

“Holy Hope”

Joel 2:12a

June 28, 2020

INTRO:

- With all that’s going on in the world today...
- *If you could pick a sermon topic...*
- **Today** is a day of **HOPE...**
- I pray you will be taught AND touched today!
- Because *attitude...* usually determines *altitude...*
- **Proverbs 13:12...** *hope deferred = sick hearts*

CONTEXT:

1. **Series** (patterns & pointers of hope)
 - a. **Hope is one of the Bible’s greatest “patterns”**
 - b. “We are not to be dooms day preppers but rather, Day of the Lord proclaimers!” -JDP
2. **Sermons** (previous hope)
3. **Scripture** (today’s hope)
 - a. God grabbed me again & spoke clearly...
 - b. Back to Joel... but very, very narrowly focused...
 - i. *“Jesus wept.”* = John 11:35 = 2 key words
 - ii. *“Consider Him”* = Hebrews 12:3a (sermon)
 - iii. *“Unhindered”* = Acts 28:31c (sermon)
 - c. Today... **Joel 2:12a** = *“Yet, even now...”* (HOPE)
 - i. Joel’s pattern: *Realize, Remember, Respond*
 - ii. Joel’s account and **PROPHETIC VISION...**
4. **Salvation** (eternal hope)
5. **Sanctification** (daily hope)

T/S: Biblical hope is **IN** Christ & **FOR** Christ...
therefore...

BIG IDEA: Biblical hope **CANNOT** be stopped!

“overwhelming over-comer” (Romans 8:37)

I will build My church & the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt 16:18)

T/S: Further, I pray that you will see that
biblical hope lies at the center of the biblical gospel

1 Corinthians 13:13

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.*

- **Grace** Saving Grace
- **Faith** Miraculous Faith
- **Hope** Holy Hope
- **Love** Lasting Love
- **Glory** God’s Glory

*See how hope holds on to faith while reaching
out in/to/for love...*

PREVIEW:

- | | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. “Yet” | REALIZE | Holy HOPE |
| 2. “Even” | REMEMBER | Holy HOPE |
| 3. “Now” | RESPOND | Holy HOPE |

I. REALIZE

A. DEFINING Hope

B. DESCRIBING Hope

“Yet, even now...”

T/S: Let's start by defining hope...

NOTE: Biblical hope begins with biblical hopelessness. - JDP

Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary:

HOPE, *noun* [Latin cupio.]

1. A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. *hope* differs from wish and desire in this, that hope implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired, or the possibility of possessing it. ***hope therefore always gives pleasure or joy;*** whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with **pain** and **anxiety**.

Defining & Describing Holy HOPE:

Holy hope is **IN** the Creator, **NOT** the created!
Holy hope is **FOR** the Creator... and **NOT** for the created...

Psalm 39:7

"And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You.

1 Peter 1:21: *Through Christ you now trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

Faith gives birth to hope & hope nurtures faith

See **1 Corinthians 13:13**.... *(...faith, hope, & love...)*

- Love is supreme & never fails...
 - *Grace* is love's "**well-spring**"
 - *Faith* is love's **reservoir**
 - **Hope** is one of love's **rivers & streams**...

Faith is both the spiritual parent AND big brother of hope. -JDP

Definition of FAITH:

Biblical faith is a "confident BELIEF."

Where "**hope**" has an **optimistic desire**, "faith" sees the invisible, holds on to the untouchable, pursues the unattainable, and accomplishes the impossible...

ALL by God's grace and ALL for God's glory! -JDP

VIDEO: *"The Anatomy of Faith"* (Erik Ludy)

T/S: Hope is the love child of grace & faith. - JDP

“Hope is the smile on a ‘no matter what!’ face.”

- JDP

God’s family of faith lives in His home of hope! - JDP

Holy hope both helps & heals! - JDP

Holy hope is never near-sighted. - JDP

Holy hope BOTH helps AND heals. - JDP

God’s family of faith lives in His home of hope! - JDP

WHAT HOPE IS NOT:

Hope without **God** is an idol.

Hope without **grace** is an impossibility.

Hope without **faith** is a superstition.

Hope without **truth** is a lie.

Hope without **love** is a selfish drug.

Hope without **koinonia** is a sad secret.

Hope without **mission** is a distraction.

Hope without **repentance** is a waste.

Hope without **praise for God** is a cracked mirror.

Hope without **worship** is a stolen gift.

Hope without **joy** is an oxymoron.

Hope without **sharing** is spiritual gluttony.

II. REMEMBER

- A. PROMISE of Hope
- B. PURPOSE of Hope

*“Yet, **even** now...”*

You need hope to cope!
Optimism is psychological...
Hope is the theological! - Rick Warren

Optimism ignores reality...
Holy hope KNOWS reality! - JDP

Holy hope is greater than every “even-if.” - JDP

“Hope is the ladder that climbs over ‘even if.’” - JDP

1 Peter 3:15

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. **Always** be prepared
to give an answer to **everyone** who asks you to
give the reason for the hope that you have...*

**Hope is a force-multiplying, offensive weapon
in spiritual warfare!** - JDP

VIDEO: *“Fools For Christ”* (Erik Ludy)

Holy hope is the fruit of faithful obedience. -JDP

- Noah’s boat building...
- Abraham’s road trip
- 3 boys and a furnace
- Daniel & the lion’s den
- David & the giant Goliath
- Joel 2:12a
- Disciples taking regular beatings
- Paul & Silas in Philippian jail
- Jude call for contending
- Ephesians 6:10ff
- Stephen being stoned...
- *“It is finished!”* (*Yet, even now*)

Romans 8:28

God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.

III. RESPOND

- A. **ATTITUDE** of Hope
- B. **APPLICATION** of Hope

*“Yet, even **NOW...**”*

Friends... hear me, **Holy hope is ESPECIALLY for NOW!**

Hebrews 6:19

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

Titus 2:13

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Titus 3:7

so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Fear, doubt, pessimism, and unbelief are all instruments of the enemy and are opposed to holy hope...

Worry is the opposite of worship and an **adversary** of hope!

Holy Hope's Healing & Helping Applications:

A **fear of God** is hope's foundation.

A **love for God** is hope's focus.

The **grace of God** is hope's glue.

The **glory of God** is hope's **bullseye**.
The **Gospel of God** is hope's **good news**.
 Christmas is hope's **birthday**.
 The **cross** is hope's **birth-place**.
 Great Friday is hope's **victory**.
Resurrection Sunday is hope's **validation**.
 Each Christian is hope's **ambassador**.
 The **collective Church** is hope's **army**.
 Baptism is hope's **aroma**.
 Discipleship is hope's **muscle**.
 Courage is hope's **backbone**.
 Love is hope's **language**.
 The Bible is hope's **blueprint**.
 Faith is hope's **confidence**.
 Faithfulness is hope's **contrast**.
 Obedience is hope's **narrow way**.
 The "few" are hope's **companions**.
 Ministry is hope's **touch**.
 Sacrifice is hope's **cost**.
 Evangelism is hope's **light**.
 A biblical worldview is hope's **design**.
The **sovereign work of God** is hope's **plan**.
 The **Holy Spirit** is hope's **Empowerer**.
 Koinonia is hope's **people**.
 The **Great C's** are hope's **purposes**.

Homothoomadon is hope's passion!
Your testimony is hope's keyhole.
Repentance is hope's doorman.
Proclaiming is hope's voice.
Preaching is hope's teacher.
A biblical witness is hope's sign-language.
Secret acts of kindness serve as hope's brail...
Service is hope's sweat.
Selflessness is hope's beautiful paradox.
Forgiving others is hope's eraser.
Authenticity is hope's credibility.
Reality is hope's reminder.
Transparency is hope's clearest translator.
Goodness is hope's personality.
Righteousness is hope's character.
Kindness is hope's reputation.
Gentleness is hope's demeanor.
Self-control is hope's restraint.
Shrewdness is hope's wisdom.
Sacrifice is hope's currency.
Patience is hope's time-keeper.
Joy is hope's smile.
Peace is hope's pleasure.
Prayer is hope's heart-phone.
Missional living is hope's megaphone.

CLOSE:

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

VIDEO: *“Falling Plates”*

Hope is the sweet song of redeemed wretches! - JDP

Romans 15:13

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope Happens Here!

Let's PRAY!

HOPE

Trustful expectation, particularly with reference to the fulfillment of God's promises. Biblical hope is the anticipation of a favorable outcome under God's guidance. More specifically, hope is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what God will do in the future.

This contrasts to the world's definition of hope as "a feeling that what is wanted will happen." Understood in this way, hope can denote either a baseless optimism or a vague yearning after an unattainable good. If hope is to be genuine hope, however, it must be founded on something (or someone) which affords reasonable grounds for confidence in its fulfillment. The Bible bases its hope in God and His saving acts.

Words for Hope.... In the Old Testament the words which are most often used to connote "hope" are tigwa ("to look for something with eager expectation"), batach ("to rely on something reliable"), and yachal ("trust"). In the New Testament "hope" is the proper translation for the verb elpizein and the noun elpis. Other words which belong to the vocabulary of hope are pepoithenai ("to trust"), hupomenein ("to endure"), and prosdokan ("to expect" or "to await"). It is important to note that the reality of hope is often present where the exact words are absent. A case in point is the New Testament Book of Revelation. The word "hope" does not appear in its pages. The message of Revelation, however, is permeated with the reality of hope.

A complete examination of hope would have to include all of the exhortations, prayers, promises, and future tenses in the Bible.

The Ground and Object of Hope... In the Old Testament, God alone is the ultimate ground and object of hope. Hope in God was generated by His mighty deeds in history. In fulfilling His promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), He redeemed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. He provided for their needs in the wilderness, formed them into a covenant community at Sinai, and led them into the successful occupation of Canaan. These acts provided a firm base for their **confidence in God's continuing purpose** for them. **Even when Israel was unfaithful, hope was not lost.** Because of God's faithfulness and mercy, those who returned to Him could count on His help (Mal. 3:6-7). This help included forgiveness (2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 86:5) as well as deliverance from enemies. Thus, **Jeremiah addressed God as the "hope of Israel,** the saviour thereof in time of trouble" (Jer. 14:8; compare 14:22; 17:13).

Likewise, the psalmist called on Israel to ***"hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.*** He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins" (**Ps. 130:7-8** NIV; compare 131:3).

A corollary of putting one's hope in God is refusing to place one's final confidence in the created order. All created things are weak, transient, and apt to fail. For this reason it is futile to vest ultimate hope in wealth (Ps. 49:6-12; 52:7; Prov. 11:28), houses (Isa. 32:17-18), princes (Ps. 146:3), empires and armies (Isa. 31:1-3; 2 Kings 18:19-24), or even the Jerusalem Temple (Jer. 7:1-7). God, and God only, is a rock that cannot be moved (Deut. 32:4,15,18; Pss. 18:2; 62:2; Isa. 26:4) and a refuge and fortress who provides ultimate security (Pss. 14:6, 61:3; 73:28; 91:9). An accurate summary of the Old Testament emphasis is found in Psalm 119:49-50. "Remember

your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life” (NIV).

A significant aspect of Old Testament hope was Israel’s expectation of a messiah, that is, an anointed ruler from David’s line. This expectation grew out of the promise that God would establish the throne of David forever (2 Sam. 7:14). The anointed ruler (messiah) would be God’s agent to restore Israel’s glory and rule the nations in peace and righteousness. For the most part, however, David’s successors were disappointments. The direction of the nation was away from the ideal. Thus, people looked to the future for a son of David who would fulfill the divine promise.

The New Testament continues to speak of God as the source and object of hope. Paul wrote that it was the “God who raises the dead” on whom “we have set our hope” (2 Cor. 1:9-10 NIV). Furthermore, “we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men” (1 Tim. 4:10 NAS). Peter reminded his readers that “your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21 NAS). In the New Testament, as in the Old, God is the “God of hope” (Rom. 15:13).

For the early Christians, hope is also focused in Christ. He is called “our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1), and the hope of glory is identified with “Christ in you” (Col. 1:27). Images applied to God in the Old Testament are transferred to Christ in the New. He is the Savior (Luke 2:11; Acts 13:23; Titus 1:4; 3:6), the source of life (John 6:35), the rock on which hope is built (1 Pet. 2:4-7). He is the first and last (Rev. 1:17), the day-spring dispelling darkness and leading His people into eternal day (Rev. 22:5).

New Testament writers spoke of Christ as the object and ground of hope for two reasons. 1) He is the Messiah who has brought salvation by His life, death, and resurrection (Luke 24:46). God’s promises are fulfilled in Him. “For in him every one of God’s promises is a “Yes” (2 Cor. 1:20 NRSV). 2) They are aware of the unity between Father and Son. This is a unity of nature (John 1:1; Col. 1:19) as well as a unity in the work of redemption. Because “God

was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), hope in the Son is one with hope in the Father.

The Future of Hope While the New Testament affirms the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work in the past, it also looks forward to His return in the future to complete God's purpose. Indeed, the major emphasis on hope in the New Testament centers on the second coming of Christ. The "blessed hope" of the Church is nothing less than "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). See Future Hope.

This expectation filled the horizon of the early Christian community. Jesus Himself spoke of it (Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:28; John 14:1-4). His disciples were promised that "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Apostolic preaching reiterated the theme (Acts 3:19-21; 10:42; 17:31). References in the epistles are numerous. Paul reminded the Philippians that "our conversation is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20 NAS; compare 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 1 Tim. 6:14). Christ "will appear a second time... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28 NRSV). Christians are "shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). If the Lord's coming seems delayed unduly, it is still certain because "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise" (2 Peter 3:9). The last book of the Bible begins and ends with a reference to Christ's return. "Behold, he cometh with clouds" (Rev. 1:7). "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

The content of the hope which will be realized in the future is described in different ways. Christians will "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21 NRSV); realize their hope of "righteousness" (Gal. 5:5); be "transformed into his likeness" (2 Cor. 3:12-18 REB; compare 1 John 3:1-3); acquire possession of

the inheritance (Eph. 1:14), and experience the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:21,50-55).

Hope is not merely individual in scope, however. It has cosmic dimensions as well. God's purpose is to redeem the whole creation. Thus, Christians expect that "the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). Peter expressed it like this: "we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13).

The Assurance of Hope Christians live in hope for two basic reasons. The first reason is because of what God has done in Christ.

Especially important is the emphasis the New Testament places on the resurrection by which Christ has defeated the power of sin and death. "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3 NRSV).

The second reason is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16). Furthermore, the Spirit is the "first installment of our inheritance, so that we may finally come into full possession of the prize of redemption" (Eph. 1:14 Williams). "Hope never disappoints us; for through the Holy Spirit that has been given us, God's love has flooded our hearts" (Rom 5:5 Williams). Hence, Paul's prayer that "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:13).

Given the assurance of hope, Christians live in the present with confidence and face the future with courage. They can also meet trials triumphantly because they know "that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3-4 NIV). Such perseverance is not passive resignation; it is the confident endurance in the face of opposition. There is, therefore, a certitude in Christian hope which amounts to a qualitative difference from ordinary hope. Christian hope is the gift of God. "We

have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Heb. 6:19 NIV).

Bert Dominy

Holman Bible Dictionary.

FAITH Trusting commitment of one person to another, particularly of a person to God. Faith is the central concept of Christianity. One may be called a Christian only if one has faith. Our English word “faith” comes from the Latin *fides*, as developed through the Old French words *fei* and *feid*. In Middle English (1150-1475) “faith” replaced a word that eventually evolved into “belief.” “Faith” came to mean “loyalty to a person to whom one is bound by promise or duty.” Faith was fidelity. “Belief” came to be distinguished from faith as an intellectual process having to do with the acceptance of a proposition. The verb form of “faith” dropped out of English usage toward the end of the sixteenth century.

Old Testament Expressions The word “faith” occurs in the Old Testament only twice in the KJV, eighteen times in the RSV, and sixteen times in the NIV. This discrepancy becomes even more interesting when we note that the RSV and the NIV agree on only five of these verses of Scripture (Deut. 32:51; Judg. 9:16,19; Isa. 26:2; Hab. 2:4), and the KJV concurs with them only on the translation of Habakkuk 2:4. These differences revolve around problems with the translation of two Hebrew roots, *ma’al* and *‘aman*.

The first of these roots, *ma’al*, is a negative term that means “to be deceitful, treacherous, or unfaithful.” The RSV, NAS, and the NIV translate this word with the phrase “broke faith” (Deut. 32:51; Josh. 22:16) or with “acted unfaithfully” (Deut. 32:51; Josh. 7:1). The KJV translates this root in those same verses with the word “trespass.”

While the Hebrew uses no single noun for “faith” in these verses, the translators have in each case rendered the sense of the Hebrew. The second root, ‘aman, is more difficult to translate because its meaning changes as it passes through the various Hebrew verb forms. There are seven such forms, but this root occurs in only three of them. In the first and most basic verb form the root means to support or nourish and is used of a parent’s care for a child. In the second verb-form one encounters a range of meanings having to do with being secure.

Only the third verb form was rendered with the Greek word for faith in the New Testament and in the Septuagint, an early Greek version of the Old Testament originating in Alexandria. ‘Aman expresses the idea of stability and steadfastness in this form and is translated as standing firm (Job 39:24, RSV; Isa. 7:9b NIV), or “to trust” (a person) or “to believe” (a statement). One stands firm in one’s convictions. In relationships, one trusts persons and believes their testimony or promises. Thus, we find no Hebrew noun for “faith” in the Old Testament, only verbs that have been translated with “faith” because of New Testament influence.

If we do not find the noun “faith” in the Old Testament, we surely find the concept named with other words. In the Old Testament faith is described as the “fear of God” (Gen. 20:11; Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 12:13; Mal. 4:2), and in terms of trust (2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 4:5, Isa. 26:4), and obedience (Ex. 19:5; 1 Sam. 15:22, Jer. 7:23). Faith is a New Testament concept that encompasses and enriches these Old Testament concepts. The English versions of the Old Testament have translated a pair of Hebrew verbs using the noun “faith.” They do so in order to express the understanding of God’s relation to humanity that has grown out of the New Testament.

Because the Old Testament does not have a word equivalent to the English noun, “faith,” does not mean the idea of faith is unimportant for the Old Testament. Habakkuk 2:4 was properly taken by Paul as the center of Old Testament religion. God prepared the way for His people in mercy and grace, then called them to obedience. To accept

the responsibilities of God's covenant was to trust His word that He alone was God and to commit one's life to His promises for the present and future. That is faith.

New Testament Expressions The Greek noun, *pistis* (faith), is related to the verb *pisteuo* (I have faith, trust, believe). The noun and verb are found virtually everywhere in the New Testament, with the notable exception that the noun is absent altogether from John's Gospel and occurs only once in 1 John. The verb form does not occur in Philemon, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, or Revelation.

Classical Greek used *pistis* and *piseuo* to mean "trust" or "confidence." In this period belief in the existence of the gods of the Greek pantheon would be expressed with the verb *nomizo* (to think, believe, hold, consider). In the Hellenistic period, however, both the noun and verb moved from secular to religious usage. The noun came to mean piety, and the verb took on the meaning "to believe"—a usage derived from debates with atheism in which faith required the overcoming of objections.

In the New Testament "faith" is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning "trust" or "confidence" in God. This basic meaning is particularly evident in the Synoptic Gospels. Mark 1:15 introduces and summarizes the Gospel with Jesus' charge to his hearers to "repent ye, and believe the gospel." (The word usually translated "believe" in this verse is the verb form of "faith" for which there is no English equivalent. The call is repeated as "Have faith in God," using the noun form, in Mark 11:22.) Thus, Jesus called His hearers to place their confidence in God. It is common in the Synoptics for Jesus to say after healing someone, "thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt. 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48.) One's confidence in or allegiance to God makes one whole. John expressed a similar understanding of faith in 6:29 and 14:1 where people are called to have faith in the Christ. The difference between John and the Synoptics is a grammatical one; John used only the verb and never the noun for faith.

Outside the Gospels faith is related to the keynote concepts of the Christian message: the state of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), sanctification (Acts 26:18), purification (Acts 15:9), justification or imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:24), adoption as children of God (Gal. 3:26). Each of these comes by faith. As in the Gospels, faith is an attitude toward and relationship with God mediated by Christ Jesus. It is surrender to God's gift of righteousness in Christ rather than seeking to achieve righteousness alone.

Faith is also called a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—something God creates in a person. In another place "faith" is used quite differently as a gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some but not to others (1 Cor. 12:8-9). Apparently such special gifts of faith refer to the ability to do great acts for God, what Jesus called moving mountains (Matt. 17:20; 1 Cor. 13:2).

The New Testament sometimes uses "faith" to designate Christianity itself or that which Christians believe (Acts 6:7; Eph. 4:5; Col. 1:23; Tim. 1:19; Jude 3). In this usage it is clear that an element of what we call belief is essential to the personal relationship we are calling "faith." Here it would be well to note Hebrews 11:6 also—"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is" In this verse also the word translated "believe" is the Greek verb form of "faith." Context here dictates that we understand it in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a proposition, "belief." To have a right relation with God, it is necessary to "believe" that God is, that God has revealed Himself in Christ, and to accept God accepts you.

If faith is the religion itself, it is so in more than an intellectual way. Faith is also the living out of the religion; it is Christianity in action. This is the meaning of "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "Walking" represents the totality of one's way of life. Paul wrote that "faith," both in the sense of Christian piety and of the trust and confidence one puts in God, determines action in life. Faith changes the standards and priorities of life. Similarly, using the imagery of a

soldier's armor, Paul said that faith is a shield against sin and evil in our lives (Eph. 6:16; 1 Thess. 5:8).

If Christianity itself may be called "the faith," then it is a small step to the New Testament usage of the participle of the verb form of faith to designate Christians. This form is often translated "believers" (it occurs most often in the plural) or "those who believe" (Acts 4:32; Rom. 1:16). If we continue our distinction between faith and belief, we would prefer the translation "those who have faith" or the ungrammatical "those who faith."

The nearest the New Testament comes to presenting a definition of "faith" per se is in Hebrews 11:1. Here faith is called "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (RSV). Thus, Hebrews closely ties faith very to Christian hope. The personal conviction of faith encourages the Christian to continue hoping for the fulfillment of the promises of God, but it is not the substance (as in the KJV) of these "things hoped for" in any normal sense of "substance." The "things hoped for" have a reality greater than anyone's hoping for them. Faith is then meant as a sort of foretaste of the hoped for things.

Faith as the Way to Salvation. The concept of faith is primarily that of a personal relationship with God that determines the priorities of one's life. This relationship is one of love that is built on trust and dependence. We receive it by trusting the saving work of Jesus. Faith is the basic Christian experience, the decision for Christ Jesus. It is the acceptance of Christ's lordship (i.e., His God-given, absolute authority). In this sense faith is doubly a break from the past: it is one's removal from sin, and it is one's removal from all other religious allegiances (1 Thess. 1:9). As a break from the past, faith is the beginning of relation to God and not an end. It is, especially in Paul's letters, the inauguration of incorporation "in Christ," in which one continues to grow and develop.

If faith is primarily a relationship into which one enters through acceptance of Jesus' authority, it also includes a certain amount of "belief." As a derived use, then, "faith" may also denote the content

of what is believed. In this sense faith is the conviction that God acted in the history of Israel and “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). In theological usage “the faith” may refer to many more doctrines and dogmas that have been developed since New Testament times, but in the New Testament “that which must be believed” was more limited as Romans 10:9-10 may demonstrate. Conclusion Faith is what we believe, it is Christianity itself, but primarily it is the relationship we have with God through what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.

William L. Self

- Holman Bible Dictionary.