

## Lesson # 1 -- The Definition of Faith

### Introduction

- A. It is vitally important, as we study this subject, to keep in mind, that faith is a characteristic -- an essential element -- of the believer's relationship with God in salvation.
- B. We will never understand faith if we focus our study upon this subject as an abstract entity existing apart from the grace, love, and faithfulness of God.
- C. Every believer has had the disastrous experience of attempting to evaluate and increase his faith by looking at himself and his own resources ("Do I have enough faith?"), or by seeking to evaluate his faith ("Is my faith genuine?"). We must not allow ourselves to do that. In contrast we must keep our eyes upon the Savior Who is "The author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Only in that context can we answer our questions.

### I. The Biblical Instruction

- A. The meaning of the words "faith," "trust," and "believe."
  1. The Old Testament Hebrew words speak of "placing confidence," "taking refuge," and "accounting faithful."
  2. In the New Testament the emphasis is on "persuasion based on hearing," "to place confidence," "to trust," "to believe."

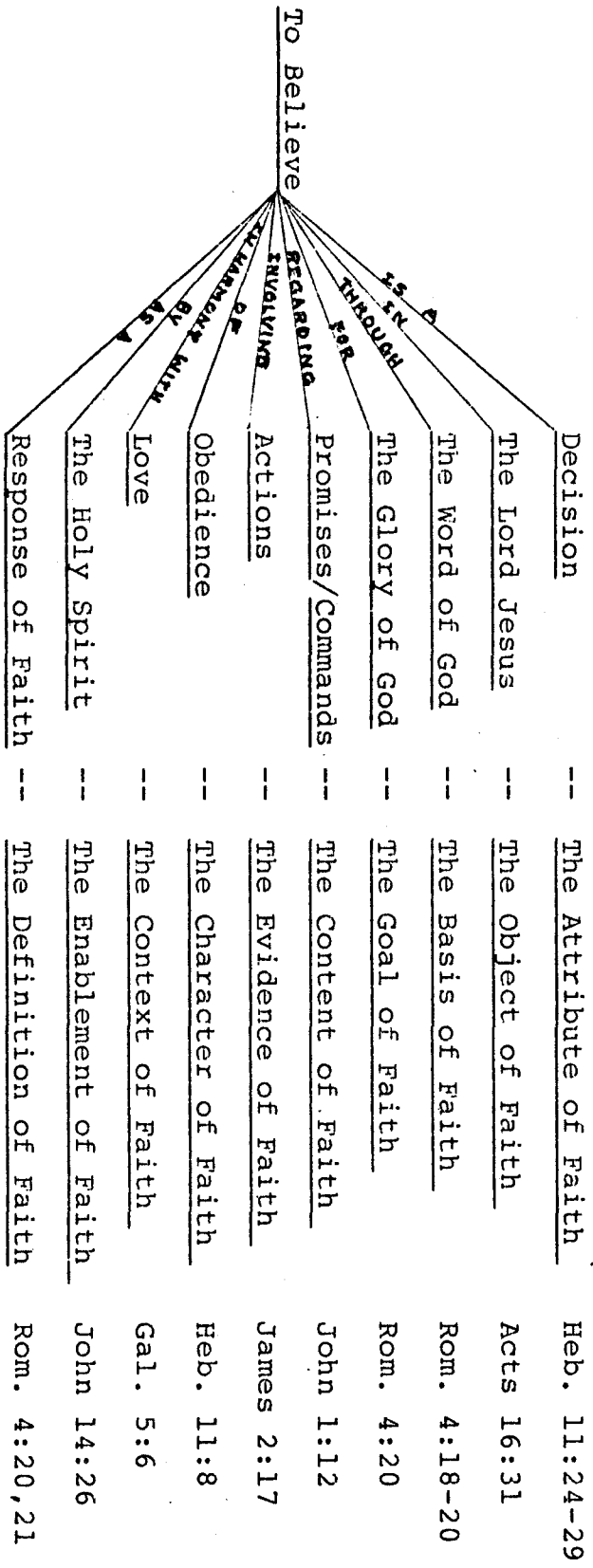
Summary: W. E. Vine in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words makes the following statement in regard to the words "faith," "trust," and "believe."

- a. A firm conviction producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth.
- b. A personal surrender to God.
- c. A conduct inspired by that surrender.

### B. The description of "faith."

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

1. The words "substance" and "evidence" emphasize the practical reality of faith as a foundation or certainty in the life of the believer. ("Substance" can be translated "title deed.")
2. The words "hoped for," and "things not seen," designate that which God has promised and which is yet beyond the reach of our natural senses.
3. Therefore: faith is that possession of the believer which gives him knowledge, assurance, and certainty regarding the spiritual realities promised him by the True and Living God.



## II. The Biblical Illustration

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurian, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurian answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel . . . And Jesus said unto the centurian, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. Matthew 8:5-13

### A. The principles clarified by this illustration.

1. Faith is a personal reponse of trust in a certain individual.

Biblical faith is not an abstract or impersonal feeling of confidence. It is inseparably related to a person and the place of that person in one's life. The Centurian knew the Lord Jesus was the Son of God.

2. Faith is rooted in an understanding of the character of a person.

Biblical faith is not blind trust. It is based upon the knowledge one has about the person you trust. The Centurian knew the Lord Jesus was trustworthy.

3. Faith is a decision to trust a person based upon the communication given by that individual.

Biblical faith is not a "hope so" product of human desire. It is a submission to the Word of God as truth. The Centurian said, "Speak the word only."

4. Faith is a response of trust in a person, based upon that individual's character and word, which issues in action.

Biblical faith is not restricted to a mental activity. It is an action -- a response of obedience -- performed in trust, and based upon the communication from that person. The Centurian "believed" the Lord Jesus and went home to find his servant healed.

- B. Summary: We must keep this Biblical pattern before us as we live our daily life. Nothing is more important among personal virtues than faith -- except love. We must constantly be on guard, lest we allow our faith to become only an emotion.

### III. The Biblical Explanation

In this first lesson I wish to list some of the more important characteristics of faith. It may enable us to understand this subject more quickly and clearly if we can get a grasp on the essential qualities of faith. We will return to a number of these as we study together.

A. Faith is a gift to the non-Christian. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 12:2

One of the most destructive effects of sin is seen in the non-Christian's lack of desire or ability to come to God or to trust Him. The Lord Jesus said that those who would come to Him were "drawn" by the Father (John 6:44,65). The believer clearly understands that his faith is God's gift -- not the result of his works.

B. Faith is an ability to respond to God. Gal. 2:20; Titus 1:1

Essentially our faith may be likened to an ability to perform the function of -- believing God. Every Christian has that ability. The evidence of faith in our life and its power is in no way understood by our emotional awareness.

C. Faith is an intimate personal relationship. Acts 16:31; 27:25

We often speak of having faith in an object. While this may serve to illustrate one facet of faith it is not a true description of the Biblical reality. Faith is the trust of one person in another person.

D. Faith is inseparably related to knowledge. Rom. 4:20,21; 10:17

True faith cannot operate in a vacuum. We cannot rightfully trust someone that we do not know -- if we are forced to do so we call it "taking a chance." The evidence of this principle is seen in how easy it is to trust a friend and how hard to trust a stranger.

E. Faith is a decision not an emotion. Num. 14:11; I Peter 1:8

This characteristic is one of the most important in this list. The way we use our God given ability -- is to make a choice. Every believer, no matter how we feel at the time, has the ability to trust God and obey Him. Too often we permit our emotions to dictate to us.

F. Faith issues in action -- the activity of faith. Heb. 11:4-8

In the light of a promise or command -- failure to act would be the evidence of doubt and unbelief (essential qualities of disobedience.) God expects us to put His promises and commands into practice -- by faith.

G. Faith accepts God's Word as truth. Titus 1:1; Heb. 11:3

The above principle is one of the most unusual in the Bible. The true Christian is one who accepts the Scripture as truth and has no problem basing his life upon its message. We know we can accept the Word of God at face value -- because we know the True and Living God to be truthful, holy, and faithful.

H. Faith is a responsibility. Num. 14:11; Luke 24:25

Faith is not an option. Too many of us treat the life of faith as a hobby and believe that everything will turn out well if we only passively wait. Some even call this the virtue of patience! God has commanded us to believe Him.

#### IV. The Biblical Application

Joy and power are often associated in the Scripture with faith and even more often in the life of the Christian.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Comment: The believer not only has the ability to believe God -- he has been given the blessed Holy Spirit to be his Helper for all areas of his life. It is important to recognize that God promises to fill us with His joy as we believe and practice His Word in the activity of trusting Him.

Conclusion: Now we must ask how we are to respond to God on the basis of what we have learned about faith. Each of us must make some application to our practical daily life -- because we have read the Word together. What decision do you need to make? Does it involve confession, or the breaking of some relationship, or a choice to change some priority, or perhaps it would be an act of restitution. Whatever our response must be -- let us carry it out -- trusting God for wisdom and strength to fully honor Him.