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CHAPTER

1

Jesus, Author of Our Faith

Do you realize that your faith is a gift from God? You should look upon your faith as a miracle. It is the ability God gives lost men and women to trust and obey our Savior and Lord. It is the ability God gives regenerated men and women to continue to trust and obey.

And Jesus is the Author of our faith.

Are you satisfied, contented with your faith? Is it the kind of faith that is pleasing to God? Does it rest solidly upon the very nature and character of God? I raise these questions with the hope of finding some ripple of concern among God's people about this simple, straightforward statement in the letter to the Hebrews: "Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (11:6).

In all of my ministry I have found comparatively few eager to consider what the Bible teaches concerning genuine faith in God. It is difficult, also, to

find spiritual concern among Christians for trusting God and living to please the One who created us and who redeemed us back to Himself.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews is often called “The Faith Chapter.” Its opening message is familiar:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . . Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. . . . But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (11:1-6)

“The Faith Chapter.” I doubt that most people recognize the full meaning of that term, “the faith chapter.” I would like to amend the title by calling Hebrews 11 the “Faith-in-God Chapter.” Or, even better, the “Faith-in-the-Character-of-God Chapter.”

The word *faith* can mean a thousand different things to as many people. It is especially so if in their thinking there is no basic reference to God, no consideration of His eternal will and no understanding of the lostness of mankind. I have discovered that professing Christians can read about the great exploits of faith in the past—and then immediately ask the age-old question, “But what is faith?”

No actual definition

Although the writer to the Hebrews declares that faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see, he is not thereby actually providing us with a definition. Definitions have to do with human reason, human intellect, human philosophy. I think God had His own reasons for withholding a specific definition of faith from the pages of our Bibles.

God's record and appeal are spiritual messages, directed to the spirits of needy men and women. If our Christian testimony is to be vital and effective, we must understand that the Bible was not given to serve as a handbook of ethical considerations. Rather, it is plainly a book of morals. Therefore, when we take God at His word in committing ourselves to Jesus Christ, we discover that faith and morals are two sides of the same coin!

I repeat: The Bible is not a book of reason about things that are good and things that are bad. Rather, it is an authoritative book clearly demonstrating for us what *is* good and what *is* bad! On that basis, then, what does the Bible tell us about genuine faith?

Without dealing in pinpoint definitions, we know that faith as demonstrated in the Word of God is complete confidence and trust in God and in His plan of salvation through Christ.

Let us agree further that faith is a gift of God to every penitent, trusting person. Beyond that, faith is a miracle, for God gives lost men and women the

blessed ability to trust and serve Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Bible assures us that faith in God is the plain gateway to forgiveness, to cleansing, to regeneration, to restoration. The Bible declares that where there is no faith there are no answers to fervent prayers. The Bible makes clear that every spiritual benefit flowing from the atonement of Christ is given to faith and is received by faith. All of this is common evangelical doctrine and is accepted wherever the cross of Christ is rightly understood.

Beware of faith in "faith"

I have often warned men in the ministry of their great responsibility when they begin to preach and counsel about faith. It is quite possible to lead people into the mistake of placing their faith in "faith" itself.

I do not think any of us believes that as Christians we can or should ever be satisfied by emphasizing our faith in "faith." To do so would result in our bragging about the greatness of our faith and our trading mutual testimonies about the results of *our* faith.

I remember an old story, used more than once as a sermon illustration. It concerned an anonymous Christian believer who testified of great faith and willing obedience with this rather amazing promise: "If the Lord ever asks me to jump right through that brick wall, I am ready to jump!"

My point is that we should not be busy magnifying our own great faith. Rather, we should be busy

demonstrating the fragrance of God's love and grace in our daily walk. It is not proper to magnify faith if in doing so we forget that our confidence as believers is not in the power of faith but in the Person and work of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I have heard ministers say that if the people in their congregations would memorize more Bible promises, they would immediately have more faith. Yes and no.

Study the Scriptures and you will find that we are not going to have more faith by counting the promises of God. Faith does not rest upon promises. Faith rests upon character. Faith must rest in confidence upon the One who makes the promises.

Faith says, "God is God! He is a holy God who cannot lie. He is the God who is infinitely honest—He has never cheated anyone. He is the God who is faithful and true!"

Yes, we must be concerned with the Person and character of God and not just with His promises. Through promises we learn what God has willed to us, we learn what we may claim as our heritage, we learn how we should pray. But faith itself must rest upon the character of our God.

When I think of the angels in heaven who veil their faces before the holy God who is totally truthful, I wonder why every preacher does not begin preaching about God—who He is, His attributes, His perfection, His being and why we love Him and why we should trust Him!

We must know God Himself

It is not enough just to know things about God. It is important that we declare to people all round us that they must come to know God Himself.

Our faith in God is more than the provision of an eternal life insurance policy. Some Christians in their testimonies seem to view God as a lifeboat always coming to their rescue. Or perhaps they portray Him as a kind of ladder enabling them to get out of a burning building.

We dare not miss the point here. Our God takes pleasure in His believing children coming to Him with genuine faith, knowing that He is the rewarder of all who diligently seek Him. This kind of earnest, genuine faith—the faith of the Scriptures—is taught and fully demonstrated in this book of Hebrews.

The lesson that comes to us through the many dramatic illustrations of faith in Hebrews 11 brings us back to my earlier statement: Faith in God is to be demonstrated, not defined. Just as God's church demonstrates Christian love, this demonstration of godly, humble faith is God's ideal for His church.

It is not enough for preachers in their pulpits to try to define love. The love that God has promised must be demonstrated in the lives of the believers in the pews. It must be practiced as well by the man who occupies the pulpit.

We should put the matter of faith in that same category. God wants His people, including the

ministers, to demonstrate all of the outworking of faith in their daily lives and practices.

In His Word, God tells us again and again that as believing children we are to live by faith and we are to walk by faith. This reference is to God's believing, trusting people and to the kind of faith that is saving faith. There are many other brands of faith being displayed in our world today. Saving faith—biblical faith—is on the highest level, for it is the life of trust and obedience that our Lord requires of us.

The Bible says faith is necessary to please God. It is plain, then, that there are unbelievers—men and women without faith who refuse to take God into consideration. It is my position that unbelief is not merely a different attitude of the human mind. Unbelief is always sinful because it presupposes an immoral condition of the heart.

The unbeliever says in effect to the Christian believer: "My gift of human reason tells me that you are unreasonable in the matters of your faith."

Christians have an answer

Christian believers have an answer born from their scriptural perspective. They are not afraid to declare that at the door of the kingdom of God man's reason is dethroned. For those who are living a life of faith and have found fellowship with God, human reason is no longer king. Instead, reason becomes a servant.

The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian Christians long ago that God had made foolish the wisdom of the world:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence. . . . That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:27-31)

Human reason has always been in rivalry with God. Our human race took a great fall on the day Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey their Creator God. He told them it was *reasonable* that they should have the same knowledge that God Himself has. Our first parents bowed to reason, taking the bait like hungry fish.

We are only too well aware of the results of their failure—their disobedience. Instead of becoming as gods in knowledge, they and their posterity fell to such a low level that they lost their capacity to know anything that really matters!

I am asked sometimes for my opinion on certain matters. Perhaps you would like to ask my opinion concerning the faculty of human reason, and I am ready to answer even before you ask! I believe that most people are more proud of their ability to reason than of any other faculty. They do not even suspect that nothing else they possess is as small as their power to reason.

Once those persons enter the kingdom of God by faith, reason becomes a useful servant—no longer ruling them as a false god. On the other hand, those who continue to live without Christ and without God will unknowingly live out their

lives in a very real kind of sub-faith, strange as that may seem.

The rationalists exercise faith

I confess that it is very intriguing to me to consider the habits of the so-called liberal thinkers. They reject the validity of any kind of faith, declaring that they choose to reject religion because it requires faith. Yet they do not discern that they are going through many of the motions of faith every day.

They get up every morning fully expecting that the sun will be in its accustomed course when they rise. They fully expect that the morning newspaper will be delivered as promised. Although they cannot entirely explain it, they have no doubt that breakfast will satisfy their appetites—at least temporarily!

They step out on the sidewalk with full faith that it will not collapse under their weight. They do not call the office where they work to inquire if they still have a job. Something very much like faith tells them their job is secure and waiting.

Nearly every move they make is by a certain kind of faith and trust. Their boast is that they lean only on reason, but from dawn until bedtime their lives fit into a pattern of faith and trust, whether they admit it or not! Yet they will argue and debate at every possible opportunity that faith is unreal and cannot be accepted because it is not predicated on human reasoning.

We who are believing Christians refuse to agree with the unbelievers' premise that we are taking

an unreasonable position. We simply accept our new realm of life and faith where reason becomes a servant. We find a blessed fulfillment in a life of trust.

We discover in this relationship with God that faith actually becomes an organ of knowledge. That is why it is completely ridiculous for religious prattlers to insist that they can equate faith and reason.

According to both Matthew and Luke, Jesus prayed, saying: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matthew 11:25). Yes, we do find that faith becomes an organ of knowledge.

In Hebrews we read, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3).

The proud thinkers tell us they believe in the eternity of matter. They are convinced in their own minds that there was never a time when things were not. To them, matter is eternal. For them, there is no invisible, eternal world back of the visible, temporal world we see and know.

The Bible tells us otherwise

But we lean on the inspired Word from the Holy Spirit of God, who gives us this truth: The visible came out of the invisible. It was God who framed the worlds. The things that are seen came from the Unseen. Thus we learn that matter came out of spirit, and before all things was God Himself!

It is by faith that we can understand these things. And that is another way of saying, "By faith we know!" We know, too, that there is much imagination in the world. For that reason we contend that our faith is not a substitute for reality. Faith in God apprehends reality and spiritual things.

True faith is not a function of imagination. I disagree with the modern theories that peace and happiness depend upon our ability to "project" ourselves out of subconscious minds. The proponents of that philosophy would have us believe that the subconscious mind sits around waiting for the conscious mind to talk to it. Then, if the conscious mind is willing to say to the subconscious, "You are going to feel good today!" you will really feel good all day.

That is human imagination. Faith in God is a function of knowledge, not of human imagination. We do not by faith project out of ourselves an imaginary hope of heaven beyond this life. Jesus Christ has promised that our place is being prepared; it is a promise of our heavenly Father.

I tell you frankly that I would not want to consider any kind of a heaven that was projected out of my subconscious mind. I am looking forward to something far more substantial than a projection of my own mind or imagination!

What the Bible says

Now, if we really have a desire for our faith in God to increase and grow, do we have any New Testament direction or encouragement? Yes! We can take a lesson from the conversation about faith between Jesus and His disciples:

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. (Luke 17:5-6)

The apostles apparently recognized their own need and addressed a direct prayer to the Author of faith—their Lord and Master: “Increase our faith!” Did Jesus reprove them for their earnest request, for their desire to mature in the realm of faith? No. Jesus did not reprove nor did He rebuke.

Instead, He taught them and He encouraged them. Surely it should strike us with conviction that our Lord was saying that even to the smallest measure of sincere faith the mightiest works for God are possible.

I ask: Do you believe as earnestly as you should that faith can bring the conversion of the human soul to God? Do you believe as deeply as you should that faith can unite you forever to Jesus Christ, your risen Lord and now your great High Priest in the heavens?

Do you believe as you should that earnest and sincere faith in the living God can remove mountains of difficulty out of your way, can cast your burden of guilt into the deepest sea? The Author of our faith stands ready to make it so.

A concluding illustration

Let me conclude with a contemporary illustration of faith easily understood because it could happen in any family household.

A father and his nine-year-old son have a close and trusting relationship. The father reminds his boy that in a month he will be observing his tenth birthday.

“Son,” he begins, “I know that you want a bicycle. I am going to order a brand-new red and white bicycle, and it will be here in time for you to begin riding it on the morning of your birthday. It will be your very own bicycle—you will be the owner!”

Is that excited boy going to wait a month before he tells his friends that he is the owner of a shining new bicycle? Oh, no! He runs out immediately to give the great news to his friends. He is full of faith. He is full of expectancy. He already knows within himself the pride of ownership. His faith has given substance to his boyish hope. His faith has given a reality to the bicycle he has not yet seen!

He is not reporting to his friends an imaginary projection of his mind. He has his father’s word. He is able to speak with assurance: “Believe it or not, I own one of the most beautiful bicycles in the whole world!”

That boy knows he can trust the character of his father. His faith is not in the factory that makes the bicycle. It rests in the character and the ability of his father to keep the promise he has made.

But, of course, there is one little friend in the neighborhood who remains cynical and unbelieving.

“Don’t give me that dreamy line about having a bicycle,” the friend insists with some belligerence.

“Who is going to believe your story? I don’t see any shiny new bicycle in your front yard.”

For an answer, the boy with the faith, the boy who already knows the delight of anticipation, simply smiles a knowing smile. “Just give me till my birthday, and when you see me riding my bike past your house, you will wish my father was your father, too!”

We thank our heavenly Father that our sincere faith in Him becomes for us a function of knowledge. It becomes substance and evidence!

Jesus is the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. With the apostle Paul we stand in faith and in knowledge: “Nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).