

A.B. Simpson:

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11: 6).

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (Heb. 10: 35).

Having unfolded the first two themes of the epistle, Christ our Apostle and Christ our Great High Priest, the writer now proceeds to the third, Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Christ our Apostle comes from God to us. Christ our Great High Priest goes from us to God. Christ the Author and Finisher of our faith brings us with Him to God in actual touch and fellowship. Faith is the point of contact, the organ of the spiritual life, the sixth sense by which we come into connection with the unseen spiritual realm all around us. The last portion of the epistle is devoted to a discussion of the nature and effects of faith, and a full unfolding of its influence in the lives of all the long array of holy witnesses who fill the page of sacred story.

I. THE NATURE OF FAITH

A very clear and comprehensive definition is given of it in the first verse of the eleventh chapter. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Many expositions and various versions of this important passage have been given, but the following points sum up substantially the meaning of this definition:

1. Faith is not a mere sentiment, but a substantial reality. The word "substance" carries with it the idea of solidity and reality. Faith is not a mere subjective state of mind, but there is corresponding to it an actual fact of which the confidence faith gives is as a shadow cast by the substance. There are in fact two realities in every instance of true faith. There is first an inward consciousness and confidence which gives to the soul a realizing and satisfying sense of the blessing claimed, and there is secondly an actual blessing, a real fact corresponding to the inward conviction and coming into our personal experience according to our faith. The man who believes in God is not therefore an idealist and a theorist building castles in the air, but he has something reliable to count upon and God can be counted upon to meet our expectations and prove the reality of His confidence. In fact, the only men that have made their mark on the religious history of the world are the men who definitely believed in God and ventured all the weight of their life upon Him.

2. Faith is not a future hope, but a present fact. It is the substance of things once hoped for, but now not hoped for but believed. The difference between faith and hope is that hope is always in the future, and faith always in the present. Hope is expecting, faith is accepting. The language of the one is, "He will bless"; the language of the other, "He does bless." In the first great object lesson of faith in the Word of God we find God leading Abraham through three tenses: the future, the present, and the past. First He says, "I will bless"; next "I do"; and finally, "I have made thee a father of many nations." All this, it will be remembered, was said long in advance of the actual fulfillment, and yet God counted it and Abraham had to count it the same as if it were already accomplished. It is thus that faith takes salvation and exclaims: "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Thus we receive the Holy Ghost and begin to act as if He were abiding in us. It is thus we take the answer to our prayers. "When ye pray, believe that ye receive [the things ye ask] and ye shall have them." It is thus we may take His healing and His help, and count upon Him literally as He speaks to us, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." It was thus He gave the Land of Promise to Joshua, saying to him, "Arise, go over this Jordan ... unto the land which I do give . . . to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you." And so it is true still that "We which have believed do enter into rest." This is, perhaps, the most vital and supernatural feature about faith, its power to anticipate the future and call "The things that are not as though they were."

Some years ago a little woman used to attend our meetings in the Tabernacle very regularly, and she was always giving bright and encouraging testimonies of God's wonderful help and her confidence in Him. She had a very hard life. Her husband was blind and helpless, her family large, and she the only breadwinner among them all. But she would get up at four in the morning and finish her washing in time to get to the Friday meeting, and she would always have a shining face and a bright, glad message. Her husband was an old soldier and they were entitled to a pension, for which she was steadily praying and believing. One day she came rushing into my office with both hands extended, crying out with exuberant joy: "Oh my dear pastor, I want to tell you the good news. We've got our pension. We've just had a telegram from Washington that it has passed." She could hardly restrain herself for joy as she talked about the change that it was going to bring, the help and comfort for her husband, the leisure for her, for her Christian work, and the means to give to the cause she loved. After she got somewhat through I asked her if the money had come. "Oh, no," she cried, "we may not get

the money for a year, but we've got the pension all the same." And so it came to pass. It was a long time that the case went through the slow forms of the department, but all the time she counted the money just the same as if it was already in her hand, and she was planning for the future without a particle of question. She was simply counting on the government and discounting its promises, so that to her the future was substantially present. How much more should we count upon our God and overleap the intervening spaces by that faith which Abraham had "before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."

3. Faith is not vision, but it lives in the unseen. Its watchword is: "We walk by faith, not by sight." It can step out in the dark and people the barren wastes with creations that have not yet come into being. It can look at the most unfavorable conditions and see them transformed until the wilderness blossoms as the rose. Like Abraham, without being discouraged, it can consider its own body as good as dead, and against hope believe in hope. It is the proving of things not seen. Seeing is not believing. Seeing is the material demonstration. Faith is confidence in the word of another, and against its own senses. As we have formerly said, it is a new sense that sees what others cannot see, and hears what others cannot hear, and lives in a world beyond the ken of man's material senses. So Moses believed as seeing Him who is invisible. So David set the Lord always before Him and said: "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." So the Lord Jesus Christ as He walked through the world could say: "The Son of man which is in heaven"; "He that sent me is with me, the Father hath not left me alone." So Peter could write: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

4. Faith is not probability, but certainty. It "is the evidence of things not seen," or as some have translated it, it is the "assurance," or the "proving" of things not seen. This brings us to the fact that the word usually used for faith in this epistle is a stronger term, denoting not merely faith, but the boldness of faith. It is the term employed in the thirty-fifth verse of the tenth chapter, "Cast not away your boldness." There are some things which if done at all must be done audaciously. A calvary charge cannot be made with caution and timidity. When once the order is given it must be all charge and nothing else. The faintest hesitation would defeat the whole movement. The very element of its strength is its abandon. When Peter went out to walk on the water it was too late to feel his way or resort to the alternative of swimming if he failed to walk successfully. He must either walk or sink, and when afterwards he tried to swim he actually did sink. It must be the natural or the supernatural. And so when we come to deal with God, if it be God at all it is an infinite God. It is as easy for Him to do the hardest thing as the easiest. It is said of Abraham that he "staggered not at the promise." The Greek is a little finer; he "faltered not." He did not even quiver, but steadfastly pressed forward "being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was" not only able but abundantly "able also to perform." The difference between believers consists entirely in this element of assurance of faith.

There are some who believe the Bible,
And some who believe a part;
Some trust with a reservation,
And some with all their heart.

It is these who reach the throne and move the world. This is the grain-of-mustard-seed faith which lifts the sycamore tree and levels the mountain. There is power in it. It is the boldness of faith. It is the only faith that is worthy of God or equal to man's emergencies. Let us ask Him for it. Let us cultivate it. Let us exercise and use it. It is the one victorious weapon of our spiritual warfare. It is the one link of connection between helpless man and the infinite resources of God. "Cast not away therefore your confidence," your boldness, for it "hath great recompense of reward."

II. THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF FAITH

1. It makes us partakers of Christ. (Heb. 3: 14.) "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." It brings us into partnership with our Lord and puts at our command all His resources. The difference between faith and works is that in the one case we do it, and in the other God does it. This was what Christ meant when He said: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." There are two in this partnership. They are working together. We are doing His works because He is doing them in us, and this is only while we believe in Him. It is just the same as when the belt is applied all the power of the engine passes into the machine, and when the belt is disconnected the power ceases. Faith is the belt, and while we use it, it brings all the strength of Christ into our being and work.

2. Faith brings us into rest. "We which have believed do enter into rest" (Heb. 4: 3). This denotes that state of

victorious rest, that Land of Promise into which we pass when we turn from our own strength and will, and enter into the fullness of Christ. It is a land of rest. It is a life of victory. And so at every step faith alone brings rest and peace. Thus only can the anxious, troubled heart grow still. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." "All joy and peace" come "in believing." Would you know His perfect rest? "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him." "Rest in the Lord."

3. Faith inherits the promises. "Followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 4:12). You may give me a check and it may be good, but it is practically useless to me if I keep it in my pocketbook, but if I endorse it, come into personal relations with it, and deposit it in my bank, it becomes available for actual things. But even then I must draw upon it, giving my check for perhaps a score of little needs in detail, and each one will be honored up to the full value of that check. I have simply converted it into coal, food, rent, clothing, and the actual necessities of life. It is thus that we take the promises of God. They are bank checks, all signed and endorsed by the potential name of Jesus Christ, but we must put our endorsement on each one, and we must send in our definite check for the things we actually need, and thus the promises become converted into the currency of life, the blessing of every day, the pardon, peace, comfort, strength, and help in time of need, which each covers as we claim it. There are tens of thousands of these "exceeding great and precious promises." But they must be appropriated, applied, and inherited or they become dead letters and drafts that have gone by default. Thus let us inherit the promises, and turn them into glorious victories and living experiences.

4. Faith has a great recompense of reward. (Heb. 10: 35.) It has glorious recompenses here, but these are nothing to the recompense of the reward of which this epistle speaks a little later. (Heb. 11:26.) The highest place in heaven today is given to a man who never preached a sermon, built a church, or organized a mission. He simply believed God, and Abraham, the father of the faithful, sits at the head of the table yonder, and we behold the translated souls who pass above carried to Abraham's bosom. The first that entered paradise after Christ's ascension was a poor sinner whose hands were stained with crime, but who, in the brief moment before his spirit was torn from his suffering body, sent up one little prayer of faith to the crucified Redeemer hanging by his side, and received the instant response, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," and so passed through those gates as the first ransomed spirit to claim the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, all because he simply trusted Christ and committed his future unreservedly to His mercy. "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent," and it will bring to us the recompense of the reward. If you can do nothing else for God you can, at least, be like Abraham, who was "strong in faith giving glory to God."

5. Faith pleases God. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11: 6). Our trust expresses confidence in God, and there is nothing so offensive as to be doubted. The great Lord Shaftesbury related in Exeter Hall a little before his death a personal incident full of beautiful significance. He said that once crossing the crowded streets of London on a slippery day, a little girl was standing at a crossing in evident perplexity, looking up and down the street and eagerly scanning the faces of the passers-by. She gave a keen look at the old statesman, and then with simple frankness stepped up to him and politely asked him if he would help her across the crowded street. He did so with great courtesy and care, and after he had landed her safely on the other side he ventured to ask her why she had selected him. She looked up simply and said: "Why I looked into your face and felt I could trust you." He was very much gratified, took her name and address, and afterwards remarked that although he had often been honored by his queen and his country he had never been so highly honored as when that little girl put her hand in his and told him that she would trust him. How must our Father feel when we doubt Him! Let us please Him by trusting Him more.

6. Faith is the principle by which our very life is sustained. "The just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10: 38). Not only are we saved by faith, but it is our vital breath and the channel of our constant communion with the sources of our spiritual strength. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." The moment we cease trusting we cease receiving, and our life begins to die. It is only as we abide in Him that we live, or He says, "without me ye can do nothing."

7. Faith is the secret of the life of every saint that has passed on before, and the one testimony of all the cloud of witnesses is: Let us be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." We shall take this up more fully later.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3: 12). Let us guard against the evil heart of unbelief.

2. Let us "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:14).
3. Let us "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3: 6). We must keep our joy or we shall lose our faith.
4. Let us give "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end": and "be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6: 11, 12). This is earnest work and needs vigilance, diligence and faithfulness.
5. "Let us hold fast the profession [or confession] of our faith without wavering" (Heb. 10: 23). Let us not only cherish it, but proclaim it, and as we tell it to others it will strengthen our own hearts.
6. Let us have patience in the exercise of our faith. "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10: 36). God will keep us waiting until He has proved to us and all others that we really do believe Him.
7. Let us be careful of the little shrinkages of faith. "If any man draw back [or shrink back], my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10: 38). These are the little soft-winged moths that cut holes in our garments. Let us not wait till the mischief is done, but check the first approaches of doubt and unbelief.
8. Let us look back often and "call to remembrance the former days" (Heb. 10: 32), and all we have already suffered, and not lose our victory now by casting away our confidence.
9. Let us look forward and remember the "recompense of the reward" so soon to come, and hold fast our confidence. (Heb. 10: 35.)
10. Let us look up "unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12: 2) and trust Him to keep it to the end.