

Faith Which Pleases God

"Ye have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the gaining of the soul. Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a proving (conviction) of things not seen" (Heb. 10:34-11:1).

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, ... who ... has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

"We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

"For in hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopes for that which he sees? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24-25).

"Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

It would help us very much if we could get quite a clear grasp of the meaning of Hebrews 11:1: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen"*. There are many translations; many have wrestled with the statement and tried to make it plain, showing that there is something here which, if we could grasp it, is rich in meaning. I shall not stay with translations, alternative renderings of the word, helpful as they might be, but I want to get into that verse with you, really try and grasp its essence, its substance. What does this verse mean?

Assurance as to God's will

Of course, the answer in a fairly full way is given in the whole chapter. The whole chapter is an exposition of the first verse, and when we sum it up, it amounts to this — and I will try to put it into a few brief and yet comprehensive statements. It means this, that there were many people who, under the influence of God, had come to believe that certain things were His will, and His will so far as they were concerned. That is the first part of the answer. It puts us on the way, it helps as far as it goes. All these people, mentioned both specifically by name and in general in Hebrews 11 were people who had come under the influence of God in relation to some particular thing, and under that influence they believed that that thing was God's will and God's will for them. Now, you can follow that at some other time and you will do it to very great profit. I simply instance one or two cases.

Abel, under divine influence, came to believe that it was God's will that he should stand as justified before God, that was God's will for him. That became the issue of Abel's life and he had witness borne that he was righteous. That is a simple beginning. He came, under the influence of God, to believe that a certain thing was God's will and God's will

for him, and that was that he should stand as just in the presence of God. That became the thing which summed up the whole matter of faith so far as Abel was concerned.

Abraham, under that divine influence, came to believe that God's will was that he should possess the land as his inheritance. That was God's will for him and that summed up the whole question of faith for Abraham. Sarah, under divine influence, came to the place where for her the will of God was a son.

So you go through every one and that is where you begin, and so we repeat this statement as the first step in answering this question. There were many people through the past ages who, under the influence of God, came to believe that certain things were His will and were His will for them.

Before we go further, we have to bring ourselves at once into relation with that statement and ask ourselves a very simple question. Have we, under divine influence, come to believe that a certain thing or certain things are God's will and that they are God's will where we are concerned? We speak about having convictions. I am not saying that every position we may take up and every conviction which we may have is born of God. We may be wrong in some of our strongest convictions, but I am bringing it into that realm now, and asking how we came by our position, our conviction, our certainty? Can we say truly that, under divine influence, that is as a thing between God and ourselves, we are where we are and we have come by a work of God in us to believe that, certain things are God's will? Beloved, we have no ground of assurance until we are there. This is the ground of a faith which is going to do in us what it did in these, but we must be sure of the source of the influence. That is, we must, as in every case in this chapter, know that it is out from God, this thing is of God. Well, of course, we shall have to come back to the Word of God to confirm that, and we shall find that every phase of spiritual life and experience is touched in this chapter.

Is it God's will that you and I should stand as just before God? Well we would not, at any rate, in doctrine, deny that. We have got that in the Word of God anyway. That is God's will and that is God's will for us. Therefore it must become the ground of faith. And you can go on and find that the spiritual life deepens, that you are taken far out of your own depths in this chapter, and yet, being far out of your own depth, beyond your own power of coping with the situation, you may still have the assurance that that is God's will for you, and you are there, in the depths too big for you, because that is God's will. Abraham found himself there and others too. That is only by way of getting our foot on this rung of the ladder of faith.

Lack of outward evidences

The second thing is this. Those things which they came to believe were God's will, those things, rather than being supported by evidence, had everything in the visible realm to contradict and make them both unreal and impossible. Let us put the two things together. They came, under divine influence, to believe that certain things were God's will and God's will so far as they were concerned, yet at the same time those very things had no support by visible evidence, but on the contrary had everything in the visible realm to contradict and to make them both unreal and impossible. What had Abel to go upon that it was God's will that he should stand just before God? If the evidence were being looked for on the outside, then Cain had it. Cain had most beautiful fruit as the result of his own effort, his own hard work. He had something to offer that in appearance was good and in argument was right, because he had produced it by hard work, honest effort. The argument might well be in the favour of Cain as he brought his offering. What has Abel? Nothing of his own fruitfulness, nothing from himself, nothing as the result of his own ability and effort. He depended entirely upon another life, something that he could not produce. He could not produce a lamb; he could not make one lamb in all the flock to live; he could not give life to one tiny lamb; there is nothing there that has come

by the genius, labour, efficiency, of Abel. It is something apart from himself, and we know that it is true in principle — Another's life, Another's merit. The evidences were not in the visible realm at all. They were only in the spiritual, in the unseen, a matter of sheer faith, and yet he was sure that that was God's way for him, that was the way of justification, being made just before God. He could not prove it, he could not argue it, he could not work it out. There was no evidence at all.

What had Abraham in evidence? Well, we know the story of Abraham in relation to the land which was the object of his deepest conviction as to the will of God. I do not think we have yet really grasped the situation with Abraham. He came to that land; we know the condition in which he found it. We have not realized that, up to the death of Sarah, Abraham had been walking up and down in that land for fifty years and had not got a foothold in it — fifty years dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the promise; a sojourner in tents, deliberately refusing to settle down in a city or in a house. There were cities, there were houses. No, he kept to his tent and for a lifetime moved in the land as the heir and yet possessing nothing. It would not be difficult to bring that over to our own spiritual experience. We can hear our Lord saying, "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*", but "*in the world ye shall have tribulation*". In the world there is not much evidence of the Kingdom being ours, but we are heirs of the Kingdom. Sooner or later, we are going to have to settle this question, perhaps the sooner the better. Look at it again.

There are two ways of looking at it. God's will may be a settled thing in our hearts. There may be no doubt about it that we have come to a certain position as under divine influence. That represents the will of God, so far as we are concerned, and yet, rather than have that borne out by visible evidences, it may be all the contrary in the visible realm, and we must take this other angle of being quite sure, that evidences, so-called, which contradict, which deny, which make that inward position utterly unreal and impossible, are not the argument that it is not the will of God. That is what this chapter says. That is the essence of verse 1 as illustrated through these centuries, a position truly of God, yet surrounded by everything that contradicts, denies, makes it unreal in this realm, and declares it an impossibility, and yet history has proved that that inwrought thing of God was the true thing and all the other was but the passing and therefore the unreal. That is what the apostle means by "*the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (2 Cor. 4:18).

Issues bound up with the will of God

Now the next step in our answer is that, while all these evidences seem to go to prove that this was not God's will and God's way, they were so real in the inward life of those concerned as to have quite a number of very big issues bound up with them, and the issues were these — or these were some of them.

1. God Himself

Firstly, they involved God Himself, and that is no small issue. Ask Abel about this matter; what hangs for him upon this way that he is taking; why he chooses this way and why he clings to this way; why he believes so strongly that this is the way and not Cain's way. How important it is to him! What is involved for him in this? His answer will be nothing less than God Himself, and I ask you, in the light of history up to date, whether Abel was right — Abel's simple issue as to the will of God, justification by faith. Was he right? Is God involved? Is it any less an issue than God Himself? We have got our New Testament now, we have got our letter to the Romans alone, and if God Himself is not bound up with this issue of justifying the ungodly by faith, we have lost our God, we are in the universe as lost ones, we do not know the way. Ask all those poor souls today in this earth, millions of them, what it is they are striving after in their sacrifices, with their idols, with their incantations, with their self-afflictions, all that they are agonizing for in

their religion, and they will say, 'To stand as just before God', and where are they, poor wretched souls!? Perhaps the greater amount of this world's misery is produced by having lost the way in the matter of justification by faith — I mean in the misery of souls. Go to any heathen country and see the misery of souls, the dread, the fear, the horror, all this tyranny of evil spirits. Why is all this soul-trouble in the world? On this point alone — justification by faith. I tell you, God is involved in this, and if you have not got your feet on that rung, you have not got God, no assurance of God. That was the issue for Abel. How much he understood, we do not know, but it meant this: 'For me, God is involved in this, and if this is not right, then I have lost God, I do not know God, I have lost the way'.

Ask Abraham about it. I have no doubt but what Abraham had such times as you and I have. The promises — yes! but where is their fulfilment? Assurances — yes! But what is happening? Made heirs — yes! But what have we got? You see — God and appearances; God and things seen. They are two different realms. God is there and everything here contradicts. God has said, but everything seems to say that it is a mistake, it is wrong, the promises are not to be relied upon. God is involved. And yet for these people these things were so real that no less a matter than God Himself was the issue for their faith.

That is the only ground of a true faith. If we have put our faith in things, we are going to have a bad time. The only ground is God. God is the ground of faith. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a proving of things not seen"*. *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God"* (Psa. 42:5). Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; hope thou in God. What is the object of your hope? God! The proving of things not seen — *"he endured as seeing Him who is invisible"*. Forgive me for putting things and God together, but you see the point. Him who is invisible; things not seen; the assurance of things not seen.

The very first step is the assurance of God as to our position, God bound up with our position, that God is involved in our position, God has done something in us. It is not some position to which we have come, some mental conclusion, something adopted by us, something we wanted and have fastened upon, but God has done something in us that the issue is no less an issue than God Himself. You cannot go through Hebrews 11 without finding that with every fresh instance and case — the issue was God. They were burnt in the flames, cast into the fire. These are included in the chapter, but to whom does that refer? It refers to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And what was their position? *"Our God ... is able to deliver ... but if not ..."*. If He does not, we will not bow to your god, we will stick to Him. It is no less a question than God Himself. It is not some obstinate position that we have adopted where we are not going to let go for anybody. It is God. God is in this for us. Well, that is the first issue — a mighty issue.

2. Life and destiny

Then these things in their innermost being by God's own work involved the whole life and destiny of these people. They were so deep and so strong that these people had no alternative. They had no reserve programme, or alternative course. They had not kept something 'up their sleeve' that, if this failed, they had that another way. No, for them this will of God in their hearts involved their whole life and destiny. If God failed — for that is what it meant — if God failed in this which He had wrought in them, which they knew He had wrought, their life went and their destiny went. There was nothing to put in the place of it. Are we sure of being there? God would work so in us as to bring us there that we have no alternative, no reserve. We have to say that what God has done in us involves our life and our destiny. We cannot resign and take up something else because this breaks down. It is very important to be there or we shall not get through, and all our testings will be testings as to whether that is the nature of things where we are concerned. Can we let go under pressure and choose some other course? If we can, the

thing is an 'it', it is not God. It is some thing. That is not good enough. It involves everything, life and destiny. There is no other way.

3. The abandonment of all else

Then next. These things which for them were the inwrought will of God, whether a single thing or several things, led to the abandonment of all here in the interest of those unseen things. They were so real that everything was abandoned for them. For Abel it meant life, it meant everything. He had to let everything go in relation to what God had wrought in him, made known to him, as His will. Abraham too left everything. He was progressively stripped until at last he seemed to be shorn of even the promises so far as their visible fulfilment was concerned, and shorn of the only one in whom and through whom the promises could be realized — Isaac. Did he say, 'I am going back to Ur of the Chaldees, I am going back to the old life — this is not working out'? No, he let go, he abandoned all. The things unseen were so real that the things seen could be let go. This is the essence of faith, the faith that goes through.

4. The power of endurance

That meant, in the next place, that these very things, because they were real, and involved such mighty issues for these people concerned, became the motive power of their suffering and endurance. "*He endured as seeing him who is invisible*". That could be said of them all. They endured, they went through, they suffered, as seeing what was not seeable. The power of their endurance was, shall we call it, spiritual sight, not natural sight. Paul knew quite well, when he wrote 2 Corinthians in which he lists so many of his sufferings and the sufferings of the saints, in which he speaks about our outward man perishing and so on, that, if these Corinthians were going to be influenced by the things seen, they would not go through. Indeed, he knew that for all believers, so he would, in the light of this fact, say,

"Our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

He would, in effect, say, 'You will never go through the light affliction, you will never go through any affliction at all, if you look at the things seen. You will only get through the affliction to the glory if you look at the things not seen.' That is in keeping with Heb. 12:2 'looking off unto Jesus'.

5. The certificate of heaven's approval

Now, let us go briefly a step or two further. These things which for these saints constituted the will of God became the issue on which the 'certificate' of heavenly approval rested. It looks to me as though they were all working for a certificate. At any rate, that is a good way of looking at it. They had witness borne that they were well-pleasing to God. That is the certificate. Yes, before they died, not having received the promises but beholding them afar off, but they had witness borne before they died. There was in many cases no evidence to prove their position as right, but witness borne, and that is the certificate of heaven's approval. What is it that brings that certificate "*approved of God*", heaven's certification of our being approved of God? It is faith, and faith the essence of which means that though God's will is still in the unseen and contradicted by all the evidences, we hold on. Heaven's certificate!

It would not be altogether a joy and satisfaction to our hearts if, on the way, we broke down, then the Lord came down, picked us up, took us through; if, all through eternity, we had to say, 'I broke down, the Lord was very good but I was a poor sort of thing.'

Would it not be very much more joy to us to say that the Lord's strength became perfect in our weakness, so that we received the end of our faith — the gaining of our souls? That is being heirs, inheriting. There is something in this salvation of ours which is another side to grace and yet it is all grace. I have got to be careful, but there is an inheriting eternal life as well as receiving it as a gift. There is righteousness imputed to faith, but there are the righteous acts of the saints in the way of fine linen, I mean something that the saints have become and done, and, while it is all of grace, it will be a great thing if we can win the certificate through grace. Through grace we are winning the promised crown. It would be a great thing if not just with lives that have been utter failures at every point the Lord receives us into heaven, but, because we have fought a good fight and kept the faith and gone through. He says, 'Well done!' — and that is no fiction. We know in our hearts it is through His grace and through His strength, but from His side it will be a genuine 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You went through, you held on, you did not give up.' The certificate of heaven's approval — well-pleasing unto Him. It was Paul's ambition, it should be ours, to be well-pleasing unto Him.

6. True service to God

All this involved the principle of true service to God. What, after all, is true service to God? It is not the number of things that you and I may do here for the Lord. I do not want to discourage you from doing all the things you can for the Lord, but the principle of true service is not the number of things that we do for the Lord. The principle of true service is this. It is — shall I say, upholding God, justifying God, making God stand right. What did Paul mean when he said, "*To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake*" (Phil. 1:29)? How can I suffer on Christ's behalf? What is, after all the essence of suffering? Well, it is the issue of the book of Job. What was the climax of the book of Job? Where did Job leap right out into the glory? When God said to Job's friends, "*Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has.*" 'My servant Job, has, through thick and thin, said the thing that is right about Me, has justified Me.' It does not look like it sometimes when Job is speaking, but to justify and vindicate God is the greatest service you and I can render. Paul vindicated God; that was the point of his service. Abraham vindicated God. That is how he was God's servant and God's friend. Everyone of them vindicated God, and the only way to vindicate God is through faith. "*He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him*". They must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder. They must believe today when the evidences are all against it and vindicate God by faith. That is the service we are called to render to God.

Imperfect as it is, may the Lord use these words to establish us.