

The Life of Faith
3 – Understanding Faith
Hebrews 11:1-2
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I. Introductory Concepts

A. The Context of the Text

B. The Purpose of the Text

C. The Wording of the Text

Hendricksen: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see

II. The Nature of Faith

A. Faith Assures Us with Confidence Concerning Things Hoped For

B. Faith Convinces Us with Irrefutable Evidence Concerning Things Not Seen

III. The Offense of Faith

A. To the Unconverted but Seeking Sinner

B. To the Skeptic and Scoffer

C. To the Struggling Christian

IV. The Blessing of Faith

well-doing, and a patient, humble submission to the will of God, to obtain that glory, honour, and immortality which the Gospel promises. Nothing but a persevering faith can do this; and a persevering faith can do it, as is plain from what it has done in former ages.

The Apostle's illustration of the efficacy of faith in enabling the believer to perform duty, endure trial, and obtain blessings, is prefaced by a remark or two explicatory of the sense in which he employs the word *faith* in this discussion. Chap. xi. 1. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Faith is in the New Testament employed sometimes to signify the act or state of the mind which we call belief, and sometimes the object of the mind in this state or act—the thing believed. It is here obviously employed in the first sense, as equivalent to 'believing.' Now what, according to the Apostle, is faith, or believing? It is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I have always felt it difficult to attach distinct ideas to these English words. They have generally been considered as intended to express the following sentiment:—"Faith gives, as it were, a real subsistence in the mind to things hoped for; it makes evident things which are not seen—it gives a present existence to things future, a visible form to things unseen. A promise is made of future good—a revelation of something not discoverable by sense or reason. To the unbeliever the promised good, the revealed truths, are an unsubstantial vision—mere creatures of the imagination; to the believer they are substantial realities." This is no doubt true; but I cannot help thinking these ideas are rather put into the words than brought out of them.¹ Taking the English words in their ordinary meaning: Believing a promise respecting future good, is not the substance of that good; nor is believing a revelation with respect to things unseen, the evidence on which I believe. The act of faith or believing, the object of faith or truth in reference to what is future or unseen, and the ground of faith, or evidence, are obviously three completely distinct things; and without the greatest confusion of thought, one of them cannot be mistaken for any of the two other.

¹ Kuinoel says of this exegesis, "A subtle interpretation which cannot be commended for straightforwardness."

The word translated "substance" occurs only five times in the New Testament, and all these instances are in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In one case, Heb. i. 3, it is translated *person*; but that passage is plainly altogether inapplicable to the illustration of the phrase before us. In the other three places where it occurs—2 Cor. ix. 4, xi. 17; Heb. iii. 14—it is translated *confidence*; and that, too, is the reading in the margin in the present instance. I have little doubt that that word expresses the Apostle's idea. 'Faith, or believing, is a confidence respecting things hoped for.' The word translated "evidence" is derived from a verb which signifies 'to convince'; and its natural and most obvious meaning is, 'conviction.' It occurs only in one other place in the New Testament—2 Tim. iii. 16, where I think there is little doubt that its meaning is 'conviction.' "All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,"—rather, 'for conviction,' *i.e.*, for teaching men what is true, and for showing them that it is true. This, I apprehend, is its meaning here: 'Faith is a conviction in reference to things not seen.' This, then, is the Apostle's account of faith: 'It is a confidence respecting things hoped for; it is a conviction respecting things not seen.' A promise is made respecting future good. I am satisfied that He who promises is both able and willing to perform His promise. I believe it; and in believing it, I have a confidence respecting the things which I hope for. A revelation is made respecting what is not evident either to my sense or my reason. I am satisfied that this revelation comes from One who cannot be deceived, and who cannot deceive. I believe it; and in believing it, I have a conviction in reference to things which are not seen. Faith in reference to events which are past, is belief of testimony with regard to them; faith in reference to events which are future, is belief of promises with regard to them.

This "confidence respecting things hoped for," founded on a divine promise—this "conviction respecting things unseen"—is the grand spring of dutiful exertion, and dutiful submission; it is this, and this alone, that can induce a man to persevere in doing and suffering the will of God, till in due time the promised blessing is obtained. That it had been so in past ages, is the proposition which the Apostle is about to prove and illustrate by a numerous induction of particular instances; and he introduces them by remarking generally, that by this faith the