

Faith - the Substance

by G.W. North

Faith is the law of life and necessary for living, leading to intelligent understanding, a good report from God, and the discovery of God.

Scripture: Romans 1:17, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 10:38, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Faith", "Justification"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the significance of faith as outlined in Hebrews 11, arguing that faith is not merely about what can be accomplished but is essential for living a justified life before God. He warns against the dangers of drawing back from faith, highlighting that true faith must produce works and fruit in a believer's life. North illustrates that faith is inherent to humanity, and everyone believes in something, but the critical question is in whom or what we choose to believe. He stresses that understanding follows faith, and that faith must be active and responsive to God's word for it to be valid. Ultimately, he concludes that faith is the foundation for a relationship with God, leading to salvation and a life of righteousness.

Transcript

The eleventh chapter of the Hebrews epistle is without doubt the greatest chapter on faith and its accomplishments in the whole Bible. Its contribution to the subject is as invaluable as it is unequalled, but its greatest value to us will be lost unless it is understood to be part of a section only and not the whole statement on the matter. The whole section commences at the thirty-eighth verse of chapter ten and ends with the second verse of chapter twelve. These forty-four verses add a new dimension to the subject, setting it in context and thereby in proper perspective. The writer's purpose is not so much to show us what can be accomplished by faith as to bring us to an understanding that men must live by faith. Realisation of this cannot fail to convince the reader of the writer's great concern for any who, having been illuminated by the gospel, draw back from true gospel living through lack of faith. There can be only one end to that he says -- perdition: 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of ... God': it is a frightening warning.

The terse submission with which the section commences in chapter ten is, 'the just shall live by faith', from which faith and life no man must draw back. The most important of all the many reasons for faith is that by it a man must first be made just, that is, justified by God; secondly he must thereafter, and by the same faith, live justly before God and man. Justification is an act of sheer grace on God's part, and because this is so it can only be appropriated by faith. When God justifies a man from sin He does so because a man

believes Him, and with a view to the salvation of that man's soul. Salvation, once granted, is a continuous experience which can only be accomplished as that man continues in the faith, that is, lives by faith. The first act of faith is an act of appropriation. Thereby forgiveness of sins and justification, both from God, are granted to a man through the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; this must lead to a life of faith or else it is not valid. The writer's contention is that unless the fruit of faith develops in a man and works of faith are manifest in his life, that person is not living by faith. If a man is not living by faith he is not alive: scripture makes plain that faith without fruit and works is dead. The whole of the eleventh chapter is given up to the substantiation of this. In it the writer points out that this is so, first in the lives and works of the progenitors and elders of the human race, and then also in the lives of the acknowledged fathers of Israel.

He commences with the fact of faith. He does not argue for faith, or try to make people accept the fact that faith exists -- faith simply is. As every intelligent person knows, faith is a fact of life; without it life could not possibly be. Every person on earth, whether he is a professed atheist or cynic or whatever, believes in something: it is in the nature of man to do so; we are made that way. Existence is impossible without believing in something or someone, even if it is only in our own deluded, disillusioned selves.

Having drawn attention to the fact of faith so that we cannot do otherwise than honestly acknowledge it, the writer proceeds to the next point, namely, everyone must recognise and acknowledge that, because men can do no other than believe, there must also be something or someone in which to believe. This must be so, for if there is nothing to believe and no one to believe in, what is the use of being able to believe? Our very humanity teaches this: we are all able to breathe, that is how we are made, but what would be the use or the sense of being able to breathe if there was nothing to breathe? It is the same with every one of our faculties and abilities; sight presupposes, even postulates, that there is something to see; hearing, that there is sound to hear, and so on. Further than this, it must also be true that the things which the eye sees, the ear hears and faith believes must have been before these various faculties were. If there is thirst there must have been water, if there is hunger there must have been food, if there is brain there must be and have been thought, and so we could go on. The very fact that faith "is" postulates that there is -- must be -- something and someone in which to believe. To say or think otherwise is either foolishness or perverseness, perhaps both.

It is not possible to believe nothing and no one; we all believe in someone and something; the only issue to be resolved is in whom and in what do we choose to believe? Faith in a man is a saving virtue; the ungodliest of men believes that he must eat and drink and breathe in order to live, so he does, and is thereby saved from dying. Faith is the law of life modified and adapted to man's estate and needs by God, in whom life and law are eternally one; for man faith has been modified and adapted to various ends and functions, many of which operate in him quite unconsciously. In his ignorance of truth and limited knowledge of these facts man calls these functions by other names because he can only name them according to his experience and recognition of them.

Belief in eating is translated into an urge to eat; man calls it appetite or hunger; it is a law. Unknown to the flesh which does not know God and has no mind of its own, hunger is an adaptation of the law of faith; it is the same with thirst and all other basic urges in human beings. Even in the body man is compelled to live by this law according to all its variety of adaptations to conscious or unconscious need. He may not think about these things and may not be prepared to admit it if he is made aware of them, for he does not know this to be true, and as often as not prefers to believe otherwise. God says, 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'. That is as absolutely true as the verse which says, 'by grace are ye saved through faith ... it is the gift of God'. Whether or not a man is prepared

to believe it, everything in the physical universe is a form of God's word. Bread for instance: God spoke wheat into existence before man made it into bread; the same with water, God made it. Every basic thing from which man may manufacture anything, whether for good or for evil, all was spoken into being by God.

Because of the fall in Eden and the sin into which man entered there, sin also entered into the world, wherefore, in the realm of knowledge man became dead to God and to the knowledge of himself; he is completely darkened in understanding. Every man is a 'by faith' person of some sort; the great difference between sinners and saints lies in this following kind of situation: when the voice and call of God came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees he listened to and obeyed it; that is how he became the saint he was. Because of this Abraham entered into a new place of faith in God -- this is of the essence of truth; living faith will only rise in man when he responds to God in a similar way. Paul describes this as the faith which comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. In his natural state man hears neither the voice nor the call of God; few men ever do. The world is in this sad state because men do not use their natural faith about things they see and hear, but refuse even to believe that there is a God, or better put, that God is. By this attitude they abide in unbelief, and when God does speak to them they do not hear either His voice or His word, they are quite dead.

Proceeding from the ground that men accept the fact of faith, the writer, pursuing the truth, makes a further important point, namely this: by the acceptance of the original premise, a man reaches a plane of understanding as sensible to his mind as it is vital to his soul's salvation. This being so, it is not difficult for him to believe that things which are seen are not made of things which appear to the senses. Although he is not speaking here of things that man has made, what the writer says is as true in the realm of human accomplishments as it is in God's. Man has made many things by apparent means from apparent things, (furniture from wood and cloth from cotton or wool for example) but even so the mind that discovered these things and the skill which made them are quite invisible; the results are apparent, but not the human factors and abilities which produced them. The writer is here speaking of things visible and invisible -- the earth -- the universe -- the real world -- life itself -- the aeons in which we live and move and have our being, man himself. God made them all.

God expects us to enter into understanding and by the knowledge gained from the common sense acceptance of the first truth enter into yet fuller understanding of the whole truth of which it is a part. In this case he speaks concerning creation -- the unseen, unapparent, unheard word of God was the means whereby the apparent worlds were framed, he says. When He did so there were no human ears to hear, no eyes to see; God spoke and thereby created. He did it all from Himself: there was nothing to respond and obey. Moses has made clear that when God did these things there was no man in existence, either to hear the word God spoke or to observe its results. Quite simply then, all men must acknowledge that this universe and everything in it was not made by man; we are living in a miracle world wherein minor natural 'miracles' occur regularly. Even time itself, as we know it, was put in being as a framework for the order and succession of creative events. Time itself is a manifestation of God's word: the ages have been fitted together by Him that in them He should fulfil His will. If we accept the first proposition, namely that faith is, it is not difficult to accept this second one, namely that faith must lead to intelligent understanding. Outside of Christ it is not common to accept this, but he who is in Christ easily does so. Although revealing the logic of faith, the writer is not seeking to convince the atheist against his will, but seeking to demonstrate to the believer the life of faith and its results.

All the material things of the original creation now so obvious to the senses, and a vaster number of things not so obvious to the senses, God made by His word; for the fullest apprehension and appreciation of both

that which is visible and that which is invisible, faith is necessary. When faith comes (as it logically should) to the heart of the child of God, it is wonderful and revelatory, but far more wonderful than that, when understanding dawns upon him and faith becomes understanding faith, it is glorious beyond words. By this understanding faith, (that is, faith which understands) the elders obtained a good report from God -- they believed and understood, and thereby obtained. We must beware of the unbelief masquerading as faith which changes the order of truth revealed here. If we do this we shall hardly believe anything and never shall obtain the good report from God which is so essential to our eternal well-being.

One of the most unsubtle of all errors common among men is, 'I will only believe what I understand', whereas the truth is quite the reverse to this thinly-veiled scepticism, namely 'I shall only understand what I first believe with my heart'. Understanding follows faith, it does not precede it. It is true that if faith first be there, understanding will lead to greater faith because understanding thus acquired will become light to the mind. The enlightened soul thereby equipped will be the more fully disposed to press on eagerly to greater truth and fuller appropriation of what it now sees and understands. Appropriating faith, that is faith which appropriates the truth revealed to the heart, is normal faith. True faith is power of appropriation and reception; believing without receiving is not faith, it is a substitute for it.

Before continuing with our theme, we should pause here awhile to note a distinction which could be quite vital to our hearts, and perhaps very illuminating also. The elders spoken of in this chapter are of two different categories: the first four, Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, are very special men -- unlike the others mentioned here they are elders of the entire human race. To miss this fact is to lose some of the blessing which God intends us to have. Adding to understanding, to these four should be added the names of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; these seven men lived before Moses and were therefore pre-law, and pre-Israel, though not exclusively so. For the purposes of God in His creation these men became the elders of the entire human race. Every man on earth can claim Abraham as his elder, but not everyone can claim Moses to be so; God never intended that everyone should; He had other intentions by him. Moses brought the law of God on to the earth because God purposed to establish Israel, His chosen nation, in spiritual truth. Abraham was their father according to flesh, and their elder according to the spirit, but not their lawgiver. By Abraham God showed that grace and faith preceded codes of law and it is he who is the elder of us all, that is, of all who live the life of faith.

In verse six it is apparent that the writer makes the assumption that, having discovered that everything exists by unseen power, the believing heart will come to the same conclusion to which he himself had arrived, namely, that God is. Proceeding further he also assures that having made the unavoidable discovery that I am, therefore I have power, a man will believe also that, because great power is displayed in this astounding universe, there must also be a great and amazing person who is the source of that power. To believe anything other than this is illogical; how else could it be? Every man, by the very logic of his own being and power(s), must at last come to God; he can only refuse to do so by refusing to accept the testimony of his own senses and denying his own self -- to be sensible man must reason thus: I am, so God is. Every man is held responsible by God for this kind of basic reasoning. Paul also is very clear about this, saying to the Romans that God will hold every responsible person capable of reason accountable to Him on two counts: (1) His eternal power; (2) His Godhead. In other words man's simple conclusion upon observing this universe should be, 'these things cannot be except by unimaginable power, therefore the one who has such power must be God'. God is, His eternal power proves that He is.

Without faith, that is without the ability and capacity to believe, man cannot be; such a man does not exist. Faith and the ability to develop that faith, as well as the basic means whereby the simplest of people may

exercise it, are constitutional in man. It is also true, (and to men this is most important of all), that without the definite exercise of faith it is impossible to come to God for eternal life. The verse which declares this also contains another statement of almost equal importance, namely this, that if a man will not come to God, it will not please Him -- and that is putting it very mildly. The writer phrases it this way because he is not issuing a warning or making threats, he is speaking to God's people, not atheists. When a man comes to God he is only following the law of both his own being and of God's to its logical conclusion. Faith is the law governing conscious and profitable relationship between God and man, and to deliberately stay away from God in heart and keep Him at a distance throughout life is to declare publicly that by so doing the person intends to deny both man and God. There can be no greater folly.

Drawing the whole of this great section on faith to a close, the writer says in chapter twelve that we must lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run the race (of life) with patience. That exhortation is most vital for all men, for the sin most common to all, and which so easily besets everyone, is unbelief: this folly of refusing to act upon the law of our very being is self-imposed death. What liberation it is to a man's being when he simply believes God's word and the things that are, and moves towards God; so doing he is fulfilling his own nature, thereby he is blessed. We all must believe that God is and that what He says will -- indeed must -- come to pass, or, better still, come into being. Whenever the promissory side of God's word comes into being, or fruition or fulfilment as the case may be, it may be said that it has come to pass. It has not come to pass away, it cannot, it has become permanent in experience, in time, and in history. It has not become fact, it was always fact because God said it; it has become recognisable fact; it has not become true thereby, but manifestly true to man, that is all. To not believe is to be a disbeliever, and classified as an unbeliever; to be an unbeliever is to be an atheist, for unbelief denies that God is; that person has therefore done nothing but continue in that offensive state before God. To believe that God is and not to come to Him by choice is self-death, and by implication to constitute oneself an attempted destroyer of God -- a very serious matter indeed. The result of coming to Him is wonderfully rewarding, and very joyous; perhaps the greatest of these joys is the delight of proving to oneself that God is. What a seal of faith this is.

When the search for God and reality has ended in complete success, the immediate outcome of it is relief and joy and the most important goal has been reached. The grateful heart will then make some offering to God -- a thank-offering -- a love-offering as excellent as may be possible within the scope of man's power. To do so is natural -- it is the obvious thing to do. Besides this it is the only righteous thing to do, because it is the discharging of the debt of gratitude owed to God; to do so is the righteousness of faith attempting repayment for that which cannot be purchased. It is not possible to have faith and not to make such an offering; it is the perfect outworking of the fact that faith is, and God wants that faith to be made known. Paul says that the gospel is being preached to all nations for the obedience of faith. Because I am, faith is; because faith is, I am; because faith is, God is (this is man's discovery); because God is, faith is (this is God's faithfulness): because faith is, I can discover God: because God is, and I have found Him, I must make a voluntary, free-will offering to Him. If I do not respond in this manner I am ungrateful and am acting neither logically nor righteously; logic and righteousness are immortal moral twins; they act in conjunction, often in unison, and are the basis of all sanity and spirituality. It is not possible to believe and do nothing; faith is the beginning of correct attitude and correct action towards God.

Taking as an example the elder of the race who pioneered the way for all men the writer says, 'Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts ... he being dead yet speaketh'. Being the son of Adam, Abel had a

fallen nature, but in spite of the fact that sin was already in the world Abel revealed his faith by doing something. This 'voice' from the dawn of history witnesses to the fact, the truth, the logic and the work of faith. Abel's work lights up to us the way of that natural righteousness which is itself the outworking of the innate principles of the nature of man. Both Paul, in Romans chapter two, and Peter, in Acts chapter ten, support this position; it is a very important one, so we will turn aside for a few moments to examine it.

In Romans three Paul says, 'We have before proved ... that ... there is none righteous, no, not one'. He was speaking the truth; he does not say however that no one has ever been righteous -- note the tense. In chapter two he speaks equally clearly of those who 'do by nature the things contained in the law, these ... are a law unto themselves: which show (they have) the work of the law written in their hearts': they prove this by their works (and by patient continuance in well-doing), he adds. Faith in Christ is nowhere mentioned in connection with these people. Surprising as this may be to some, there were people like this living on earth in Paul's day, and there are people of this description living on earth still. They know nothing of Moses' law, or of the Gospel, but live by the outworking of natural faith according to conscience. As we have before seen, all men without exception are held responsible by God for this, He exempts no-one, nor does He accept excuses on this count from anyone, not even from the most primitive or the most underprivileged, or from the evangelised.

Neither nationality, culture, social conditions, lack of education, loss of privilege, heathendom nor the fact of sin affect this, and neither does the present state of spiritual death nor the deprivation of the gospel. None of these things alter the fact that originally the work of the law was written by God in Adam's and Eve's hearts, and has been passed on by heredity to every human being born since. Nothing has affected that -- though there may be total depravity, there is no such thing as total ignorance. Subconsciously every man 'knows'; man is a 'knowing' person. The gospel takes this into account and is directed to men with this in mind. The Holy Spirit is sent into the world for this purpose. He comes to a person to awaken and quicken that 'knowing' faculty to consciousness of true spiritual realities. The best news of the gospel is that from the primitive state of ignorance and the original innate knowledge of the God of whom he is ignorant, sinful man may be resurrected to a far higher position than that which he formerly had, and can know all things (1 John 2 v.20 & 27).

At an earlier date Peter took this same position when addressing Cornelius and his friends at Caesarea, 'I perceive that God is no respecter of persons', he said. By a vision and certain specific commands God had shown him something which revolutionised his outlook upon the world of men; it came to him as a complete surprise. As a result of this, when the apostle went to the Gentiles at God's command, his perception of truth was profoundly changed. By the vision and the commandment he had now gained understanding of men and of God's will, and the power and extent of the work and purpose of Christ's death on the cross. As far as it is allowable for us to assume, Cornelius and his friends were originally a heathen company who had converted from idolatry to a belief in the one true and living God. Consistent with that and his human nature Cornelius was doing works according to the light and measure and kind of faith he had. As far as they had gone these people had let their 'natural' faith dominate their thinking and actions, and were, before God, as righteous as that faith could make them in His sight. This was what Peter realised and said, 'In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him'.

God had shown Peter this by the vision, and this was also the basis of truth upon which the angel of the Lord had spoken to Cornelius on the day he visited him in his home. The parabolic implication of the vision God gave to Peter upon the housetop (when the vessel filled with every imaginable beast was lowered to

him from heaven) was exactly as Peter said; that is why God commanded Peter to kill and eat. Peter was astounded at the words. Perhaps the thing that astonished him most was that these unclean creatures were not thrust up at him from the pit but lowered to him from heaven. 'Slay ... eat', said the voice -- it was repugnant to him, but O what a privilege! Peter refused point blank, but God persisted and insisted that he should do as commanded. After three attempts, God made Peter see the truth and understand what He was meaning. People whom Peter called common or unclean (certainly he would not have called them righteous) actually found acceptance with God. Peter knew that God would only accept men upon the ground of righteousness, so he just had to accept what God was showing him. What else could he do? By the vision Peter learned that Cornelius and his friends were righteous. Their personal righteousness was neither the righteousness of Moses nor yet the righteousness of Christ, it was the righteousness of their proper response to the law inwrought in the heart of man by God at the beginning. The works which Cornelius had wrought in righteousness by this natural faith and with a clear conscience in the sight of God revealed it.

Cornelius was a righteous man according to his light, but he was not yet regenerate. He was not chosen by God to be a saint because of the natural faith he had, but was chosen to be the gentile upon and through whom God would pour out His Spirit that the door of faith should be opened to the whole world of gentiles. It could be thought that, being God, the Lord could have chosen to do this through the veriest sinner, but such thinking is wildest assumption, and against the whole revelation of scripture. By being faithful to God as far as he knew Him and true to himself, and by acting according to natural (God-given) faith, Cornelius had become acceptable to God, so God selected him for honour. The man who acts according to this faith naturally receives the gospel and the Christ of the gospel.

It has ever been like this since the commencement of the human era. Abel and those early elders of faith were not alone in their righteousness. Scripture makes clear that centuries after this, in Abraham's day, king Abimelech claimed before God that he and his people were a righteous nation, and neither God nor Abraham denied it. Amazingly enough in the two separate incidents in which Abimelech encountered first Abraham and then his son Isaac, Abimelech showed himself to be more righteous than either of them, and they were patriarchs of Israel the chosen race, while he was a Philistine. Abimelech was not one of the chosen race, nor was he the called of the Lord, neither was he God's friend. Was he more righteous than Abraham? In the incident, and as the incident showed, yes. It was exactly the same with Isaac when, years later, he followed his father's unrighteous example; both he and his father brought the threat of punishment upon a guiltless people. It must have been most humiliating to both Abraham and Isaac to be reproved by this 'heathen' king for their sin. In those days righteousness consisted in living and acting rightly according to the inbred law common to all men, instead of living and acting according to inbred sin.

The account of Abel and his offering commences the list of the earliest elders of the faith-life: his faithfulness is in sharp contrast with his father Adam's faithlessness, who for that reason is not referred to in this chapter. Adam's sin lay in the threefold fact that he acted contrary to: (1) the explicit word of God; (2) the obvious attestation to its genuineness and power displayed in all nature around him; (3) the implicit word and work of the Lord written within him: therefore Adam died. Physically he remained unchanged, but because he denied God instant spiritual death took place within him; he had acted contrary to the law of his own life. Quite different to this, years later and apparently without any instruction, Abel offered to God a sacrifice more excellent than Cain and God witnessed to those who witnessed it then and to all who observe it now that he was righteous. It is not said that by virtue of his offering he became righteous, rather it appears that Abel acted as he did because he was already righteous, and that the righteous God

testified to his gifts because they were the testimony that this young man was righteous. The thing that appeared and was therefore seen was the offering, but what did not appear, and was therefore not seen by Adam and Eve and Cain, was Abel's faith and righteousness. These were apparent to God though, and He witnessed to these to Cain, and presumably to his father and mother (if they were still alive).

So it was that Abel spoke to his relatives and is still speaking to us today. Abel is the only one of whom this is said, and since he speaks from the dawn of time his voice is authentic and what he says is most important. God draws attention to Abel's gifts (to Him) because they were brought by a man who knew no gospel but the testimony of his own conscience responding to the work of the law written in his own heart. This caused him to think aright and act aright, even though no legal code of sacrifices and offerings had as yet been given to men. To this day Abel is saying that where the gospel is not preached and is therefore unknown, God looks upon and deals with men according to natural faith and natural righteousness. This could only be then (and can only be now, as it was also in both Abimelech's day and Cornelius' day), because, in foreknowledge of the fall and in anticipation of it, the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world. Upon this ground of truth all those worthies whose names have been mentioned in this chapter, as well as millions more whose names and the works they have done have not been mentioned, were and are accepted by God. It is a significant fact, fundamental to salvation, that the Lamb of God Himself was slain upon the ground of His own natural faith and innate righteousness; only thereby could the redemptive will of God reign in righteousness over all and be efficacious for all.

By the devil's cunning and Adam's folly, sin had entered into the world and death by sin, but sin was not imputed to Cain by God because there was no outward form of law. At that time God had neither formulated nor given it to mankind; the words, 'Thou shalt not kill', had not been written. In that era everything turned on the work of the law written on the fleshy tables of the heart and the thoughts of their own hearts reacting to God's work therein. As conscience exercised men they either accused or excused themselves or each other before God and man; of a corporate body of law and a functional legal society the human family knew nothing. When, at a much later date, God did give the law, He formed it to cover and condemn the sins which men had already committed or were in danger of committing. The natural source of law in man, and the sole arbiter of it, had been flawed and had ceased to function correctly because man had changed; he had altered the relationship between himself and God and fellow-man. Man had become a different person from the one God had made; his spiritual nature had changed because of sin; he could not be justified in what he was doing.

Recognising this, and knowing that man could not change back to his original state, God, having raised up Moses, prohibited sin by itemising it in a plainly stated legal code and engraving it on tablets of stone and giving it to His people. To that legal code He also appended a detailed system of blood-offerings that men should make to Him; compliance with the requirements listed in this code brought men back into favour with God. Thereupon God entirely exonerated him, and justified him from his sin. The sacrifices themselves did not blot out sins; they had no power to do that, neither did they earn God's forgiveness; man was forgiven by God simply because he obeyed Him. In whatever age he lives man is only ever forgiven when he complies with God's word and the work of the law operative in that age; this compliance is called the obedience of faith. Man can never be forgiven by anything he does just by the act of doing it; he is forgiven because of the obedience of faith displayed by and inherent in that act -- never by the ritual of it. Let a man's deeds, of whatever kind and calibre they may be and under whichever covenant they may be done, but become merely legal or mechanically religious, and there can be no approval of them by God; they will not be accepted by Him, and neither will forgiveness be granted by Him to that person. The

natural faith of the heart of a man must be renewed and revived in that man so that he co-operates with God by believing Him for personal salvation.

This renewal and revival is effected in man by the grace of God through the word spoken unto him by God for that purpose. When God speaks to a man with that word, He also imparts the ability to hear it so that every man is without excuse. By His word God quickens and revives natural faith, and He does so because it is the faith He infused into Adam in the beginning, without which he would have been an incomplete man. Jesus had this faith; it was of a higher quality and of greater degree than in any other man: it was of this that He spoke in the temple when He exhorted men to have the faith of God. That faith which had been originally generated in man needed to be regenerated, else how could man become regenerate? This faith was in man in the beginning, but it had died, that is, the vital spiritual content of it had departed, leaving the empty shell. The gospel is preached to man for the obedience of faith; from the moment he hears the gospel everything depends upon a man's decision to obey or disobey it, doing so he either obeys or disobeys God. Exactly as in that which took place between God and Adam in the beginning, with the advent of sin man became an empty shell, a mere capacity; life had departed. Death was self-inflicted by man when he chose not to believe God. We see therefore that what is generally taken to be unbelief was really a preference for the devil's word as against God's.

Whenever the gospel is preached in the power of the Spirit man chooses life or he chooses death. Originally death came by hearing -- that is, by listening to the devil; similarly, in this gospel era, life comes by listening to God with intent to believe and obey Him. Satan did not slay man, he only supplied man with the opportunity to destroy himself by that which was good, which man did. That the devil intended to destroy Adam through Eve, and thus destroy them both together, is beyond question, therefore he is guilty of murder by intention; satan was both the initiator of the act and an accessory to it. It is sad to think that man, knowing what he was doing, deliberately slew himself, though not knowing all that death meant -- man chose to die. To Adam it was a novel experience and terribly tragic; for him the act was irremediable -- 'thou shalt surely die', God had said, and he did. That was the first death, it was (and still is) a spiritual one. Adam changed; from being a living man he became a dead man; his body still lived, but not his spirit; man is not a body -- he has one. Choosing to believe satan man changed his behaviour, his nature and his person and his character; he had died a death as God said he would. There are other deaths further to the first one, all of them resulting from the first one, one of which is the physical death which terminates man's existence on earth. For all the sons of men this is an inevitability -- there is no avoiding it; as rivers flow to the sea so is man born to die.

Among those great elders of the race there was one exception to this -- Enoch. It was not God's will for him to die; instead, in him God intended to reveal further truth: Enoch pleased God; this was God's testimony to the man. Enoch had this testimony in his heart before God and man -- he was righteous and he knew it, for it was God's testimony to him. Just as God bore testimony to Abel's gifts, So He bore testimony to Enoch's life. On account of his offering to God Abel had to die; he was just as faithful as Enoch and pleased God just as much, but he was allowed of God to be slain: not so with Enoch though. He was not superior to Abel; what happened to each of them was by faith, but for righteousness' sake and for God's purposes by Enoch he did not have to die. Here then we have two extremes: by faith Abel saw death; by faith Enoch did not see death. By this we see that faith operates in and covers the two manners of departure from physical life in this world -- bodily death and bodily translation. The greatness of true men of faith lies in this, they are men of understanding and do not care whether, in the will of God, they are destined to see death in this world, or not to see it. In Christ both methods of departure are exhibited:

He died and departed, he also departed forty days after His resurrection without dying. Either departure is as acceptable to men of faith as it is to God. The spirit that questions God's ways, demanding from Him an answer to everything He does, is not of God. Whatever happens through grace, faith must develop in every man to that point of implicit trust in Him which complete obedience brings.

There are men whose lives and gifts are altogether pleasing to God, they somehow understand, and by the mystery of their simple faith God is free to do exactly as He likes with them. God could force His will on anybody, but it is not His purpose to do so; His desire is that men should co-operate with Him by faith so that His truth should be revealed in them. With such men God can do as He wants, use them as illustrations of truth, make them examples of His power, or through them say or do something which is vital to all mankind just as He wills; that is the kind of faith they have. It is original faith -- faith as it should be, that is, faith as it is in God and was in the Lord Christ on earth. At the beginning man was made in that same likeness after the same image, but it was effaced by sin and was never displayed on earth again in all its perfections until Christ came. A hint of this is to be found in the combined lives of Abel and Enoch; the Lord Jesus, when finally made flesh, was made the fulfilment of all that Abel and Enoch exemplified. The Christ offered unto God both His life by that most excellent sacrifice and, following that, was translated to heaven: He had this testimony -- He pleased God. To His own He showed Himself alive on numerous occasions following His decease by many infallible proofs. Many times during the period between His resurrection and His final ascension to His Father He moved between heaven and earth, appearing for a while here and there for certain purposes until finally He returned bodily to home and Father, never to return again until the trumpet of the herald shall sound.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gw-north/faith-the-substance/>

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