

anything but tremble and be afraid and how can it avoid turning away from the God whom it dreads? But faith ought to seek God, not turn away from him. It is obvious, therefore, that we have not yet found a complete definition of faith, because it is impossible to name every sort of knowledge of the divine will. So for 'will', often the messenger of bad news and the herald of fear, let us substitute the kindness or mercy of God. In this way we shall undoubtedly be coming nearer to the nature of faith.

We are drawn to seek God when we are told that our safety is treasured up in him; we are confirmed in this when he declares that he takes a deep interest in our welfare. We need his gracious promise that he is a propitious Father, since there is no other way in which we can approach him. So mercy and truth are closely linked in the Psalms. It would be useless to know that God is true, if he did not lovingly draw us to himself. We could not lay hold of his mercy, if he did not offer it.

I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord; may your love and your truth always protect me (Ps. 40:10–11).

... It would be presumptuous to believe that God was well-disposed towards us, if we did not have his assurance and clear invitation. Christ is the only pledge of love, for without him, everything speaks of hatred and anger.

Since the knowledge of divine goodness cannot be of much importance unless it leads us to trust in it, we must not allow knowledge to be mingled with doubt. But the human mind, when blind and dark, is unable to rise to a true knowledge of the divine will. Nor can the heart, vacillating in constant doubt, rest secure in such knowledge. So, in order that the Word of God may be given full credit, the mind must be enlightened and the heart strengthened from some other direction. We shall have a complete definition of faith

if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of God's favour towards us, based on the truth of a free promise in Christ, revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
[8–13]

14. Now I want to go over the different parts of our definition one by one, so that no doubts can remain. By knowledge, we do not mean the sort of understanding we have through our human senses. This knowledge is far superior: the human mind has to go out of and beyond itself to reach it. Even when it has reached it, it does not comprehend what it feels, but understands more from persuasion than it could discern by its own ability... Paul says that 'as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:6–7) showing that what we understand by faith is distant from us and out of view. So we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists more in certainty than discernment.

15. We must add that faith is sure and certain, so that we can convey an impression of its strength and unchanging nature. As faith is not happy with a doubting, changing mind, so it cannot be happy with obscure and vague ideas. It calls for a certainty which is complete and decisive, only to be expected in matters which are sure and proven. Unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts that while everyone confesses with their lips that God is faithful, no one ever believes it without a tremendous struggle. Particularly when we are brought to the test, we betray our unbelief by wavering. With good reason, the Holy Spirit bears clear testimony to the authority of God, so that it may deal with this problem and make us really believe the divine promises: 'And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times' (Ps. 12:6) ...

Whenever God commends his Word, he is indirectly re-

buking our unbelief, because he says it to remove all false doubts from our hearts. So many people have a picture of divine mercy which gives them very little comfort. They are haunted by terrible anxiety as they doubt whether God will forgive them. They imagine that they have grasped the truth about his mercy, but they put such narrow limitations on it. They have the idea that this mercy is great and overflowing. They believe it has been given to many and is available to all. But they cannot be sure whether it will reach them personally, or rather, whether they can reach it. So their knowledge stops short and leaves them in mid-air. Far from being strong and peaceful in mind, they are weighed down with doubt and apprehension. How different is the feeling of full assurance which the Scriptures attach to faith – an assurance which leaves us in no doubt that God's goodness is clearly offered to us. We cannot have this assurance without being aware of its sweetness, and experiencing it in our hearts. So the apostle deduces that confidence follows faith, and boldness follows confidence. His words are 'In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence' (Eph. 3:12). This underlines the fact that our faith is not real unless it enables us to stand calmly in the presence of God. Such boldness can only spring from confidence in God's favour and salvation. This is so true that the term faith is often used as a synonym for confidence.

16. The main hinge on which faith turns is this: we must not imagine that the Lord's promises are true objectively but not in our experience. We must make them ours by embracing them in our hearts. Only then will confidence (referred to as peace in Romans 5:1) spring to life. This is the assurance which quietens and soothes the conscience before God's judgment. Without it, it is plagued and torn apart with overwhelming fear (unless it takes a momentary nap, forgetting God and itself). And it really is momentary! It can never enjoy oblivion for long, because the memory of