed of his faith which we need to take deeply into our life and develop. As we go on believing God's word in our hearts, continue to confess it with our lips and persistently act on it in our lives, so the seed develops into a mature plant which enables us to receive the promise.

Just as some seeds need to be touched by frost to germinate, and other plants need strong winds to make them develop strong roots, so Jesus positively tests people to strengthen their faith. We can see this in his delay before visiting Lazarus, John 11:5–40, his questioning of the Canaanite woman, Matthew 15:22–28, and his unusual command to the Capernaum nobleman, John 4:46–53.

Faith and prayer

Plants, however, need more than cold weather and strong winds to develop from seeds to fruitful maturity. And our immature faith also needs feeding and nurturing to enable it to develop properly.

We know that faith is a relationship, that it is an entering into and a clinging to the living God – that it is a living relationship with the Word and the Spirit. We see in *Effective Prayer* that

Living Faith

prayer is an indispensable part of any relationship with God, so we should be able to appreciate that prayer is crucial for the development of our faith.

Persistence

True faith is seen in the persistent praying described by Jesus in Luke 11:5–13 – we consider this throughout *Effective Prayer*. Persistent prayer is necessary until God's promised results are seen or the Holy Spirit witnesses to us that the matter is accomplished.

We can say that persistent prayer is both the evidence of faith and also a means to the development of faith. Without faith, we will not persist; but, through persistence, our faith develops and matures so that we do receive God's promise to us.

Breakthrough

Intercessory prayer is often necessary until there has been a breakthrough in the Spirit, and his assurance of faith has been released in us.

This is when we know in our spirits that our request has been granted and the situation has been dealt with. This has nothing to do with whether the result can yet be seen, for the spiritual breakthrough can come long before there is any visible change in the outward situation. We examine this in Part Seven of *Effective Prayer*.

This is a faith-developing process: we pray in faith until we receive the Spirit's assurance; then we accept his assurance; and then we confess it and act on it by not worrying – and by ceasing to pray about the matter and starting to praise God. Again, this prayer-process both evidences our seedling-faith and strengthens and develops it.

Warfare

Spiritual warfare is often necessary as we exercise faith in God for the fulfilment of one of his promises to us. The children of Israel had to go through many battles before they entered into their inheritance in Canaan. We consider this in Part Seven of *Effective Prayer*.

Developing living faith

The whole faith-process – from hearing, through believing, confessing and acting, to receiving – is a time of spiritual warfare as the enemy always tries to starve or trample on the young faith-seedling. It should be plain that spiritual warfare prayer aids our faith development by resisting the enemy's attempts to smash or corrupt our faith.

We should note that spiritual warfare is often keenest just before the spiritual breakthrough or the release of the promise.

Thanksgiving

Praise and thanksgiving are also crucial to the development of faith. We demonstrate faith, and so strengthen it, whenever we praise God simply on the basis of faith – without any physical evidence. We do not need faith to praise God for what we can see! This glorifies him and releases his power. We consider this in Part Five of *Effective Prayer*.

The prayer of faith

James 5:13–18 is an important passage about prayer and faith, and verse 15 refers to 'the prayer of faith'. We examine this more fully in Part Ten of *Effective Prayer* and Part Five of *Ministry in the Spirit*.

The prayer of faith means 'to pray with the knowledge that we have what we ask for in advance of possessing it'. We see this in 1 John 5:14–15 & Mark 11:24. To pray in this manner, we need:

- ◆ An inner assurance – Hebrews 11:1
- ◆ The witness of the Spirit – Romans 8:16
- ◆ The peace which comes through faith – Hebrews 4:3 & 10.

We should not think of 'the prayer of faith' as a level of praying to which we can aspire only occasionally, for every prayer that is based upon a received *rhema* word from God should be 'a prayer of faith'.

We should understand by now that God has given us – through his Word – the faith that we need to pray his word to

Living Faith

fulfilment, and that 'the Word', 'the Spirit' and 'the blood' provide us with all the extra assurance we need to pray in this way at all times.

Faith and praise

If we are serious about developing living faith in our lives, we should ensure that we maintain an attitude of praise and worship for who God has revealed himself to be in the Word and through the blood, and that we give thanks in advance of the manifestation or fulfilment of the promise in our lives. We see this attitude in Psalm 106:12 & 130:5–7.

We study thanksgiving fully in Part Five of *Effective Prayer*, and see there that thanksgiving is primarily a prayer, directed to God, which thanks him for what he has done; and that praise is essentially a commendation or extolling about God's activities and attributes which is either directed to other people or is embraced by them when directed to God.

When we thank God, we speak personally to him. But other people are usually involved when we praise God. The order in Psalm 100:4 is clear. We come individually to his gates with our thanksgivings, but then enter together into his courts with our praise. For living faith to develop, there must be both this personal and corporate element – there must be thanks *and* praise.

God inhabits the praises of his people

Psalm 22:1–3 shows that God inhabits, or is enthroned on, the praises of his people. He comes and owns his people when they praise him to other people. This coming of God through praise is what develops faith: through praise, our relationship with God is strengthened.

Psalm 89:15–16 makes it clear that praising God is walking in the light of his presence. As we develop this intimate relationship, so the faith we have received from God naturally strengthens and matures.

Praise honours God

We should be able to grasp that we strengthen our faith – and the faith of others – when we thank God for what he has done. Although these thanksgivings are not statements of faith, they do build faith. For as we rejoice in what God has done, so we deepen our belief that he can do the same deeds again – and greater deeds.

But we should not thank God with the single aim of strengthening our faith, rather we should thank him to focus attention on him – to honour and glorify the living God. Psalm 50:14–15, 23; 107:21–22; 116:12 & 17 illustrate this principle.

Praise, however, goes further than thanksgiving. In praise, we extol God for who he is and for what he is yet to do. These praises are both the evidence of confessing-faith, and a means of developing it. Again, we should praise God essentially to honour and glorify him; but we should recognise that this faith-praise has a side-effect of developing our faith.

As we praise *Yahweh* for being who he is, so our praise underlines and boosts our faith. And as we praise him for what he is yet to do – on the basis of what he has said, who he is, and the assurances he has given – so we bring glory to God and strength to our faith.

Praise prepares the way for victory

The Scriptures repeatedly show that praise prepares the way for victory, that it hastens the coming of the promise. We see this in passages like Exodus 15:1–3, 9–13; Job 35:10–11; Psalm 2:8; 8:2; 42:5–6; 77:6; 149:6–9 & Acts 16:25–26.

Again, we must appreciate that Paul and Silas did not praise God so that their prison doors would burst open, they simply praised him because he deserved praise. Praise in their circumstances, however, was itself a manifestation of faith. Furthermore, it both brought God more deeply into their situation and was also an implicit attack on the enemy. We consider this aspect of praise in *Worship in Spirit and Truth*. We can say that faith-filled praise honours God and drives the devil away – in this way, it prepares the way for victory and fulfilment.

Living Faith

Praise brings glory

We see in Part One of *Glory in the Church* that sacrifices, including the sacrifice of praise, always attract the glory of God. In the Old Testament, the expression 'the glory of God' is used in two different ways:

- ◆ As a parallel term to 'the name of God' which refers to the self revealed character of God
- ◆ As a visible revelation of God's presence to his people.

God's glory shows people – and principalities and powers – precisely where God is, and exactly what he is like. This means that our sacrificial praise draws the presence – the name and nature – of God into our situation. This is always a marvellous boost to our faith, for who can doubt when we know that God is among us?

Faith like Abraham

As we have seen, the biblical story of Abraham's developing faith – from Genesis 12:1 to 22:19 – is important for our understanding of living faith. In the New Testament, Abraham, not Moses, is the father of faith and the model of the way we experience salvation.

An overview of the way that Abraham's faith developed helps us to draw together the different principles of faith that we have noted in this book.

Genesis 12

The first mention of any relationship, 12:1–3, between God and Abraham reports God speaking to Abraham, without any precedent, and giving him a series of eight promises:

- ◆ I will show you a land
- ◆ I will make you a great nation
- ◆ I will bless you
- ◆ I will make your name great

- ◆ You shall be a blessing
- ◆ I will bless those who bless you
- ◆ I will curse him who curses you
- ◆ In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

At this stage, God makes no demands on Abraham. He simply speaks his particular *rhema* word for Abraham, and Abraham can either respond with faith or disbelief. Verse 4 shows that Abraham believed God's word to him and acted with faith. This faith-response is followed, in verse 7, by yet another divine promise. This promise would have greatly strengthened Abraham's faith, as it would have confirmed to him that God truly was with him and was guiding him to Canaan.

This time Abraham responds, in verse 8, to God's promise with worship. He builds an altar and calls on the name of *Yahweh*. We can see that there is a promise and a faith-response at each step of the faith-process, and that each development draws Abraham closer to God. He is genuinely entering into God, becoming aware of his name and nature, and starting to cling to him.

There is no hint of any reason why God spoke to Abraham. It is simply God's sovereign choice. There is no standard that Abraham must reach up to. It is all grace on God's part and faith on Abraham's.

In Genesis 13:8–12, Abraham and Lot separate, in accordance with Abraham's 12:1 command. And God responds, in 13:14–17, to Abraham's faith-action with yet another repetition of his promise.

Genesis 15

Genesis 14 records Abraham's extraordinary – and testing – encounter with Melchizedek, which must have been faith-building. Immediately afterwards, God again spoke to Abraham with words of promise, in 15:1.

Living Faith

We have seen that Abraham was in such a real relationship with God that he was able to mention his doubts to God. God did not dismiss Abraham because of his doubts, instead he patiently confirmed and explained his word to him.

Genesis 15:6 draws attention to Abraham's faithful response to God's word, and defines it as 'believing in' or 'on *Yahweh*'. God then reveals himself to Abraham in verse 7, and Abraham responds with more questions – and God assures him through the blood covenant described in verses 9–17.

At this point, Abraham had genuine living faith in *Yahweh*, but it was still 'seedling' faith: his faith was mixed with doubts and questions. Every time, however, that Abraham responded with faith words and actions, God drew him deeper into a vital relationship with him. We can note that God kept on repeating his word to Abraham, kept on 'injecting' faith into Abraham, and that Abraham's small but genuine faith in *Yahweh* was enough. God reckoned it to him for righteousness.

All this should fill us with confidence, for it is the same for us today. God has chosen us and he has spoken to us – and it is entirely on the basis of his grace and nothing to do with our worthiness. He has given us specific promises, and he does not reject us when our faith is tinged with doubts and questions. He keeps on calling us to worship him, to travel with him, to enter into him and to enjoy a vital relationship with him. And whenever we make a tentative step of faith, he rewards us with a reaffirmation of his word and a greater revelation of himself.

Genesis 17

Genesis 16 describes Abraham's sinful presumption – his faithless actions. But there is no rebuke from God, only grace and promises to Ishmael and Hagar. Genesis 17, however, involves a major development in Abraham's faith.

Fourteen years have passed by, and God appears to Abraham again, revealing himself this time as *El Shaddai*, as the all-providing God. Now, for the first time, God requires in 17:1

that Abraham should walk before God and be perfect. God was not demanding sinlessness, but a basic straightforwardness – unlike his behaviour in 12:12–20 & 16:1–4 – which was based in staying close, in clinging, to God.

It is important we understand the process: first God revealed himself as total provider, and then he instructed Abraham to walk before him – to stay close to his total provision and to depend on his total provision. God did instruct Abraham to be perfect, and – if he was – then God would be with him and would provide for him. We must grasp that grace always precedes faith and provides the faith needed for the necessary faith-response.

More promises – including a new name – are then given to Abraham, verses 3–8, and then more demands are placed upon him. Again, the promise always precedes the demands for those in a worshipping relationship with God.

The gift of a new name to Abraham by the all-providing God draws attention to the nature of *El Shaddai*, and emphasises that Abraham will be enabled to be what the promise had said he would be.

Steady development

We can see a steady development of Abraham's faith in Genesis 12 – 21. For example:

- ◆ Chapter 12 – Abraham's first faith-response to God's word by leaving home, family and country.
- ◆ Chapter 13 – A faithful disentanglement from his family, and a lapse of faith by journeying to Egypt, where he had not been sent, and sinning. God did not speak to him while he was there.
- ◆ Chapter 14 – Abraham trusts God over possessions.
- ◆ Chapter 15 – Abraham believes – and asks questions. The blood covenant is given as assurance.

Living Faith

- ◆ Chapter 16 – Another lapse of faith, and Abraham trusts ‘the flesh’.
- ◆ Chapter 17 – God’s first demand for obedience and a close walk with God. God gives him a new name and nature.
- ◆ Chapters 18–19 – Abraham is portrayed as a godly man. He leads his family in the ways of righteousness, 18:19; he shares the secrets of God, 18:17; he is an intercessor, 18:23–33.
- ◆ Chapter 20 – Another lapse of faith along an old weakness; even so, God uses Abraham in a healing miracle.

Eventually, in chapter 21, Isaac is born and it seems that Abraham’s faith has reached fruition.

Genesis 22

The events of Genesis 22 are the supreme test of Abraham’s faith, and the moment when he obtains the promise he has heard God speak about so many times. God’s test required mature faith and unquestioning obedience, and verses 1–10 describe how Abraham passed the test. As a result of passing this divine faith-test, verse 12 shows that Abraham entered into an even deeper and more intimate relationship with God. James 2:21 shows the importance of this moment.

In this new level of loving obedience, God makes an oath and swears by himself; by this oath God was both renewing his promises to Abraham and also offering him a new level of assurance. The divine oath is a further assurance of faith – similar to the blood covenant – which God in his grace gives to Abraham. This time, however, the assurance is not given because of Abraham’s questions, but as a gracious reward.

We can say that this is the moment when Abraham obtains the promise, for the oath is the absolute guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled. God has given his word that there can now be no going back. At this point, Abraham moves from ‘having’ a promise to ‘receiving’ the promise. His faith has reached completion.

Developing faith

We should be able to appreciate that the story of Abraham is our story. God speaks to us, he gives us his holy Word, and we respond to him with immature, faltering, weak faith. But we press on, slowly developing a stronger, living faith and a genuine relationship with God.

Like Abraham, God calls us to believe in him, to walk before him, to depend on his total provision. And, like Abraham, we fall into sin, we intercede, we see God work miracles, we look for God to fulfil his word to us, and so on.

There are, however, a few significant differences. Abraham had just one brief meeting with a priest-king who fed him with bread and wine. We have a lifelong relationship with the high priest of the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 5:6–10, who goes on feeding us every day with bread and wine.

Instead of a once-only blood covenant to assure our faith, which involves the broken body of animals, we have a once-for-all blood covenant based on the blood and broken body of God himself.

And rather than an oath spoken by God as the guarantee of his promise, we have the gift, the seal, of God the Holy Spirit which is the absolute pledge, and first instalment, of our inheritance. God does not speak an oath to us as he did to Abraham, he gives us himself as his unbreakable commitment to our eternal blessing.

Our faith can develop from a tiny seedling to complete maturity, for God has done everything to make it possible. We simply need to go on clinging to him, to go on praying and praising, and to keep on living through the faith-process of believing what God has said, speaking what he has said, and doing what he has said.

The blood, the Word and the Spirit guarantee that, like Abraham, we too will move from hearing and seeing and receiving promises, to obtaining them personally from the living God.

Living Faith

Summary

Having worked through this volume you will now have a greater understanding of what it means to walk by living faith. You have seen how that faith develops from a tiny seed and grows into a healthy, fruit-bearing plant. We have traced this whole process through each of its stages and elements. It would be helpful now to summarise this teaching about living faith.

God's definition of faith

God has given us a very helpful definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'. According to this verse, faith is occupied with the 'not yet' and with 'the unseen'. This is precisely where most of us go completely wrong. The worldly philosophy says that 'seeing is believing', but the Bible says '*believing is seeing*'. If you can see it with your natural eyes, you don't need to believe God for it. The writer of Hebrews also tells us that faith is the substance of things *hoped* for. In other words, it has to do with a future, yet unseen reality, one we have not yet appropriated or experienced in our lives.

Faith and hope

But what does the Bible mean by hope? It is a confident expectation of a future event; it's the certainty that that future event will come about. An obvious example is the resurrection of our bodies. It has not yet happened, but it is going to happen. The reason we can believe this promise is because when Jesus was raised from the dead he released the hope of the resurrection so that one day we will all be raised from the dead. According to Titus 2:13, it is our glorious hope that will certainly be fulfilled when Christ comes again.

The Apostle Paul speaks about hope in Romans 8:24. We are not just saved by faith, we are also saved by (or in) hope, because we've not yet received everything that will be ours through the salvation that comes in Jesus. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? In other words, as long as God's promise is future, as long as it's not yet come to pass, you can call it 'hope'.

Faith and 'substance'

We have seen that living faith has to do with the 'not yet' and the 'unseen'. That is why, naturally speaking, we struggle with it. The Bible says we are called to live by faith, not by sight. Most people are dominated by the world of their physical senses and look for some immediate physical results, rather than focusing on what God says. But unless you know how to believe when God's promise is invisible, you will never see it materialise. First you believe, then you receive.

Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah was barren, but nevertheless he was strong in faith regarding the promise of God, being fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able to do. He faced the facts, but he did so in the certain knowledge that they were not the whole truth of the situation. By faith Abraham realised that spiritual truth goes way beyond physical facts, available to our senses. God had named him Abraham, the 'father of a multitude', and he clung onto the truth of that as the years passed and nothing appeared to be happening. He had faith in the God who calls things that are not as though they already were.

Some people refer to the time between knowing by faith that you have received something from God and the moment the promise it is seen in the physical realm as 'faith's incubation period'. Hebrews calls the assurance of having something by faith in advance of the manifestation of the promise 'substance'. Living faith is 'substance', because it has to come to you by revelation and is based on solid certainty.

Three meanings of 'substance'

As we saw in Part One the word 'substance', in Greek *hupostasis*, carries several strands of meaning. We examine three of these here.

The first, borrowed from Greek philosophy is, 'things as they really are, not as they appear to be'. If you only look at things as they appear to be, you will never move in faith.

Living Faith

The second meaning is, 'a firm foundation which we can stand and build upon'. Because it is substantial you can walk on it. That is how Peter walked on the water! He walked on the substance of his faith in the word of Jesus. By faith we can do the impossible. Everything else will let you down, but real faith will never let us down. It's an unshakable foundation for our lives.

The third meaning of the word 'substance' is, 'title deed'. The word 'substance' was used in the area of commerce and the purchase of property to refer to the deed on record establishing property rights. If you have the title deed to your property it is proof that you own the house. It doesn't prove that you actually live in the house. Somebody else could live there. You may not be the occupier but you are the owner, and have the legal right to take possession of the property. When we are moving in living faith we lay hold of the title deed to our promise, we become the owner. Then we can make the transition from being the owner to the occupier.

Faith is evidence

As with the 'title-deed', the word for 'evidence' used in Hebrews 11:1 is taken from the legal system of the day. It means the evidence is so strong that, beyond any reasonable doubt, the person under trial has been proven guilty. It refers to incontrovertible evidence, evidence that cannot be denied. A related word is 'conviction'. So faith is the evidence or conviction of things not seen. Many people in our society are saying, 'If the Bible is true, prove it'. But God says, 'faith is the evidence'.

Faith, then, has to do with accomplished facts, revealed truths and living realities. Living faith is the substance of God's accomplished realities, the 'substance of things hoped for'.

Seeing is believing

As we have seen, living faith lays hold of God's accomplished truths, his Word. It has nothing to do with our human imagination, or mental powers, or wishes, or desires or dreams. But, we also read in Hebrews 11:27 that faith enables us to 'see the invisible'. This reveals the power of vision. We

can understand the mysteries of God by faith, lay hold of God's promises by faith, and by faith we can certainly see the promise of God ahead of its fulfilment. God's Spirit witnesses to the eyes of our heart giving us a visual understanding of what we are believing him for.

The power of vision is a vital part of faith. We must learn how to co-operate with this envisioning process of the Holy Spirit. By faith we can see a vision of the thing God has spoken about and hold that vision before our eyes until it is accomplished in our lives.

Living faith applied

From God's Word, we understand everything that we need for life and godliness – from forgiveness of sins right the way through every other earthly provision – has been promised to us. By faith we can see that every promise in the Bible as an accomplished truth. That means by faith we can reach into the invisible realm and lay hold of God's spiritual realities, his accomplished truths concerning our life. By faith we take them and bring them into the realm of the actual, the visible, – into our own human experience.

Every blessing God has for us on the earth has already been accomplished by Jesus on the cross. For example, this is the truth behind 1 Peter 2:24 which says by 'his stripes you were healed'. If there is any difficulty in healing it is not in the heart of God our Father. It is the Father's will to heal. Jesus has paid the price on the cross and by faith we can reach into the invisible realm and lay hold of God's accomplished reality concerning our healing. This applies to all the promises of God's Word.

Living faith is an exciting adventure. God invites you to walk with him, to see the invisible, to do the impossible and to accomplish his revealed will in the earth.