

GOD'S ECONOMY IN FAITH

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Faith is universally regarded as a matter of central importance in the salvation and life of a believer in Christ. However, its equally central role in the carrying out of God's economy, that is, His plan and endeavor to accomplish His good pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9-11), has been little appreciated. In much of Christianity, faith in the objective sense is understood as the set of biblical teachings that one must believe in order to be saved. In the subjective sense faith is commonly understood as an assent to these and other teachings in the Bible as well as a trust in the promises of God, especially regarding salvation. Although such an understanding of faith can hardly be said to be wrong, it fails to capture the intrinsic significance and the broad scope of faith as revealed in the New Testament. This is because it centers on man's benefit, whereas the full and proper understanding of faith focuses on the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, for which man's salvation is the means. With man's need in view, the function of faith is seen primarily as saving human beings from the negative consequences of the fall through the redemptive death of Christ. God's purpose, however, necessitates that human beings be saved much more, on the positive side, in the resurrection life of Christ (Rom. 5:10) realized as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2)—to the extent that they become the glorious corporate expression of God (Rom. 8:29-30; 12:4-5). Therefore, we should not understand the contents of the objective faith as confined to God's initial salvation, which is primarily judicial in nature; they comprise the fullness of God's salvation in the believers, which can be carried out only by the eternal life and is therefore primarily organic in nature. The function of the subjective faith is accordingly not only to justify man but also to bring man into full participation in God's economy of salvation for the realization of His eternal purpose, which is to gain a corporate man expressing Him in glory (Gen. 1:26; Eph. 3:21; Rev. 21:2, 11).

Though many Christians appreciate that justification is by faith alone, few are aware that the whole

of God's economy is in faith. In charging Timothy to hold to and defend the faith, Paul speaks of "God's economy, which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4), showing that faith is the very realm in which God's entire economy of salvation is carried out. This has nothing less than dispensational import, as it indicates that faith, rather than the law (1 Tim. 1:7-9), is the unique way for God to carry out His New Testament economy. It also has immense practical import for every believer: If we see that the objective faith includes the entirety of God's eternal economy, we will also see that our participation in His economy is a matter of partaking of His grace through faith (1 Tim. 1:14)—not of fleshly effort

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to fulfill the law. Whereas the law issues in death and condemnation (Gal. 3:21; Rom. 7:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:7, 9), faith issues in the enjoyment of eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; John 3:16), and salvation in the eternal life issues in the building up of the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16)—the great mystery of godliness, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16; 4:7; 6:3, 11; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3). Seeing that all of God's economy is a matter of faith will strengthen our subjective faith as the God-infused ability to substantiate His economy, bringing us into a richer participation in God's salvation for the fulfillment of His purpose (1 Tim. 1:14, 19; Heb. 11:1).