

Life of Faith (1740)¹

[Baker list, #18]

Editorial Introduction:

This is the first major published example of Charles Wesley's propensity for versifying scripture. Charles issued it in his own name as a pamphlet on May 24, 1740, and the ledger of his printer (William Strahan) suggests that it was reprinted on June 2 on that year. John Wesley then incorporated the hymn into *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), which appeared in July.

The issues of the "quietism" controversy between the Wesley brothers and the English Moravians can also be discerned in this work; cf. the introduction to *Means of Grace* (1740).

Editions:

Charles Wesley. *The Life of Faith*. [London: Strahan, 1740.]

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: June 16, 2008.

**THE
LIFE OF
FAITH.**

**Exemplified in the Eleventh Chapter
of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews.**

By Charles Wesley, M.A.
Student of Christ Church, Oxford.

Verse 1.

- 1 Author of faith, eternal word,
Whose Spirit breathes the active flame,
Faith, like its Finisher and Lord,
Today, as yesterday the same;
- 2 To thee our humble hearts aspire,
And ask the gift unspeakable:
Increase in us the kindled fire,
In us the work of faith fulfil.
- 3 By faith we know thee strong to save,
(Save us, a present Saviour thou!)
Whate'er we hope, by faith we have,
Future and past subsisting now.
- 4 To him that in thy name believes,
Eternal life with thee is given,
Into himself he all receives,
Pardon, and happiness, and heaven.

- 5 The things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason's glimm'ring ray,
With strong, commanding evidence
Their heavenly origine display.
- 6 Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly,
Th' invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.

Verses 2–3.

- 1 By faith the holy men of old
Obtained a never-dying name,
The sacred leaves their praise unfold,
And God himself records their fame.
- 2 Through faith we know the worlds were made,
By his great word to being brought:
He spake: the earth and heaven obeyed;
The universe sprang forth from nought.
- 3 The heavens thy glorious power proclaim,
If thou in us thy power declare;
We know from whom the fabric came,
Our heart believes, when God is there.
- 4 Thee through thyself we understand,
When thou in us thyself hast shown,
We see thy all creating hand,
We *feel* a God through faith alone.

Verse 4.

- 1 Believing in the woman's seed,
And justified by faith alone,
Abel a nobler offering made,
And God vouchsafed his gifts to own.

- 2 Witness divine he thus obtained,
The gift of righteousness received;
And now he wears the crown he gained,
And sees the Christ he once believed.
- 3 Still by his faith he speaks though dead,
He calls us to the living way:
We hear; and in his footsteps tread:
We *first* believe, and *then* obey.

Verses 5–6.

- 1 Exempted from the general doom,
The death which all are born to know,
Enoch obtained his heavenly home
By faith, and disappeared below.
- 2 From earth unpainfully released,
Translated to the realms of light,
He found the God by faith he pleased,
His faith was sweetly lost in sight.
- 3 God without faith we cannot please:
For all, who unto God would come,
Must *feelingly* believe he is,
And gives to all their righteous doom.
- 4 We *feelingly* believe thou art:
Behold we ever seek thee, Lord,
With all our mind, with all our heart,
And find thee now our great reward.

Verse 7.

- 1 Divinely warned of judgments near,
Noah believed a threat'ning² God,
With humble faith, and holy fear
He built the ark, and 'scaped the flood.

²Ori., “threatening”, a misprint; corrected in 2nd edn. (1743) of *HSP* (1740).

- 2 He (while the world that disbelieved,
The careless world of sinners died,)
The righteousness of faith received:
Noah by faith was justified.
- 3 We too by faith the world condemn,
Of righteousness divine possessed,
Escape the wrath that covers them,
Safe in the ark of Jesu's breast.

Verses 8–10.

- 1 Obedient to his God's command,
And influenced by faith alone,
Abraham left his native land,
Went out, and sought a place unknown.
- 2 A place he should possess at last,
When twice two³ hundred years were o'er,
Upon the word himself he cast,
He followed God, and asked no more.
- 3 As in a strange, though promised, land,
(A land his distant heirs received,)
He, and his sons in tents remained;
He knew on whom he had believed.
- 4 A better heritage he sought,
A city built by God on high,
Thither he raised his tow'ring thought,
He fixed on heaven his steadfast eye.
- 5 Whose firm foundations never move,
Jerusalem was all his care,
The New Jerusalem above;
His treasure, and his heart was there.
- 6 And shall not we the call obey,
And haste where God commands, to go?
Despise these tenements of clay,
These dreams of happiness below?

³“Twice two” changed to “full four” in *HSP* (1740).

- 7 Yes Lord; we hearken to thy call,
As sojourners o'er earth we rove,
We have for thee forsaken all,
And seek the heaven of perfect love.

Verses 11–12.

- 1 By faith, the handmaid of the Lord,
Sarah, received a power unknown,
She judged him faithful to his word;
Barren and old she bore a son.
- 2 Nature had lost its genial power,
And Abraham was old in vain:
Impossibilities are o'er,
If faith assent, and God ordain.
- 3 He glorified Jehovah's name;
(God spake the word, it must be done)
Father of nations he became,
And multitudes sprang forth from one.
- 4 From one old man the race did rise,
A barren womb the myriads bore,
Countless, as stars that deck the skies,
As sands that crown the ocean shore.

Verses 13–16.

- 1 The worthies these of ancient days,
By faith they lived, in faith they died:
Not yet received the promised grace,
But darkly from afar descried.
- 2 Assured the Saviour *should* appear,
And confident in Christ to come,
Him they embraced, though distant near,
And languished for their heavenly home.

- 3 Pilgrims they here themselves confessed,
Who no abiding-place must know,
Strangers on earth they could not rest,
Or find their happiness below.
- 4 Regardless of the things behind,
The earthly home from whence they came,
A better land they longed to find,
A promised heaven was all their aim.
- 5 Their faith the gracious Father sees,
And kindly for his children cares,
He condescends to call them his,
And suffers them to call him theirs,
- 6 For them his heaven he hath prepared,
His New Jerusalem above,
And love is there their great reward,
A whole eternity of love.

Verses 17–19.

- 1 Abraham, when severely tried,
His faith by his obedience showed;
He with the harsh command complied,
And gave his Isaac back to God.
- 2 His son the father offered up,
Son of his age, his only son,
Object of all his joy and hope,
And less belov'd than God alone.
- 3 His seed elect, his heir foretold,
Of whom the promised Christ should rise,
He could not from his God withhold
That best, that costliest sacrifice.
- 4 The father curbed his swelling grief,
'Twas God required, it must be done;
He staggered not through unbelief,
He bared his arm to slay his son.

- 5 He rested in Jehovah's power,
The word must stand which God hath said,
He knew th' Almighty could restore,
Could raise his Isaac from the dead.
- 6 He knew in whom he had believed,
And, trusting in omnipotence,
His son as from the dead received,
His steadfast faith received him thence.
- 7 O for a faith like his, that we
The bright example may pursue,
May gladly give up all to thee,
To whom our more than all is due!
- 8 Now, Lord, for thee our all we leave,
Our willing soul thy call obeys,
Pleasure, and wealth, and fame we give,
Freedom, and life, to win thy grace.
- 9 Is there a thing than life more dear,
A thing from which we cannot part?—
We can—we now rejoice to tear
The idol from our bleeding heart.
- 10 Jesu accept our sacrifice,
All things for thee we count but loss,
Lo! At thy word our Isaac dies,
Dies on the altar of thy cross.
- 11 Now to thyself the victim take,
Nature's last agony is o'er,
Freely thine own we render back,
We grieve to part with all no more.
- 12 For what to thee, O Lord, we give,
An hundred fold we here obtain,
And soon with thee shall all receive,
And loss shall be eternal gain.

Verses 20–22.

- 1 Isaac by faith declared his race
 In Jacob and in Esau blest,
The younger by peculiar grace
 A nobler heritage possessed.
- 2 By faith expiring Jacob knew
 Distinguished mercies to pronounce,
His hands found out the happy two,
 And bless'd his fav'rite Joseph's sons.
- 3 He raised himself upon the bed,
 Propped on a staff he owned his Lord,
The patriarch bowed his hoary head,
 His body with his soul adored.
- 4 Joseph by faith the flight foretold
 Of Israel's afflicted race;
God their hard bondage should behold,
 And lead them to the promised place.
- 5 Thither he willed his bones to go,
 And take possession in their stead;
His bones the promised land shall show,
 He claims his Canaan, though dead.

Verses 23–28.

- 1 Moses by faith from death was saved,
 While heedless of the tyrant's will,
His parents in their God believed,
 And dared the lovely babe conceal.
- 2 By faith, when now to manhood grown,
 A just contempt of earth he showed,
Refused a prince's name to own,
 And sought but to be great in God.

- 3 In vain its pomps ambition spreads,
Glory in vain displays her charms,
A brighter crown its lustre sheds,
A purer flame his bosom warms.
- 4 Wisely he chose the better part,
Suff' rings with God's elect to share,
To pleasures vain he steeled his heart,
No room for them when God is there.
- 5 Fleeting he deemed them all, and vain,
His heart on heavenly joys bestowed,
Partaker of his people's pain,
Th' afflicted people of his God.
- 6 Egypt unfolds her golden blaze,
Yet all for Christ he counts but loss;
A richer treasure he surveys,
His Lord's anticipated cross.
- 7 He triumphed in his glorious shame,
On pleasure, fame, and wealth looked down,
'Twas heaven at which his wishes aimed,
Aspiring to a starry crown.
- 8 By faith he left th' oppressive land,
And scorned the petty rage of kings,
Supported by Jehovah's hand,
And shadowed by Jehovah's wings.
- 9 His steady way he still pursued,
Nor hopes nor fears retard his pace,
Th' Invisible before him stood,
And faith unveiled the Saviour's face.
- 10 By faith he slew the typic lamb,
And kept the Passover of God:
He knew from whom its virtue came,
The saving power of sprinkled blood.

- 11 With all the servants of his Lord,
He (while the first-born victims died)
Dared the destroying angel's sword,
And, armed with blood, its point defied!

Verse 29.

- 1 While through the sea by faith they passed,
The sea retired at God's command,
The waves shrink back with trembling haste,
The waves a crystal barrier stand.
- 2 Th' Egyptians daring to pursue,
With horror found a wat'ry grave,
Too late their want of faith they knew,
And sunk beneath th' o'erwhelming wave.

Verses 30–35.

- 1 By faith, while Israel's host surrounds
Proud Jericho's devoted walls,
The ark stands still, the trumpet sounds,
The people shouts, the city falls.
- 2 Rahab by faith deliv'rance found,
Nor perished with th' accursed race,
The harlot for her faith renowned,
Amongst the worthies takes her place.
- 3 Worthies, who all recorded stand,
And shine in everlasting lays;
And justly now they each demand
The tribute of distincter praise.
- 4 Gideon, and Barak claim the song,
And David good, and Samuel wise,
And Jephtha bold, and Samson strong,
And all the ancient prophets rise!

- 5 The battles of the Lord they fought
Through faith, and mighty states subdued,
And works of righteousness they wrought,
And proved the faithfulness of God.
- 6 They stopped the lions' mouths, the rage
Of fire they quenched, escaped the sword,
The weak grew strong, and bold t' engage,
And chase the hosts that dared their Lord.
- 7 Women their quickened dead received,
Women the power of faith displayed,
With steadfast confidence believed,
Believed their children from the dead.

Verses 35–37.

- 1 Others, as in a furnace tried,
With strength of passive grace endued,
Tortures, and deaths through faith defied,
Through faith resisted unto blood.
- 2 Earth they beheld with gen'rous scorn,
On all its proffered goods looked down,
High on a fiery chariot borne,
They lost their life to keep their crown.
- 3 Secure a better life to find,
The path of varied death they trod,
Their souls triumphantly resigned,
And died into the arms of God.
- 4 The prelude of contempt they found,
A spectacle to fiends and men;
Cruelly mocked, and scourged, and bound,
'Till death shut up the bloody scene.
- 5 Or stoned, they glorified their Lord,
Or joyed, asunder sawn, t' expire,
Or rushed to meet the slaught'ring sword,
Or triumphed in the tort'ring fire.

Verses 37–38.

- 1 Naked, or in rough goatskins clad,
 In every place they long confessed
The God, for whom o'er earth they strayed
 Tormented, destitute, distressed.
- 2 Of whom the world unworthy was,
 Whom only God their Maker knew,
The world they punished with their loss,
 The holy anchorites withdrew.
- 3 Lone unfrequented wilds they trod,
 O'er mountaintops the wanderers ran,
With milder beasts in dens abode,
 And shunned the haunts of savage man.

Verses 39–40.

- 1 Famed for their faith all these believed,
 By justifying faith made whole:
Nor yet the promised grace received,
 The Christ, the fulness in their soul.
- 2 A better gift he us provides,
 On whom the gospel-times are come;
And lo! The Holy Ghost *abides*
 In us, and makes our hearts his home.
- 3 We now our elder brethren meet,
 Their faith, and happiness improve,
And soon with them shall shine complete
 In Christ, and perfected in love.