

The Definition of Faith

by A.B. Simpson

Faith is a present receiving of things promised, believing what sight and evidence may contradict, and is indispensable to please God.

Scripture: Genesis 15:5, Romans 4:17, Hebrews 11:1

Topics: "Faith", "Trust in God's Promises"

Description

A.B. Simpson expounds on the definition of faith as presented in Hebrews 11, emphasizing that faith is the present acceptance of God's promises rather than mere hope or sight. He illustrates that true faith believes in the unseen and the impossible, as exemplified by Abraham's unwavering trust in God's promise despite contrary evidence. Simpson further explains that faith recognizes God's creative power, enabling believers to trust Him to bring forth life and strength from nothing. He warns that failing to trust God is akin to practical atheism, as it undermines the reliability of His Word. Ultimately, Simpson calls for a faith that pleases God, rooted in the assurance of His promises and the recognition of His sovereignty.

Transcript

The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews contains the most complete treatise on faith to be found in the Scriptures. It is introduced by a definition of faith, as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This definition teaches us:

First, that faith is not hope, not a mere expectation of future things, but a present receiving of that which is promised in a real and substantial way. It is accepting, not expecting.

Secondly, that it is not sight, for it deals with things not seen. The region of the visible is not the realm of faith. When a thing is proved by demonstration, it is not a matter of faith, but of evidence. Faith asks no other evidences than God's Word and its own assurance. It is the evidence. It is not true to say that "seeing is believing." Faith believes where it cannot see; nay, believes what sight and evidence may even seem to contradict, if only God has said it.

When God said to Abraham, "I have made thee a father of many nations," there was no sign of it; indeed, the evidence of sight plainly contradicted it. But God said it, and Abraham believed, for faith "calleth the things that are not as though they were."

And so Abraham "considered not his own body, now dead," but "was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform.

Thirdly, faith recognizes in every case an act of creation. It does not require any material to start with, for it believes in a God who can make all things out of nothing, and therefore it can step out upon the seeming void and find it full of the creations of His power.

In giving His greatest promises in the Old Testament, God reveals Himself as the Creator of that which He is promising. "Thus saith the Lord, the Maker of it, Call unto Me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." There may be no sign of it, no probability of it, no germ of it from which to start, but God is able to make it out of nothing by a word. He does so make it by the word which faith claims. He needs no protoplasm to build His magnificent edifices of worlds. "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Into the soul that has no basis or remnant of goodness, but is dead in trespasses and sins, He can speak life and holiness. Into the body, whose constitution is exhausted and its springs of life run out, He can command health and strength. And so faith begins where human hopes and prospects end; "man's extremity is God's opportunity."

Now this faith, the apostle declares, is indispensable in order to please God. No wonder; anything less is to treat God as if He were unreal and unreliable, and is practical atheism. It is to make His Word less sure than a mere material fact of nature and perception of the senses; it is to trust God less than we trust His works.

The reason why God requires our absolute trust is very plain. The ruin of the human race came by discrediting and doubting God's word to our first parents. "Hath God said?" was the fountain of all sin. "God hath said" is the foundation, therefore, of our restoration. Only when we thus implicitly believe His Word will we love and obey Him. And as unbelief stands in the foreground in the first picture of our fallen race, it leads the procession of the lost, in the closing scene in the tragedy of mankind. "The fearful and the unbelieving shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Let us "take heed, therefore, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Having given general principles respecting faith, the apostle next proceeds to illustrate them by a series examples from the Scriptures. The first seven are taken from the Book of Genesis and represent various aspects of faith in human life.

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